Digital transformation is leading a new era of change around the world. In 2016, the digital economy accounted for 16% of global GDP, and without considering the impact of Covid-19, had been projected to increase to 26% by 2020. Considering this growth, a country’s digital resilience and ability to develop technology-dependent operational capabilities are becoming increasingly important. Digital resilience uses technologies to make government, business and society more resilient, and adapt to changing circumstances to withstand and bounce back from crises and shocks, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

To explore new developments, the University of Central Asia, in partnership with the State Committee for Information Technology and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic, and the World Bank, held an online Conference on “Why Countries Need Digital Resilience Strategies: Safeguarding Digital Transformation in the...”

Conference Explores Strategies for Digital Resilience

Deputy Minister of Education and Science Visits Khorog Campus

On a visit to UCA’s campus in Khorog on July 3, Mr. Qodirzoda Dilovar Bahriddin, Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Tajikistan, stated how pleased he was with the detailed presentation and tour of the campus. “The high standard of education at UCA should be an inspiration to other Tajik universities.” He was particularly impressed by UCA’s Cooperative Programme, where students undertake mandatory summer internships at corporations and businesses where they gain real word experience. The visiting delegation toured the UCA campus facilities and were introduced to UCA’s specialisations, campus operations, research institutes, as well as collaboration between UCA and Khorog State University.

Continued on page 2.
Age of Covid-19© on June 30th. It provided a platform to raise awareness about digital resilience, and shared views from an international panel of cyber security experts. The Conference also discussed action plans for the government and other stakeholders to better manage crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

This Conference, taking place in the year designated in Kyrgyzstan for the Development of Regions, Digitisation and Support of Children, brought together over 100 participants online. It was also one of the outcomes inspired by the Digital Transformation in Central Asia (DTCA) Conference held in Bishkek last October, inaugurated by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Sooronbai Jeenbekov.

Altynbek Ismailov, Chairman of the State Committee of Information Technology and Communications of Kyrgyz Republic, in his opening remarks highlighted “Kyrgyzstan is committed to mobilizing the IT community in the country to respond to the challenges of digitisation, so that the citizens of our country can reap the benefits of technology.”

Rafal Rohozinki, CEO of the SecDev Group (Canada), delivered the keynote address on “Securing and Sustaining Digital Transformation under Covid-19,” where he presented a proposed framework for investments and priorities to strengthen digital transformation. It was followed by a panel discussion on "Why Countries Need Digital Resilience Strategies," with Oleg V. Petrov, Digital Resilience Lead for Central Asia at the World Bank. The speakers were global leaders in their field, with experience in developing strategies for digital resilience.

Other speakers included Bolormaa Amgaabazar, World Bank Country Manager for the Kyrgyz Republic; Louise Chamberlain, United National Development Programme Resident Representative for the Kyrgyz Republic; Farid Nakhli, Programme Coordinator at the International Telecommunication Union; Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA, and Shaukat Ali Khan, Chief Information Officer at UCA.

Watch the conference in English or Russian.
Popularity of SPCE’s Mobile Library in Naryn

UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) launched a mobile library in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) for students from SPCE’s Academic Achievement Programme, Access Microscholarship Programme, as well as for children affected by a recent flood, which damaged over 60 homes in Naryn.

SPCE collected over 250 books, and has been distributing them in the Naryn town and Tynesh village during the Covid-19 pandemic. This project was launched under the Access Microscholarship Programme in Naryn, and is also supported by the Naryn Town Administration.

Learn more in the following news and video reports:

Azattyk Media https://www.azattyk.org/a/naryn-kitep-baldar/30698391.html
Naryn TV https://youtu.be/LlANw7JNbGQ

SPCE Graduate Lauds Academic Achievement Programme

Kymbatai Medetbekova is a graduate of SPCE’s Academic Achievement Programme (AAP) in Naryn, and studied at SPCE for five years. Subsequently she won a scholarship and enrolled in a business school in Hungary. Kymbatai attributes her success to her experiences at SPCE. “Thanks to the knowledge gained at SPCE, I was able to enter my dream university in Europe. Studying at SPCE gave me the academic boost I needed and has directly helped me achieve my goals,” said Kymbatai, while recommending SPCE’s programme to others.

AAP is a package of well-planned English courses aimed at preparing learners for the rigorous requirements of the academic curriculum of reputable universities, such as UCA. Students begin preparation from Grade 7 and complete the programme by Grade 11.

Eight New ICDL Test Centres Launched in Kyrgyzstan

Eight schools in Southern Kyrgyzstan have been recognised as International Computer Driving License (ICDL) Accredited Test Centres (ATC), as part of the “Demilgeluu Jashtar” project. This recognition follows UCA’s SPCE providing computers, teacher training, and other necessary equipment to the 8 schools in Osh City, Aravan, Suzak, and Bazar-Korgon. The centres now offer ICDL programmes and certification tests. Fifty schools in Kyrgyzstan are currently implementing the ICDL programme under the “Demilgeluu Jashtar” project. It is funded by the United States Agency for International Development, and is implemented by UCA, the Mountain Societies Development Support Programme for Kyrgyzstan, Association of Social Entrepreneurs, International Educational Debate Association in Central Asia, and Accelerate Prosperity, an initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network. 

Read more.
Spotlight: Nurbek Nisharapov

The Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic conducts state examinations annually as a requirement for students to complete their Bachelor degrees. In June, the Ministry appointed Nurbek Nisharapov, Head of SPCE Naryn, as Chairman of the state examinations for Naryn State University’s Philology department, including specialisations in Chinese, German, English, Russian, Korean, and Kyrgyz languages and literature. The appointment was made in recognition of his work at SPCE in Naryn. As Chairman, Nurbek is responsible for individually proctoring the state examinations online, including evaluating theoretical knowledge, as well as student’s thesis defense. The exams were conducted from June 10-15, and upon approval from the Ministry, Nurbek will also be signing the diplomas of the graduates.

SPCE Webinars Promote Digital Literacy of Teachers

Lidiya Chikalova from UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE), conducted six webinars in June reaching over 300 teachers from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Moldova. The webinars aimed at improving digital literacy of teachers in the region, as well as provided training on conducting Cambridge Assessment English programmes.

Sessions also included how to use Zoom, work with young learners, as well as tips and recommendations on how to teach online.

Nine New ICDL Trainers in Afghanistan Gain Certifications

In June, the Head of SPCE Afghanistan, and eight trainers from SPCE’s learning centres in Faizabad, Ishkashim, and Shughnan (Afghanistan) became certified to deliver the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) programme, an advanced computer literacy qualification. The training was organised in cooperation with ICDL Afghanistan, and was funded by UCA.

UCA’s SPCE offers short-term programmes and courses across its learning centres in Darwaz, Ishkashim, Faizabad (2 centres), and Shugnan (Afghanistan).

Did You Know?

UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education conducted a survey in 2019 of 1,957 alumni who took courses between 2017-2018 across 13 learning centres in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan.

- Entered university or found jobs after completing SPCE courses: 52%
- Applied learnt knowledge or skills in current job or studies: 81%
- Confirmed SPCE exceeded their expectations: 83%
- Highly rated SPCE facilities and services: 93%
- Would recommend SPCE to others: 96.5%
In an article by 24.kg News, UCA topped the list of preferred universities in Kyrgyzstan. "In 2019, UCA had the highest rating in terms of the average ORT national admissions test score of students, with an average score of 186.5. Academically strong students from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are awarded full scholarships on a competitive basis. When awarding the scholarships, the University takes into account the outstanding results in entrance tests, first places in national Olympiads in mathematics and English and "Gold Certificate" winners under ORT."

Read the full article in English, or Russian

Achieving Academic Excellence During and After Covid-19

Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA, delivered a keynote lecture on “Defining and Devising Excellence in Higher Education During & Post Covid-19 Era” as part of an online lecture series entitled “Sharing Best Academic Practices.” It was organised by the Inter-University Consortium for the Promotion of Social Sciences (IUCPSS), alongside its partner institutes in Islamabad (Pakistan). Read more at: https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/676754-iucpss-initiates-lecture-series.

UCA Trains Government Employees in Cyber Security in Naryn

The University of Central Asia held an IT Security Awareness training for department representatives from the Naryn Government on June 17th. It was organised as part of Naryn’s Smart City project and UCA’s Town Development Initiative. The training was aimed at enhancing and improving IT Security awareness among government staff, to reduce the risk of security incidents within Naryn’s public authority. The training covered IT security recommendations and best practices, including understanding the source of threats, how to prevent security incidents, computer security, password and mobile phone protection, as well as recommendations for working remotely. A similar session is planned for the public authority in Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.
UCA Students Take Action to Protect the Environment

A dynamic group of undergraduate students at UCA in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) and Khorog (Tajikistan) are actively raising awareness about ecological issues, encouraging participation from the local communities, and promoting environmentally sustainable practices.

UCA’s Eco-Warriors Club in Naryn aims to protect the environment, and regularly organises community clean-ups, social events and environment-related challenges on campus, as well as other activities to raise awareness within the community. Across the Naryn campus, the Club has set up 25 boxes to sort recyclable materials, and have collected hundreds of kilos of paper, cardboard and plastic. In 2020, the Club won a grant from the United States Embassy, which will help install recycling boxes in all schools, universities, and offices in the city of Naryn. This initiative will also include conducting training on ecological problems, how to recycle and segregate waste, and the importance of living eco-friendly lifestyles.

UCA’s Green Community club is located at the Khorog campus, and was established in September 2018. The student-led club promotes reducing waste, and encourages zero waste practices in Khorog. Students have launched projects on Early Environmental Childhood Education, recycling, raising environmental awareness, and are also producing an environmental book. Club members regularly organise community clean ups and tree planting events on campus to celebrate Earth Day.

“Currently, the only way to recycle in Khorog is to transport waste from Khorog to Dushanbe, which is a 16-18 hour journey. We collect paper and plastic bottles, and send them for recycling,” said Anisa Abibulloeva, who leads the UCA Green Community. “We only use trucks that are travelling to Dushanbe anyway, in order to minimise our carbon footprint and cost.” In the future, the Club hopes to establish a recycling machine in the town of Khorog, where the University campus is located.

IPPA Research: Causes and Reduction of Stunting in Kyrgyzstan

An Exemplar in Global Health (EGH) platform was launched in June, and features research by UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration staff, Dr. Roman Mogilevskii, Dilbara Kirbasheva, Mariia Iamshchikova, and Zalina Enikeeva. Read IPPA’s research on the causes and reduction of stunting in Kyrgyzstan at: https://www.exemplars.health/topics/stunting/kyrgyz-republic.

The platform brings together experts, funders, and collaborators around the globe with the mission of identifying positive global health outliers, analysing and understanding what makes these countries successful, and disseminating the core learnings so they can be replicated in comparable settings.

Rysgul Nurbekova, Eco-Warriors Club President, at the Naryn campus.

UCA undergraduate students at the Khorog campus plant trees to celebrate Earth Day.

© UNICEF
Geothermal Energy Helps Year-round Farming in Tajikistan

Food and nutrition insecurity are emerging as major issues in mountainous regions, particularly in the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) in Tajikistan, where there are short growing seasons, severe climatic conditions at elevations above 2,000 metres, and limited availability of agriculture land. To address these challenges, UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI), in collaboration with other research institutions and development partners, has launched a research project on food systems.

“An important and unexplored resource for food production in GBAO is geothermal energy,” said Aziz Ali, Research Fellow at UCA’s MSRI in Khorog. “While there are abundant sources of hot geothermal water in Tajikistan, they are currently only being used in the treatment of various illnesses and skin diseases. There is untapped potential to use this energy to heat greenhouses for off-season vegetable production, as well as space-heating for poultry farming.”

MSRI, in partnership with Khorog State University, established a greenhouse using geothermal resource energy in the Jelondi village of Tajikistan’s Shughnan district in autumn 2018. This pilot project is aimed at testing vegetable production in a high-altitude greenhouse using hot water as a heat source. It was funded by MSRI through the Pathways to Innovation (P2i) Project of the International Development Research Center of Canada.

Results demonstrated that vegetables can grow at high altitudes using geothermal heating. In the 50 square meter greenhouse in Jelondi village, nearly 700kg of vegetables were produced over 4 months, despite harsh environmental conditions. Research findings revealed that this can provide a good source of fresh nutritious food for families, while also increasing income for families.

As part of this project, a small poultry farm was also established in Jelondi village in November 2019, to raise ducks using geothermal heating in a pond. The initial result was encouraging as the birds achieved substantial growth and body weight within 1.5 months. Findings suggested that with an investment of 2,130 Tajik somoni to purchase ducklings and feed for one year, a family can earn 1,880 Tajik somoni in net income per year from poultry farming and see increased growth each year. This is considered a sizable amount and can contribute to improved rural livelihoods and food security.

“Our research is ongoing through 2020; preliminary findings reveal that the available geothermal resources of hot water springs in high altitude areas of GBAO have great potential to assist in producing food at minimum costs year-round,” noted Aziz Ali. “Geothermal energy is nature’s free gift, and with proper use, can help increase food production and support rural livelihoods across mountain communities in Central Asia.”

UCA Launches Best Digital Teacher Competition

The Education Improvement Programme (EIP) of UCA is holding a competition to find the best digital teacher among its partner and Aga Khan Foundation supported secondary schools in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The competition is open to educators teaching biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, informatics, computer sciences and English in secondary schools (Grades 5-11).

The competition is aimed at developing effective online teaching and learning materials for secondary schools. The deadline for submissions is August 1st 2020, and the winners will be announced on August 28th.

For more information, email info@ucentralasia.org.
UCA organised three public lectures in June on Turning Data into Value with Process Mining, People-Centric Cyber Security, Lessons Learnt from Covid-19, and How to Accelerate Your Career and Master Your CV and Interviews Like a Professional. These lecture recordings are available on UCA’s YouTube channel.


### Upcoming Events

**History and Future of the Internet**

- **Date**: July 16th 2020
- **Time**: 5:00-6:00pm (GMT+6)
- **Location**: Online

Vinton G. Cerf, Vice President and Chief Internet Evangelist, Google, will speak on the history and future of the internet. The event is co-sponsored with the World Bank and the State Committee for Information Technology and Communications of the Kyrgyz Republic.

### Call for Participation: Online Training on Pluralism and Resilient Societies

The University of Central Asia is pleased to invite registration for a 20-hour online certificate programme on pluralism and how it can help make societies more resilient. The training will enable participants to better understand pluralism, mental health, and crisis management to increase social emotional intelligence during these unprecedented times. It will also cover tools on how to support others, and will provide an opportunity to develop stronger communication skills. The training will be offered free of charge to all UCA faculty, staff, and students. For other interested participants, the cost is $150. The training will be conducted online three times a week between August 10-24th between 8:30-10:30am (Bishkek time). The deadline to register is July 20th. [Learn more](#).

### Rural Migration in Kyrgyzstan: Drivers, Impact, and Governance

The development of Kyrgyzstan reveals a declining agricultural production and a steady increase of remittances from labour migration, which suggest a transformative effect on migration. Asel Murzakulova, Senior Research Fellow at UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute, has published research on the drivers, image, and governance of rural migration in Kyrgyzstan. The paper is based on a study that focused on investigation of the state of knowledge about migration, rural change and migration policy in modern Kyrgyzstan, and suggests recommendations of prominent areas for future studies. The report is available for free download in English at: [https://www.uceralasia.org/Research/Item/2751/EN](https://www.uceralasia.org/Research/Item/2751/EN).

### Public Finance and Technological Development in Central Asia

UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) has published its Working Paper #56 on public finance and technological development in Central Asia by Dr. Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director of IPPA. The paper discusses the current situation of government revenue, expenditure, and deficits in the economies of Central Asia, and considers the options available to use fiscal policy to support the technological development of these economies. It provides recommendations for the modification of fiscal policies to promote economic diversification and productivity growth in Central Asia. The report is available for free download in English at: [https://ucentralasia.org/Resources/Item/2755/EN](https://ucentralasia.org/Resources/Item/2755/EN).