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**UNIVERSITY
OF BERN**

Internationalization Strategy 2026 - 2030

Faculty of Medicine, University of Bern



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Introduction

The Strategy 2030 of the Faculty of Medicine sets internationalization as one of its six long-term strategic goals, considering it as a key factor for excellence and success. The Internationalization Strategy 2026 - 2030 articulates our strategic goals and outlines our path toward being a globally connected and internationally leading Faculty of Medicine.

The Dean and the Faculty Commission for Internationalization and National Networking have developed this strategy in alignment with the goals and measures of the Internationalization Strategy of the University of Bern. This strategy implements the overarching University strategy at a Faculty level.

Faculty Commission for Internationalization and National Networking:

Head of Commission

Prof. Kristina Adorjan

Members

Prof. Annalisa Berzigotti

Prof. Valentin Djonov

Prof. Christoph Gräni

PD Dr. Carolina Gutierrez Herrera

Prof. Georgia Salanti

Prof. Anton Sculean

Prof. Eva Segelov

Prof. Stephan Windecker

Coordination

Emilie Ballestraz (Coordinator for Internationalization and National Networking)

Contact

Universität Bern

Medizinische Fakultät

Dekanat

Murtenstrasse 11

CH-3008 Bern

Definition of Internationalization

In the context of higher education and academic research, internationalization is a broad and multifaceted concept that encompasses diverse approaches and gives rise to a wide range of potential measures and actions. In 2003, Jane Knight, an Adjunct Professor of Education at the University of Toronto, developed a currently widely used definition of the concept of internationalization:

“Internationalization (...) is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”¹

Recent efforts to define internationalization emphasize a new understanding: internationalization is not an end in itself, but rather a means to enhance the quality of education and research within and beyond the institution. The following definition of internationalization (Hunter, 2015²) captures this approach and seems very useful in framing our internationalization strategy:

“Internationalization of higher education is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.”

While this definition is primarily centred on higher education, the critical importance of internationalizing research shall be emphasized. International research or cooperation refers to collaborative efforts involving scholars, researchers, and institutions from different countries, working together to address global challenges and advance knowledge on shared topics of interest. Such collaborations not only foster innovation by bringing together diverse perspectives and expertise but also facilitate the dissemination of findings across borders and multiply funding opportunities.

This document outlines the vision and key objectives that guide the internationalization strategy for the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bern.

¹ Knight J. *Updating the Definition of Internationalization*, Jan 2003, [International Higher Education](#) (33), p.2. [doi:10.6017/ihe.2003.33.7391](https://doi.org/10.6017/ihe.2003.33.7391)

² Hunter F. *What's in a name? Refocusing internationalisation in higher education*. Oct 2015. EAIE, Policy&Strategy, [Link](#).

Vision and Goals

As one of the largest medical faculties in Switzerland, the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bern is a globally oriented institution, dedicated to the highest standards of research, education and clinical services. The Faculty aims to enhance its global positioning by internationalizing key areas of research, education and administration.

Our vision is reflected in the following goals:

- **Advance Research and Clinical Excellence.** To facilitate external collaboration and foster the exchange of ideas, thereby enhancing research excellence and clinical services.
- **Promote Global Education and Professional Growth.** To provide international education and training programs that support and enhance international career development, thereby expanding global and attractive opportunities for incoming and outgoing staff, researchers and students.
- **Improve International Positioning.** To elevate the Faculty's global profile and to raise its visibility via increased international connections and presence.
- **Foster a Rich Academic Environment.** To establish a dynamic, diverse and globally interconnected academic culture through international engagement and worldwide collaboration.

Operational Objectives

To implement our vision and reach our goals, the following operational objectives have been defined:

- I. **Strengthening International Networks and Partnerships.** To develop and expand international collaborations with clinical departments, research institutes, universities, medical institutions and academic clusters worldwide, thereby fostering knowledge exchange and joint initiatives.
- II. **Promoting Academic Careers.** To increase the Faculty's appeal to international students and researchers, by facilitating the incoming and outgoing mobility of students, researchers and staff, supporting (international) career development of academic personnel, offering competitive recruitment packages and creating structured opportunities for early-career academics to expand their expertise.
- III. **Boosting International Visibility and Reputation.** To enhance the Faculty's global profile by promoting research achievements and engaging in strategic (media) initiatives. This includes participating in international conferences, hosting visits from potential partners, and adopting an internationally oriented outreach and communication strategy.

- IV. **Expanding Global Medical Impact.** To foster sustainable international engagement with research and medical institutions or networks worldwide, including in low- and middle-income countries, thereby promoting a dynamic, equitable and interconnected academic environment and an open-minded culture that can lead to global health improvements.

Objective I: Strengthening International Networks and Partnerships

International partnerships in research and education are a long-lasting reality in several clinical departments, institutes, and research clusters of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Bern. The Faculty's internationalization strategy prioritizes the facilitation and further development of these partnerships as a core pillar. Sustainable cooperation with international partners not only fosters excellence but also catalyzes profile building and boosts international visibility. It occurs at various levels, through individual networking among scientists, departmental collaborations or overarching institutional partnerships. While international collaboration varies in scope and duration, the Faculty distinguishes between the following three main types of partnerships:

- **International partnerships at the Institute/Department or Faculty level.** Individual clinical departments, institutes, or the Faculty as a whole engage in academic collaborations with strategically important international partners. These may include research institutions or clusters, medical departments, hospitals, or faculties located in Europe or beyond. Such partnerships should offer mutual added value and contribute to advancing the frontiers of research, science, innovation and medical education. Partners are selected based on their strong research track record, academic achievements or specific expertise in a field of interest. Partnerships may also be initiated with small-size universities and institutions in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), depending on the objectives of the partnership.
- **Strategic partnerships at the Faculty level.** These partnerships consist of long-term and sustainable collaboration with carefully-selected institutions that share common strategic goals in research and teaching. They are initiated at the Faculty level, often with leading universities worldwide, ensuring alignment with the Faculty's academic and research priorities. They mostly consist of sustained knowledge exchange, joint research projects and events, and the development of shared educational initiatives. They are typically carried on within the framework of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and delegation visits and involve several clinical departments or institutes.



- **International networks.** The Faculty, through the membership of the University of Bern, actively participates in international academic networks, such as The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and the European alliance ENLIGHT. Active membership in such networks provides access to broader research and educational opportunities, fosters the exchange of ideas and best practices and enhances international reputation, thereby supporting the Faculty's vision of achieving excellence through global engagement.

Objective II: Promoting Academic Careers

Science, by its very nature, is a global endeavor. Achieving internationally recognized research requires the continuous exchange of knowledge and ideas across borders. The Faculty is committed to attracting exceptional talent and establishing a vibrant international academic community by implementing the following concrete measures, in cooperation with the central administration of the University of Bern:

- **Active recruitment of talented researchers and clinicians.** To enhance recruitment efforts to attract outstanding clinicians and researchers at all career stages, including Master's, PhD, postdoctoral, and senior researchers/clinicians. Recruitment strategies shall focus on both national and international talents, with the aim of building a diverse, dynamic and welcoming academic environment.
- **Exchange of visiting scholars:** To promote and facilitate the exchange of visiting scholars, based on reciprocity, among others through Adjunct Professorships. Standardized terms and conditions, streamlined procedures and advisory services (including information on available facilities) shall be established to ensure a consistent and supportive experience for all visiting academics.
- **Double affiliations:** To offer the possibility of double affiliations with part-time employment (20-40%) for excellent international researchers.
- **Acquisition of third-party international funding.** To foster a stimulating research environment and provide both administrative and strategic support to maximize success in grant applications, the Dean's Office and the Grants Office at the University of Bern shall facilitate the application process for funding from prestigious sources, including the European Union (EU), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and other international excellence clusters.
- **Promotion of young researchers:** To help early-career researchers gain international experience and establish robust global networks by facilitating access to exchange programs, international conferences and collaborative research projects that contribute to professional development and academic success.

- **Promotion of academic diversity, inclusion, gender equality, and the advancement of women's careers.** To foster an open-minded academic culture that promotes diversity and avoids discrimination. In particular, recognizing specific challenges faced by women in academia, the Faculty shall implement targeted measures to support female clinicians and researchers in gaining international experience. Initiatives shall include support for participation in networks that address mobility challenges, such as the "[Women as One Escalator](#)" initiative, the Swiss National Science Foundation's [AcademiaNet](#), the [COMET](#) career program and the [FELS](#) network at the University of Bern.
- **Student mobility.** To expand opportunities for international student exchange by reducing barriers to mobility and establishing the necessary framework to support both incoming and outgoing students for short-term and semester exchanges.
- **International Education Programs.** To offer undergraduate and continuing education programs taught in English and accessible to international students, in order to foster intercultural exchanges and attract international talents at all levels.

Objective III: Boosting International Visibility and Reputation

Through successful implementation of internationalization activities, the Faculty shall strengthen its international visibility and reputation. The following measures will support the realization of international branding objectives:

- **Communication channels:** To use existing internal and external communication channels to display and actively communicate about internationalization activities and services.
- **Bilingual communication:** To communicate in German and English and to promote language competencies among staff and students. The implementation of a bilingual approach at all levels should be considered to promote internationalization as well as the inclusion of all students, scientists and clinicians.
- **International rankings:** To monitor closely and participate in international university rankings, while actively disseminating meaningful scores. Our target is to be among the top 50 in health & medicine in the Times Higher Education (THE) ranking by 2030.
- **International delegations:** To welcome and host international delegations, such as potential partner universities and medical institutions, international networks or governmental representatives.

Objective IV: Expanding Global Medical Impact

Diseases and medical needs are not confined within national borders. Global health challenges should therefore be addressed on an equal footing with national and international partners. The Faculty of Medicine recognizes its global responsibility by committing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and through the active promotion and support of Global Health Initiatives.

Internationalization intersects with global health, defined as “(...) *collaborative transnational research and action for promoting health for all*” by Beaglehole and Bonita (2010)³. While historically, global health has focused mainly on LMICs, it now encompasses broader perspectives such as population health approaches or the study of the interconnected causes of poor health.

Through the following initiatives and by aligning research, education, and clinical services with the SDGs, the Faculty will strengthen its international reputation as a leader in global health, drive meaningful health improvements and contribute to the broader mission of fostering a more equitable and sustainable world.

- **Promoting global health initiatives and partnerships.** To proactively play a role in global health partnerships, thereby contributing to the improvement of healthcare standards and the access to medical education and services worldwide. This includes maintaining an overview, enhancing visibility and supporting global health projects within the Faculty, as well as engaging in international collaborative networks with institutions dedicated to sustainable health development.
- **Engaging in global health research.** To support ongoing research initiatives focusing on critical global issues — such as environmental health, pollution, climate change, and their impacts on health. The Faculty is dedicated to advancing multidisciplinary research that provides innovative solutions to these challenges, aligning with international efforts to promote public health and sustainability.
- **Including Global Health in the academic curriculum.** To integrate global health topics into the medical curriculum to ensure that students acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to address health challenges in an interconnected world, ideally by supporting experiential learning opportunities.
- **Fostering equal partnerships.** The Faculty approaches all collaborations with equity, valuing partnerships with institutions from every region of the world. These collaborations shall emphasize reciprocity and shared benefits while facilitating knowledge exchange, mutual learning, and the development of joint solutions to global health challenges. In particular, the Faculty of Medicine will align with geographic priorities set by the University of Bern by actively promoting joint initiatives with partners based in Africa (see “[Initiative Afrique](#)”, UniBE).

³ Beaglehole R., Bonita R. *What is global health?* Global Health Action. 2010; 3:10.3402/gha.v3i0.5142. [doi:10.3402/gha.v3i0.5142](https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v3i0.5142).