

EMA Conferences Team

Proposed working agenda for the period up to 2008

Introduction of the proposal

The Conference Advisory Team of the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association Launch Committee (hereafter to be referred to as the CAT) consists of seven members coming from six countries and four continents: Argentina, China, Finland, India, Mexico, and Ukraine. Within the Erasmus Mundus Programme, the seven members come from several master programmes: Master of Applied Ethics, Environmental Science, Policy and Management (MESPOM), Master of Science in European Forestry (MSC EF), Master of Nanoscience and Nanotechnology (EMM-Nano), Joint European Master's Programme in Materials Science (EMMS), and International Master of Science in Rural Development (IMRD).

According to the decision adopted by the Erasmus Mundus Alumni Association's first meeting on June 18, 2006 held in Brussels, the CAT was made responsible for making arrangements for the future networking of the EMA, e.g. conferences, gatherings, etc. The CAT decided to prioritize topics listed as agenda item 1-6 while other topics and issues are dealt with on an ad hoc basis. All of these items were discussed with other EMA working teams, European Commission and Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) during the meeting on Oct. 19-20, 2006. The first version of this document (Ref: EMA-CAT-01), released to all EMA Liaison Group and Launch Committee members, served as the basis for the discussion before and during the October 19-20 meeting (hereafter to be referred to as October meeting) held in Brussels. This document (Ref: EMA-CAT-02) represents the discussion and results of the October meeting^[1].

First, the main options for EMA associated gatherings are three: the annual meeting of the EM student/alumni representatives (hereafter to be referred to as the general assembly, or GA, or the EMA GA), regional meetings organized by EMA sub-groups and thematic/multi-disciplinary meetings organized by one or more Erasmus Mundus (EM) courses. This document covers the information with respect to the organization of the EMA GA and the many primary aspects about regional and thematic meetings. It is necessary to mention that ONLY the GA will involve decision-making processes, e.g. election of EMA President, Steering Committee members and other EMA officers if there are any (EMA Policy Team will provide details in this particular matter).

In order to avoid confusion, it is necessary to make clear that the "GA" mentioned in this document, only refers to the annual gathering for the Erasmus Mundus students and graduates representatives^[2]. Moreover, regional or thematic meetings refer to networking activities organized independently by a group of EM courses at a different location and time, or jointly with the EMA GA as a side event in some special circumstance. The latter two should be distinguished from the GA.

1. The frequency and timing of the EMA conference(s)

The CAT members, with consultations from participants of respective courses, agree to propose that the GA be held once a year. There is a general consent that it is not

necessary and simply not feasible to organize such a meeting more than once a year. However, sub-group/thematic/multi-disciplinary meetings can be organized in a different time and location^[3]. This option will be further discussed in this document.

With regard to the schedule of the gathering, it was discussed that February, May, June, September and October can be considered the optimal timing for the EMA conference. But in February and September there are a number of students on vacation in many courses so they were eliminated. October is usually the starting period of the EM courses and it does not seem to be feasible for many students. Among the left options, May seems to be more preferred than June because for most courses June is the end of the academic year and students are busy with exams and papers. This is especially true with graduating students whose thesis deadlines are in June. In addition, the CAT recommends that the duration of the annual EMA conference should not be set to be less than three days. In this way, people will have the opportunity to meet and talk to each other, which is less feasible during a 1- or 2-day gathering. The CAT also recognizes that meeting with people from other courses and having informal discussions are as important as formal interactions. Taking into account that the GA could quite often overlap with study/work, the CAT suggests that the annual conference should last from Thursday/Friday to Sunday/Monday, whichever is preferred by the majority of EMA members (EM students and graduates). However, alumni's (those who already graduated) preference was not considered, as there did not seem to be any direct/indirect connections with them among the team members.

The October meeting further discussed the above aspects and decided that the coming GA would be held in the third weekend of May 2007 (subject to minor changes upon request). After that period, almost all two-year (or shorter) EM course students who enrolled in 2005 will be graduating (or would have already graduated) thus giving them an opportunity to meet right before their graduation.

2. Selection of conference venue

The CAT recognized that it is highly feasible to hold the EMA GA in Brussels especially from the present perspective. However, it is advisable to hold future general assemblies in any one of the third countries, especially after a couple of years when the first/second year students graduate and go back to their home countries. Such an event will be combined with a series of EM promotion activities in that country in particular. For example, if the GA were organized in China for instance, then the ACA would, under the name of the European Commission, seek assistance from the Ministry of Education of China, for instance, and organize an Erasmus Mundus Week which allows potential applicants to have the opportunity to meet with former/current EM students as well as to hear about the European culture because of the participation of some European students. The CAT will cooperate with other working teams, especially the EMA-Promotion Team.

In practice, the CAT recommends that prior to the GA each year in the future, each of the EMA working teams (serving the current term) propose a conference venue for a general vote by the GA. Then when the new EMA Steering Committee members take over, they will be the organizer. The course representatives are required to collect the respective course students' preferences in their respective courses before the voting process. Each venue proposal should include a general introduction of the place in

question, why and how the choice of that place is going to benefit the EMA networking as well as future development of the EM courses. As an alternative option, the future EMA GA can also decide that each EM course proposes a venue for further discussion and selection by the Launch/Steering Committee but there will be practical difficulties as there will be some 100 courses in 2008. In principle, the decision with respect to the conference venue should be made through an open discussion process but the final decision on the procedure to select GA venue will be subject to future GA discussions.

The October meeting discussed the above points. Taking into account practical issues as well as organizational aspects, it is decided that the EMA GA 2007 would be held in Brussels.

The selection of sub-group/thematic/multi-disciplinary meeting venues are purely up to individual event organiser(s) and therefore it is not covered in this section of the document.

3. Identification and selection of attendees

The CAT is aware that due to a number of reasons (mainly financial constraints) it is not possible to invite all EM students and alumni to the GA. However, the CAT decided to take the primary principle that “the future EMA conference shall strive to as wide participation as possible”. Because the GA is considered to be an important EM summit and it will involve decision-making event of the EMA and take into consideration many of the practical issues, the October meeting have modified CAT’s previous proposal (Ref: EMA-CAT-01) and have agreed on the following points.

The EMA GA, taking place once a year, will invite alumni/student representatives nominated by each EM course. An EM student or graduate should seek the support and nomination from her/his respective course in order to participate the GA. Each EM course can designate maximum two representatives to the GA, one from the EU countries (including accession countries) and the other from the third countries^[4]. Each EM course should also designate the deputies of their representatives, who shall replace the representatives in their absence. Note that not all the nominated representatives will be invited at the same time to the future GAs due to organizational and practical issues. However, the 2007 GA will invite all course representatives^[5]. Invitees for GA 2008 and thereafter will be decided at a later time^[6]. Self-financed attendees may be admitted to participate the meeting if they register within the given deadline and if there is capacity to accommodate them^[7]. Financial support will only be available for the nominated course representatives.

It was discussed that any student or graduate may be given an opportunity to submit a brief proposal to organize an event (including side-event) during the GA. However, due to many considerations like practical issues, the nature of the GA, etc., this suggestion was not adopted by the October meeting.

Student/graduate representatives will be involved in the decision-making process. It is very important to develop appropriate guidelines for the selection of representatives. The following paragraphs will focus on the procedures in this regard, namely, the process for any interested student/graduate to seek nomination. It has been further discussed that the term of the EM course representatives (also EMA GA

attendees) may be set to be one year, or two years renewable term. However, this may cause continuity problems within some courses. Therefore, it is up to each individual EM course to decide the duration to stay in office for the student representatives. Furthermore, regarding the selection of course representatives the October meeting has adopted CAT's suggestion as to NOT proposing mandatory or standardized procedures for EM courses to follow but to offer the following three sample indicative options for the EM courses to choose, according to whichever suits their own circumstances. Students participating in the EMA courses may develop other suitable procedures for the selection of conference participants and they are strongly welcomed to publicize their experience or advice through the EMA website. The CAT suggest that in nominating their course representatives, the EM course student body should take the principle of democracy[8], representation[9], commitment[10], transparency[11] and efficiency with regard to this matter.

The three indicative nomination methods are as follows[12].

Option A: Direct open election on-site. This is deemed to be most applicable where students are studying all together at one of the partner institutions. In this case, the coordinator shall assist in arranging a meeting of the EM students, either by her/him or designate someone else to provide necessary assistance. The meeting can start with an open call for nomination (preferred in a written form, nominations to be collected by an organiser). Then all candidates' names can be put on a white/black board, unless any one of them wishes not to be listed. Once the nominated names have been presented to the whole course/class, the election can take place. Experience shows that it is better that each of the EMA courses run this election no earlier than 4 weeks after the students have had met and got to know each other. Activists and capable volunteers will then be given sufficient time to show up and gain wide support among the student body.

An election can be done electronically where students happen to study at different institutions at the time of election. In this case, the coordinator shall help organize the e-election. One recommendation is that students studying at the same institution nominate a certain number of representatives (Note that students within all EM course should be encouraged to nominate themselves), these representatives are then going to deliver an electronic appointment plans, followed by which an e-election can be organized.

The above is mainly applicable for EM course with no graduate until now. It is very important to note that alumni representatives are an essential part of EMA and each EM course should also nominate alumni representatives once they have any.

Option B: Appointment by coordinators. This is considered to one of the fastest and most efficient method for selecting EMA gathering participants. However, the CAT strongly suggests that EM courses do not choose this option under normal circumstances as it creates potential tensions among the student body and the coordinators. Furthermore, this method goes against the principle of democracy.

Option C: Running a lottery. There can be some extreme circumstances when students within some EM courses are in favor of this method. In such case, the EMA is not against running a lottery to decide which member(s) to go. Necessary assistance to run the lottery should be provided by relevant course administration.

Nevertheless, the CAT strongly suggests that the representatives to be elected by the student body mainly and/or only. No interference/influence shall be involved in the process of the selection of the EMA conference participants, unless the student body of a particular course prefers to give up their right to decide who should attend the GA and gatherings.

4. Regional and thematic meetings and other activities

The October meeting decided to highly promote regional and thematic gatherings, as there are a number of sound reasons for highlighting these events:

The scientific basis of the events makes it possible for current EU and non-EU students as well as Alumni to meet and present their papers, Formally and informally exchange ideas and experiences;
EU students, who are subject to Action 3 will have the opportunity to present the result of their researches in third countries;
The event will allow an interesting exchange of non-EU students on EU problems and EU students on problems in third countries and thus initiate the dialog;
The event will bring together alumni of the course what will increase a feeling of being a member of EM and promote the programme and indirectly the entire European education system.

Therefore, each EM course is highly encouraged to organize such an event at least once a year (or once every two years), with or without the financial support from EMA.

First, as mentioned above it should be noted that regional as well as thematic gatherings/meetings should be distinguished from the EMA GA. This section intends to open more channels, other than the EMA GA, for EM students and graduates to host or participate in a number of gathering events by themselves. A regional gathering refers to meetings organized and hosted by EM students and graduates from the same geographic region, e.g. EM students and graduates from India may have the opportunity to organize an EMA-India event in a specific place or region in India^[13]. However, it is realized that the regional meeting based on geography may happen at a later time since the EM is a young programme and there are a number of issues that cannot be easily solved, e.g. identification and selection of participants; budgetary arrangements, logistics, among others. Therefore, combining a regional meeting with the EMA GA was proposed at the October meeting, in coincidence of the European Higher Education Fair.

Thematic gatherings may be organized and hosted by one or more EM courses with similar interests. Both regional and thematic gatherings can be organized separately and independently from the EMA GA. However, in order to obtain funding from EMA, proponents shall be prepared to demonstrate that they will organize high quality gathering events by following the application guidelines. The general guidelines have been adopted by the Launch Committee and will be made available to applicants.

There are many ideas and proposals for regional and thematic meetings organized by the EMA. The Launch Committee decide to promote multi-disciplinary events organized by at least two EM courses, with exceptions for those organized by only

one EM course under very special circumstances, e.g. there is only one EM course in that particular area. With sufficient funding support from Brussels, each individual course can be an organizer in such events. It is recognized that such events will be an important platform for the backbones of the future coming out from EM courses to broaden their connections and establish contacts.

The CAT suggested that future regional/thematic events under the EMA framework should be implemented through the following mechanisms/steps:

1st: following the October meeting, the EMA Launch Committee is going to open a call for the establishment of regional/discipline groups within the EMA. The primary step is to assist each EM course to organize its own Alumni Association as a branch of the EMA. These branch alumni associations will choose their own organizers/leader to organize some events under the financial support from EMA, e.g. the EMMS course's alumni association can cooperate with another EM course to host a seminar inviting former graduates and current students to talk about what is happening in their respective fields. The October meeting adopted this suggestion and decided to open a call for expressions of interests under the thematic events scheme. Please refer to the guidelines for application details.

2nd: each year, during a specified time period, agreed by the Launch/Steering Committee, any individual/group can submit a proposal for the organization of a regional/multi-disciplinary specific meeting as long as they can get certain number of confirmed participants, then the EMA will decide/choose the most favorable proposals for implementation. The October meeting decided to organize one regional meeting in Beijing, China^[14] in coincidence of the European Higher Education Fair in the second half of the year and to support 4 to 8 thematic meetings. Please note that the October meeting decided to only support thematic meetings organized by at least two EM courses in 2007 (with exceptions on extreme circumstances). Regional meetings to be organised in the coming years will be decided by the future EMA Steering Committee according to their available resources.

3rd: The EMA Launch Committee will consider opening a call for the theme of the EMA GA 2007. This will come out at the most appropriate time.

It should be kept in mind that to organize an event based on an open process can achieve the goal of the EMA gathering as to involving as many participants as possible because this process will involve an additional number of active organizers as well as particular participants.

There are possibilities that other nice ideas about EMA gatherings are not mentioned above and therefore any further ideas coming up will be considered in the future work on CAT. The EMA Launch/Steering Committee is suggested to set up an unwritten rules and principles as to its funding resources supporting activities coming from different interest groups. For example, similar proposals shall not be given priority in the case that it has been supported previously unless there is convincing figure showing wide support and welcome of that proposal. However, because the funding opportunities and availability are rather unclear for the moment, these issues will be discussed at a later time.

5. Side events/activities

To clarify, a side event or activity refers to an event or activity being held concurrently during the EMA GA. For any GA, the CAT suggests to organize a venue tour of the city where the meeting takes place. E.g., the GA in May can organize a Coach Tour in the city of Brussels. Interpreters will present relevant aspects of the city(-ies) along with the trip. For this coming gathering in 2007, it is recommended that the whole group shall have the opportunity to take a brief visit to the European Commission/Council/Parliament. Political institution is an important component of the European culture because of its uniqueness. Such a visit will provide the students with access to better understand the political system of Europe.

As a second proposal, the CAT proposed to hold a number of concurrent side meetings each time when the GA takes place. In such case, participants with different interests will have the opportunity to choose a variety of options offered by the GA. In some cases, regional and/or thematic events can be combined with the GA. Unfortunately, the GA in 2007 (and even in 2008) will not involve any side events due to a number of practical issues.

The CAT recognised that the best ideas for side events/activities always come from the student body. Therefore, it is recommended that each year in the future (not applicable for the GA 2007), along with the announcement of the GA information, the CAT launch a call for expressions of ideas for side events and followed by the above-mentioned procedures and the most favorable proposals will be selected.

In any case, the CAT is aware that the organization of any event can be limited due to budgetary matters. Therefore, the proponent of any event should take into account the financial feasibility of their proposal. The amount of budget to be allocated for EMA in the coming years is at present a matter of discussion and approval by the European Commission.

6. Adoption of this proposal

The previous version (Ref: EMA-CAT-01) of this document was sent to all EMA representatives and was discussed during the October meeting. Many comments and feedback were received from the EMA Liaison Group and Launch Committee members, which formed the current version of this document.

The Launch Committee meeting session on Oct. 20, 2006 discussed the above aspects with concluding comments and adopted the proposal.

7. Other business

The CAT appreciates all EM members who actively participated in the discussion and refinery of this document. Mihaela Ostafe, Vito Borrelli, Alan Smith, Ingrid Rigler and Franziska Muche as well as other meeting attendees have provided important assistance and remarks during the active discussion with the CAT. Their contribution is highly appreciated. Ms. Tahia Devisscher, non-EU student representative from the Masters course in Environmental Science, Policy and Management has provided enormous support during the drafting process of the first version of this document. Her contribution is also highly appreciated!

Furthermore, there are a number of suggestions that are beyond the CAT's mandate. The CAT will cooperate with other EMA working teams to work on them.

The content of the EMA GA in 2007 should include: election of the EMA Steering Committee and the EMA President; presentations by the Launch Committee, etc. Final programme shall come out at a later time.

Any comments or suggestions can be sent to Chunyu Liang, CAT communicator, at [✉ chunyu_liang\(at\)163.com](mailto:chunyu_liang(at)163.com) or [✉ Chunyu.Liang\(at\)postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Chunyu.Liang(at)postgrad.manchester.ac.uk). All future comments will be considered and carried into the organisation of future EMA events.

Thank you for your submitting your proposals!

Please note that the EMA is presently not a legally registered organization. The activities associated with EMA have been and will be carried out by a "service provider" contracted by the European Commission. So far, the service provider has been the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), but their present contract with the European Commission expires on 18 February, 2007.

To ensure the continuity of the its services, the European Commission has launched a new call for tender to contract a service provider for the EMA. This tender procedure will last for about 4 months and the result will come out in June 2007.

As you already know, in October 2006, the Launch Committee (LC, consisting of 7 members) and Liaison Group (about 33 members divided into different working teams coordinated by the LC members) met in Brussels and identified a list of services (available in the discussion documents on the EMA website) to be provided for the EMA. Most of these needs have been accepted by the European Commission and they have included these services in the call for tender.

Unfortunately, by June, due to the lack of a service provider, many of the activities/events previously proposed for the first half of 2007 cannot take place. The European Commission is supportive, and during the gap period will take ensure the maintenance services for the EMA, until the next service provider is selected.

It is expected that many of the planned activities carried out by EMA will resume in the second half of 2007. For the same reason, the conferences, no matter thematic or regional in nature, will have to be postponed until the next service provider is selected. We appreciate your understanding of the situation.

Please also note that the discussion documents published on the EMA website are merely proposals submitted by the EMA Launch Committee and the working teams.

Conferences Team

8. Annex 1-Proposed procedure for the financial management of the EMA Launch/Steering Committee

The October meeting decided that the EMA would be given suitable financial resources and responsibility. Conference organizing work, as well as all the other EMA activities, always involves financial aspects. In order to create a functional and efficient body serving the EMA, a procedure was hereby proposed and adopted by the October meeting. Note that this procedure is only a component of the EMA

Launch/Steering Committee's regulations in managing its funding resources for EMA associated gathering events as elaborated in this document.

A. Purpose

The purpose of setting up such a mechanism is to encourage EM alumni and students into the creation and organization of many of the future EMA events. Involvement of EMA members is the primary idea.

B. Conditions and operation rules

Starting from the year of 2007, EMA members (EM graduates and students) will have the opportunity to organize groups of different interests and receive support from the European Commission. According to the October meeting decision, the EMA is going to support one regional event in Beijing and 4 to 8 thematic meetings in 2007.

The CAT will serve as a communication and coordination body for providing assistance of submitting the expressions of interests (Eols). The EMA Launch/Steering Committee, assisted by ACA, will serve as the decision-making body for the utilization and management of the funding resources.

EMA members are encouraged to submit brief proposals (maximum two pages preferably) that fit the criteria outlined below. The proponent is also requested to make a detailed budget requirement to carry out the proposal, unless such a requirement is not necessary. For the year of 2007, the deadline for submission of Eols is 4pm Brussels time, Feb. 15, 2007.

The general conditions shall include:

1. In principle, the fund is a one-time grant for an approved project activity. However, possibilities exist that some popular activities can be organized in the coming years' EMA gathering occasions. Such events shall receive strong and wide support from the EMA members.
2. There is currently no upper limit on the financial requirement as there are various volumes of different events. However, applicants are strongly suggest to consider the financial feasibility of their events.
3. No theme restriction exists for any proposals. However, it is advisable that in order to obtain support the proposal needs to attract a significant number of participants.
4. Any EMA member, namely, any previous and/or present EM course student, has the right to submit a proposal. However, the Launch Committee will only accept events organized by at least two EM courses in 2007, although exceptions exist for extreme cases. And applicant will be required to submit evidence showing strong interest in the event, e.g. this can take in the form of signed confirmation to attend the event, etc.
5. Proposals should seek to enhance the prestige of the European Commissions' Erasmus Mundus framework; proposals that seek to create a tradition of the EMA (or branch) are highly encouraged.
6. The structure of an Eol is provided in the attached guidelines.
7. Approved project activities are, in principle, to be organized by the proponents with assistance from their host university and the EMA service provider.

8. The Launch/Steering Committee reserves the right to set budget limit on project activities when resource availability becomes clear.
9. Practical matters including the management of budget will be decided at a later time.

As an early attempt, the Launch/Steering Committee cannot anticipate certain matters that are subject to fast change. Therefore, the Launch/Steering Committee reserves the right to update the conditions contained in this document with prior notification. These updates will be made available online.

C. Procedural aspects

Individual(s)/Group(s) should submit their proposals to Mihaela Ostafe, Project Officer with ACA, at [✉ mihaela.ostafe@aca-secretariat.be](mailto:mihaela.ostafe@aca-secretariat.be) no later than 4pm Brussels time, Feb. 15, 2007. ACA will forward the submissions to the CAT and unless the format/structure does not meet the criteria set up by the Launch Committee, the CAT will submit the Eols to the Launch Committee for final decision. The Launch Committee will discuss the Eols and then forward its decision to the EMA service provider for implementation of the approved events.

Proponents can expect to receive an answer from the Launch Committee by the end of March 2007. This means that the Eols should consider organizing events to be held later than that time.

[1] For emphasis purpose, the concluding points of the October meeting are highlighted in this document.

[2] This document does not cover the aspects with regard to the organization of gatherings of the EMA GA as well as the Launch/Steering Committee members, although the GA and Launch/Steering Committee members may be nominated/elected by each EM course following the indicative guidelines provided in this document.

[3] Financial support will be made available for these events. The Academic Cooperation Association's secretariat will open a call for expressions of interests (Eols) on the implementation of sub-group/thematic/multi-disciplinary meetings and in cooperation of the CAT shall be ready for receiving such proposals anytime within the validity period specified therein. It should be noted that Eols will be treated on a first-come-first-serve basis until the budget is used up but for the call for Eols for 2007 there will be a general deadline for all Eols. In general, The CAT (and the CAT of the subsequent Steering Committee) members will make the first evaluation within the first 15 days upon receipt of the Eol(s) before passing it through the member (s) in charge of conference matters who further sends its evaluation and draft decision to the Steering Committee for a final decision. Response from the committee shall be made within 10 days. Any rejection made by the CAT and the Steering Committee shall be complemented by sound reason (s). The CAT encourages sub-

group/thematic/disciplinary meetings of all kind to apply for support from the EMA. The detailed guidelines on this call for Eols will be released shortly.

[4] See Erasmus Mundus official website for the definition on third countries: ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/index_en.html.

[5] Further changes subject to the EMA Policy Team and Launch/Steering Committee decisions.

[6] Subject to EMA Policy Team and Launch/Steering Committee decisions.

[7] This will be related to meeting venue capacity.

[8] In principle, the EMA attendees shall be selected in a democratic way.

[9] In principle, the EMA attendees shall represent the interests of the courses they participate. Ideally and theoretically, any suggestions and proposals raised by these attendees shall represent those of the students' and/or the alumni's.

[10] The CAT recognized that everybody may wish to go and sit. However, it is very difficult to come up with a procedure to ensure participants' commitment. Therefore, it is up to each EM course to consider this matter in particular.

[11] The decision-making process shall be made available on the EMA website and information contained therein should be frequently updated. EMA members shall be given the opportunity to express their comments and ideas that shall be reflected in relevant EMA decisions.

[12] Subject to minor amendments by the EMA Policy Team and Launch Committee.

[13] In such case, the procedures and organizational matters will be discussed further.

[14] EMA organized events will be rotating in other countries in the coming years. However, the current capacity only allows to organise only one regional event in 2007. It was originally considered to be held in India, where most of the EM students come but to organise the event concurrently with the European Higher Education Fair which will happen to be held in China will bring multiple benefits: it is in line with the promotional purpose for EM; it enables prospective students to meet with current EM students and alumni; it helps reduce cost for organizing a separate regional meeting at different locations.