

# Universal Accreditation System (UAS): An Innovative Education and Research Credit Appraisal by USERN

Niloufar Yazdanpanah, Mahsa Keshavarz-Fathi, Heliya Ziaei, Ali Jaberipour, Mona Mirbeyk, Sara Hanaei, Simin Seyedpour, Negar Azami, Milad Akbarzadehmoallemkolaei, Kawthar Mohamed, Noosha Samieefar, Zahra Kolahchi, Sajad Kolahchi, Zahra Rahimi Pirkoochi, Sara Momtazmanesh, Mojdeh Sarzaeim, Negar Moradian, Alireza Sarkar Lotfabadi, Amir Hossein Loghman, Saboura Ashkevarian, Nima Rezaei

*Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Tehran, Iran*

## USERN; a borderless network promoting scientific education and research

The Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), as its name implies, aims to promote two main foci, education and research (1). As for the research arm, USERN has a great accomplishment of publishing more than 1450 scientific documents, resulting in an H-index of 57 at the end of 2021 (Figure 1). Education, as defined by USERN, is "the process of receiving or giving systematic instructions to prepare individuals to be functional in learning and generating knowledge and spreading wisdom" (2). As one of the central organizations which have been established to promote science without borders, USERN has organized over 800 educational and inspirational scientific events, including different scientific workshops, Focused Group Discussions (FGD), Meet the Expert sessions (USERN Expert Express Event, UEEE), Scientific Debates, USERN Research Week Events, talks, and schools, during the first six years of activity (3,4). At the dawn of the 7<sup>th</sup> year of activity, USERN is also proud to have its invaluable scientific community including over 18,000 members, more than 600 top 1% scientists, and 19 Nobel/Abel laureates as its Advisory Board members, 63 USERN junior ambassadors (UJAs), 70 USERN Interest Groups (UIGs), 78 Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs), and 46 USERN offices (Figure 2).

## Indexing of educational activities

Indexing educational activities is of great importance for the supervisors and employers seeking skilled fellows and employees. Unlike a scholar's research outputs that are readily accessible through

online databases, one's extra-curricular educational and executive activities are not usually indexed on online databases with public access. Individuals' attendance in extra-curricular educational programs qualifies them in different fields other than their field of specialty. In addition, experiencing executive roles in different activities improves students' communicating, management, and cooperative skills and prepares them for their future occupations.

There are different scoring systems designed for scoring educational activities. For instance, the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program aims to create a continuing commitment for lifelong learning to increase the knowledge, skills, and proper performance that is essential for board-certified physicians/surgeons' practice. The MOC's credit system comprises three types of credits; credits based on time, credits based on completing an activity of the program, and partial credits. The new MOC program learning framework categorizes the learning process and, in relative scoring, into three sections: group-learning, self-learning, and assessment (5). The MOC program is limited to scoring activities for fellows and healthcare professionals.

On the other hand, a groups of physicians criticize it for being expensive, burdensome, and not completely in line with their usual practice. Nevertheless, Gray *et al.*, reported that physicians who have completed the MOC program gained better performance scores in their analytical study (6). The importance of continued educational activities and knowledge and skill assessment is not arguable; however, the way the MOC program is implemented has been controversial for years (7,8).

The Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) put forward board-specific

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**Corresponding Author:** N. Rezaei

Universal Scientific Education and Research Network (USERN), Tehran, Iran

Tel: +98 2166576573, Fax: +98 2166929235, E-mail addresses: rezaei\_nima@tums.ac.ir, rezaei\_nima@yahoo.com

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requirements, which could better fit physicians' daily practice rather than MOC requirements. In addition, many of the accredited Continuing Medical Education (CME) activities could be registered for MOC credits. CME is introduced as a proper alternative for MOC (9).

The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) aims to create a system for evaluating and representing students' educational activities. It is designed to facilitate the representation and recognition of the student's academic qualifications and achievements and make possible the application of national higher education degrees in different countries and on international scales. Hence, ECTS helps validate the student mobility between higher education institutions and is adopted by the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (10).

### Universal accreditation system (UAS): an innovation from USERN

Since its establishment in 2016, USERN has applied different accreditation methods to evaluate the educational and research activities of USERN beneficiaries, including UIGs, USERN offices, and UJAs (11). Moreover, many organizing committees of external events have requested to obtain the accreditation of their events by USERN.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> year, after experiencing and examining different accreditation methods, USERN aimed to launch the Universal Accreditation System (UAS) to quantify educational activities and professional development, which have not been indexed on online databases. This system includes accreditation of activities for different categories, including participation in various educational programs and performing executive roles. The importance of educational activities and experiencing different educational courses and their strong association with future employment and career accomplishments is not hidden to anyone. While almost

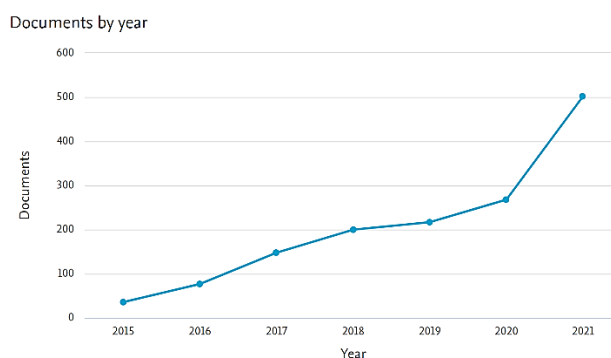
all the reviewed accreditation systems mainly focused on educational activities, the administrative and executive activities could not be neglected. Executive activities and team working improve the soft skills of individuals in different aspects, including communicating skills, time management, language skills, cognitive and emotional empathy, negotiation and conflict resolution, problem-solving, flexibility, decisiveness, and leadership skills. Integrating these skills equips students with necessary features that considerably help them in their future careers (12,13). Therefore, assessing both educational and executive activities is considered to design UAS.

UAS credits appear on the profile of USERN members as online evidence of participation in educational programs and administrative activities (Figure 3).

USERN welcomes event organizers to apply to get UAS credits for their events if the event proposal meets the standard criteria to grant UAS credits for its participants. The amount of UAS credits for each event is calculated based on the approved UAS instructions, based on the event's type, duration, and scale (local, national, international), which is developed by the UAS core committee in USERN.

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**Figure 1.** USERN scientific output during 6 years of scientific activities, resulting in an H-index of 57 and more than 1450 scientific documents

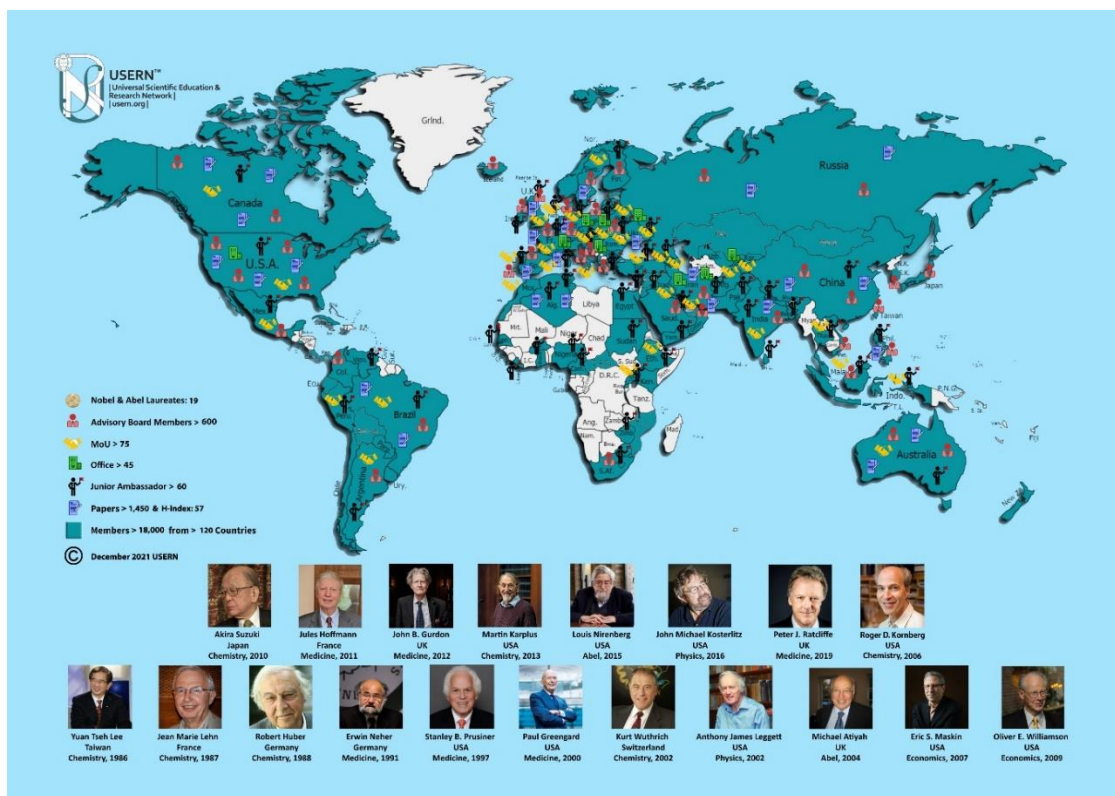


Figure 2. USERN map, December 2021

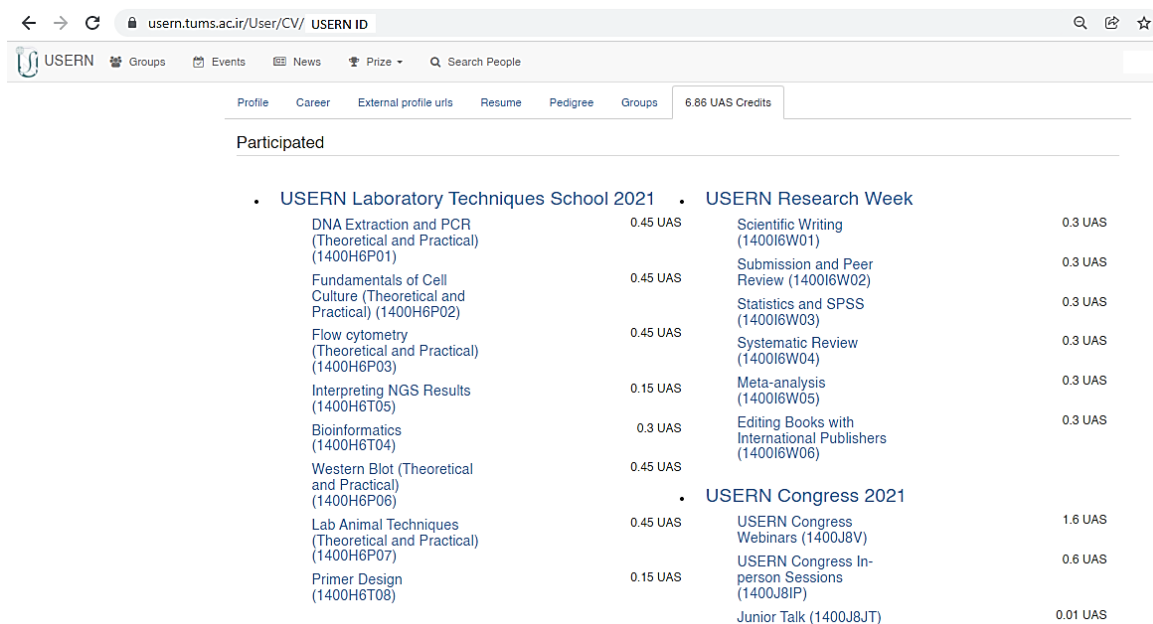


Figure 3. An example of how UAS credits appear on the USERN profile of individuals. The UAS for each event is recorded separately on the profile, while the total UAS credits obtained appears on the top

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