

## « Sponsoring to integrate better »

This project is led by Liza Abid and Vahideh Akbari, PhD students in wood and bio-based materials engineering under the supervision of Véronic Landry.

It is part of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives of CRMR-CERMA and aims to support the integration of international students. It is based on a mentoring program that encourages mutual aid, the sharing of experiences, and the strengthening of ties within the university community, thus contributing to a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

### PROJECT DETAILS

#### General purpose

Offering equal treatment to all may often seem like the right approach, but the reality is more complex. This project aims to provide support tailored to the specific needs of everyone—particularly newcomers or those looking to join research centres—to foster their integration and inclusion.

The main objective is to establish a sponsorship program in which volunteers already involved in the centre accompany and support new members based on their needs.

#### Relevance

After making significant efforts to gain admission to a foreign university, students are often faced with numerous challenges: navigating administrative procedures, obtaining visas, and adjusting to the rules and culture of the host country.

These challenges can create considerable pressure—particularly for those who face language barriers or lack access to essential information. Feelings of isolation and disorientation may arise, sometimes leading to loneliness or even mental health issues.

It is, therefore, essential to provide support to these newcomers to ease their transition and promote their integration and inclusion in university life

## Proposed actions

### **1. The stages of the project**

- Distribute a survey to members of the two research centres to collect their experiences of arriving without a sponsor.
- Present the project to the different research groups with the help of a brochure explaining the role of sponsorship and the various forms of support possible (face-to-face or remote).
- Recruit volunteers who are willing to become sponsors.
- Organize an information meeting to explain to sponsors their responsibilities.
- Identify new members who want to be sponsored.
- Assign sponsors based on the needs of newcomers, considering the language spoken and the sponsor's experience, without relying on background or culture to encourage diversity and inclusion.
- Connect sponsors with new members.
- Follow up with sponsors regularly to answer their questions and resolve any issues.

### **2. Responsibilities of sponsors**

Sponsorship can be done remotely and upon the arrival of the new member:

- Contact the newcomer (call, email) to review their needs.
- Accompanied him in the administrative procedures (visa application, registration, etc.).
- Help them settle in (housing, SIN, bank account, transportation, etc.).
- Welcome him to campus and introduce the team members.
- Have them visit the department (offices, library, administration, etc.).
- Explain the academic grading system, scholarship opportunities, and course modalities.
- Present existing research centers and committees.
- Inform about campus events and activities.
- Encourage participation in social and academic events.
- Listen and provide moral support.
- Educate other members about the importance of sponsorship.

### **3. Evaluation**

- After a month, collect feedback from newcomers via a survey or follow-up meeting.
- Identify the strengths and areas for improvement of the program.

## RETOMBEES ESCOMPTEES

- Facilitate the integration of newcomers.
- Reduce feelings of isolation and psychological pressure.
- Promote an equitable approach by tailoring support to individual needs.
- To offer support to all, regardless of their origin.
- Reduce the stress associated with the change of environment.
- Strengthen the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- Enable sponsors to develop skills that can be used on their CV

A survey was conducted by the EDI committee within the CRMR and CERMA, revealing that some international students perceive unequal treatment, which goes against the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. This project aims to address these issues by facilitating the integration of students and promoting a more inclusive and caring work environment.

***« As international students, we have personally experienced the challenges of adapting to a new academic and professional setting. We are convinced that adapted support, even remotely, can considerably improve the university experience and support newcomers in their journey » - Liza and Vahideh***

## The concrete benefits of these projects are reflected in several key actions:

### 1. Student mentoring over two sessions

Throughout two sessions dedicated to project development, Liza and Vahideh mentored a dozen students from diverse backgrounds. Through their attentive and thoughtful guidance, they fostered a collaborative learning environment in which mentees were actively involved in every stage of the project—from the initial concept to its implementation.

This mentorship not only helped participants develop both practical and theoretical skills but also nurtured autonomy, critical thinking, and a sense of initiative. Through regular exchanges, personalized advice, and an inclusive, student-centered approach, Liza and Vahideh enriched the academic and personal experiences of the participants while also sparking their interest in applied research and interdisciplinary collaboration.

## 2. Creation of a resource document

Following a survey designed to better understand the needs of international students, a comprehensive guide was created. It offers essential information on academic integration, administrative procedures, available campus resources, and practical tips to help newcomers adapt more smoothly to their new environment.

Please refer to the document [here](#)

## 3. Organization of a thematic conference

Entitled « [Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: EDI at the Heart of Our Collective Actions!](#) », this conference highlighted the initiatives carried out by the EDI committee. The event aimed to raise awareness among the student community about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, to promote current projects, and to promote exchanges on the challenges experienced by international students.

You can watch the recording [here](#).

## 4. Highlighting the sponsorship project

During this conference, special attention is paid to the sponsorship project, which aims to support new international students by pairing them with more experienced students. The aim is to strengthen peer-to-peer support, encourage social and academic integration, and attract new volunteers who want to be actively involved in this initiative.

These actions are part of a global approach to improve support for international students by promoting their inclusion and developing a network of solidarity within the university community.