



UNIVERSITY
OF CENTRAL ASIA

Strategic and Operational Plan 2015 – 2020

School of Arts and Sciences



Strategic and Operational Plan 2015 – 2020

Executive Summary

As a University focused on the development of mountain societies, University of Central Asia's (UCA) campuses are located in secondary towns and rural settings, with the hopes to be at the heart of an intellectual and economic transformation in the region. The 2015 – 2020 Strategic and Operational Plan for School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) focuses on Academic Excellence, Research and Community Outreach in line with UCA's fundamental priorities. SAS aims to recruit a diverse student body with a curiosity for learning both inside and outside the classroom and display leadership potential. SAS will employ experienced academic staff, who display a willingness to mentor students during their academic journey and will be provided training and professional development to allow implementation of innovative teaching methodologies for course delivery. Students will undergo a Preparatory Programme to prepare them for an international standard undergraduate education SAS provides. Developed with global institutional and academic partners who are experts in their fields, the curriculum has been contextualized for the socio-economic trends and market demands at Central Asia. With the incoming students and academic faculty, there is an expected increase in economic activities for local businesses. Socio-economic development of the town will be further supported by partnering with important stakeholders in Naryn and Khorog, engaging in cross-cultural exchange with non-profit organizations and supporting educational entities with knowledge exchange and professional development opportunities.

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Introduction

The University of Central Asia (UCA) was founded in 2000 as a private, not for profit, secular university through an International Treaty signed by the Presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, and His Highness the Aga Khan; ratified by their respective parliaments and registered with the United Nations. The Presidents are Patrons of the University and His Highness is the Chancellor. UCA brings with it the broader commitment and partnership of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN).

As a University focused on the development of mountain societies, UCA's undergraduate programmes are to be located at its purpose-built world class residential campuses in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan; Khorog, Tajikistan; and Tekeli, Kazakhstan near the Tien Shan, Pamir mountains and mountain ranges of Kazakhstan respectively. The towns of Naryn, Khorog, and Tekeli offer culturally and ecologically rich environments and communities. By locating the campuses in secondary cities and rural settings, UCA hopes to be at the heart of an intellectual and economic transformation in the region.

The purpose and activities of the University include the promotion and dissemination of knowledge and technology and to provide for instruction, research, training and demonstration in the development of mountainous regions and their societies and such other branches of learning as the University may determine. The 2015 – 2020 Strategic and Operational Plan for the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), focuses on Academic Excellence, Research, and Community Outreach in line with UCA's foundational priorities.

Vision and Mission

UCA seeks to contribute leadership, ideas, and innovations to the transitioning economies and communities of the region through education and vigorous research programmes that produce knowledgeable, skilled, and creative graduates. The mission of UCA is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain communities, by offering an internationally recognised standard of higher education, and enabling the peoples of the region to preserve their rich cultural heritage as assets for the future.

Along with the mission of the University, SAS encourages excellence in teaching through undergraduate academic programmes in Communications and Media, and Computer Science on the Naryn campus and Economics, and Earth and Environmental Sciences on the Khorog campus; engages in programmes of research, scholarship, and creative activities; and supports application of knowledge through outreach to serve the changing needs of the Founding States: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. The School offers undergraduate programmes to enable students to understand the intellectual and cultural heritages, the physical world, rapidly changing technologies, and social, economic, and political development. SAS promotes students' ethical and intellectual development and capabilities through critical and independent thinking, reading, and communicating. Further, it fosters breadth through engagement with theoretical foundations and basic skills, and depth through the intellectual challenges explored via intensive study in a field of major. Student-faculty interaction is enhanced through independent and collaborative experiences to inspire life-long learning and civic engagement.

The School's vision forms the core of UCA, delivering a liberal arts education for the 21st century and performing a central role in fulfilling the mission of the University in undergraduate education, research, and outreach.

The key principles guiding the strategy for launching and developing SAS and its undergraduate programmes are as follows:

- Opportunities for students from rural areas and secondary towns from mountainous regions;
- Equity of campuses, providing uniform academic experience and campus life;
- Academic programming to expose students and faculty to the Central Asian context;
- Building campus town communities through outreach.

To ensure implementation of the stated missions and vision, SAS will track performance indicators related to student academic achievement, alumni career performance, research and policy impact, and socioeconomic impact of the School's operations.

SAS is open to all persons of either gender of whatever religion, race, ethnicity, nationality or domicile who are academically qualified for admission to the courses of study offered. No such person shall be denied the privileges on the ground only of gender, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality or domicile.

Academic Excellence

Students

To be successful at SAS, outstanding academic performance, a curiosity for learning outside the classroom, and early signs of leadership potential are crucial. Students must be well rounded. They will not only be academically outstanding and leadership oriented, but also represent a healthy diversity of culture and interests, and talents in the arts and other extracurricular activities. Financial standing will not be a barrier for admission to SAS as students will be offered scholarship grants (top 15% based on merit), need-based grants and interest-free loans.

In line with UCA and the Schools' mission to foster the socio-economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain societies, where over 65% of Central Asians live, upgrading programmes shall be offered to bring the level up of these secondary students and allow them to be potential students at SAS. Summer and winter upgrading programmes are to be offered both on the campus and at regional schools.

Recruitment efforts will include more than 50 schools across seven oblasts of Kyrgyzstan to provide potential students with information on the academic programmes, state-of-art facilities, equipment, residence, admission requirements, etc. Similar efforts will also be made in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to ensure a demographically diverse Central Asian student body. Representatives from the Student Recruitment will also attend education fairs, host open houses and engage in other activities per recruitment norms in the region.

Admissions at SAS shall be transparent, and merit based, while considering the overall representative profile of the student body, i.e. one that is demographically balanced. SAS proposes that a diverse and representative student body is one that has a balance between male and female students, students from the three Founding States, and students from schools located in urban and rural centres. However, balance cannot and should not mean an equal number of students in each category; this would marginalize merit in favour of demographic considerations. The admissions process, comprising of an Admissions Test and evaluation of application profile by an Admissions Committee weighs merit with representation, aiming to identify top students who are likely to thrive with the quality of education the School offers.

Students will be provided academic support during their studies at SAS comprising of academic help beyond the classroom through student learning support centres, access to additional resources, and academic mentoring. Students will be expected to maintain good academic performance and utilize these resources as required.

Non-academic support is recognized as crucial to enable students to thrive; the campus will have a Student Affairs team to help transition students to a residential campus through an orientation programme, cater to challenges students might face being in a remote location, engage in activities to facilitate learning beyond the classroom, and navigate their way through other non-academic matters as required. The team will also comprise of a counsellor to ensure mental wellbeing of the student body.

Faculty

The academic staff will be required to have experience in line with their academic ranks, reputable credentials, and willingness and ability to mentor students during their academic careers. SAS plans to recruit senior international faculty to provide academic leadership and credibility and instil an academic practice new to the region. Graduates of the Central Asian Faculty Development Programme¹ (CAFDP) are expected in most cases to start as junior faculty. However, the long-term goal is to have some 80% of its faculty from the region as this will be critical to its financial and intellectual sustainability.

The Preparatory Programme faculty will consist of four English as a Second Language teachers, two mathematics teachers and two Science teachers. The target is to hire teachers who have the experience and talent to engage, stretch, and support students during this intense preparatory year. For the Undergraduate programme 18 full-time faculty will be hired, with an addition of visiting faculty members, to deliver the breadth of the courses.

The designed recruitment process is a rigorous seven-stage protocol including interviews with varying levels of UCA and School management, skills assessments with external experts, curriculum design submissions to assess alignment to the UCA curriculum and research needs, sharing teaching evaluations, and a three-day visit to Central Asia, which will include the critically important exercise

¹ A programme offering support to Central Asian scholars who wish to pursue doctoral studies by providing financial assistance and opportunities at international affiliate universities for advanced study and research. The first cohort began in 2008 and is currently on-going.

of teaching a demo class and a tour of the Naryn campus. Decisions about faculty recruitment will be driven by merit.

For full-time faculty hiring, there is a recognition of a dearth of qualified Central Asian faculty in the region: 88 PhD faculty have been identified at the top five universities in each of the Founding States in the disciplines that will be taught at SAS. Beyond the region, a recruitment database of 4,876 PhD faculty in the intended six undergraduate disciplines from good universities in India, China, Turkey, and Russia has been assembled; 1,116 of these faculty work at Central Asian research institutes housed in Western universities. The call for recruitment will target those identified to ensure relevant applications.

During appointments, faculty will have levels of seniority: Lecturers; Senior Lecturers; Assistant, Associate and Full Professors. Ranking will be based on a pre-defined criterion accounting for their experience and excellence in (1) teaching, (2) research, and (3) community service. Faculty Appointment and Promotion Committee decisions will be under the oversight of the Academic and Student Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees to ensure transparency in the process.

Visiting faculty members will come from leading institutions internationally and provide an academic bridge between the hired faculty and global communities of research practice. They will be strong researchers and teachers to ensure that SAS benefits from leading research and teaching practices globally. To mitigate the risk of limited contribution from visiting faculty, SAS will (1) allow visiting faculty to apply for research funding when they collaborate with a faculty member, (2) co-locate visiting and full-time faculty on campus to facilitate social ties, (3) engage visiting faculty with specialized expertise to offer training on campus; and (4) fund undergraduate students as research assistants to visiting faculty.

All newly hired faculty will undergo a faculty onboarding programme. Whether a faculty member is in their first year of teaching, or if they have taught for many years at another university or academic institution, the adjustment can be overwhelming for new faculty members. Through this programme, SAS hopes to have new faculty fully integrated through a series of workshops. With this programme, SAS will show a level of institutional commitment in supporting the faculty in their instructional efforts.

Although SAS will initially be able to differentiate itself from other institutions in the region by having faculty who have access to world-class training, further programmatic measures (through externally supported partnerships) are required to ensure excellence among the faculty. This will be undertaken through professional development including opportunities to learn about and implement different pedagogies and innovative teaching methodologies, and interaction with global academics. Mobility between campuses and interaction with other faculty for knowledge creation will be crucial.

SAS aims to provide its faculty with strong research support and serve as a hub for strong local and international research-based initiatives. For SAS, research support implies fair access to generous amounts of research funding, access to high quality international research partners, and a strong priority given to the importance of research in a university setting.

Academic Programmes

In developing the academic plan, and to ensure a world-class education, UCA collaborated with the Aga Khan University, the AKDN Higher Education Forum (HEF), Aga Khan Education Services, and the Aga Khan Academies. A market study was conducted by Nielsen in 2013 to gather valuable insights from the region. Undergraduate majors for each campus have been chosen based on regional labour market relevance, vertical integration between undergraduate and graduate programmes, ability to offer interdisciplinary courses across the University, and faculty readiness and availability through the CAFDP.

The market study further informs the academic plan: institutional and individual academic partners with stellar reputations from various leading institutions globally will work together for each specialization to produce comprehensive concept notes for each major inclusive of programme structure, course descriptions, learning outcomes, faculty requirements, international benchmarks, and fit with the Central Asian context and socioeconomic trends and needs. These partnerships serve as a brand advantage in faculty and student recruitment and mitigate the quality risks associated with teaching that would be likely for a new institution. Principles that will guide such collaboration include:

1. Partners should have outstanding reputations and established brands;
2. Be experienced in developing globally recognized curriculum;
3. Want to build absorptive capacity in Central Asia;
4. View this interaction as a first step in a broader partnership and not a one-time transaction;
5. Have the ability and willingness to design bespoke curriculum for the undergraduate programme that fits the Central Asian context;
6. Be open to industry, academic and government expert feedback;
7. Encourage their faculty to engage in research and institutional building with UCA;
8. Have dealt with disaster and other risks in high mountain areas and have knowledge and interest in Central Asia.

The undergraduate degrees consist of a one-year on-campus Preparatory Programme followed by a four-year undergraduate degree which includes a core curriculum component. The academic programmes balance the intellectual excitement of a liberal arts approach with the disciplinary skills required for graduates to successfully compete in the labour market. The programmes follow the European Credit Transfer and accumulation System (ECTS) in accordance with the Bologna Process.

Preparatory Programme: Given the deficiencies identified through the Undergraduate Readiness Assessment, the duration of the preparatory programme is one full year for all incoming students and will include Mathematics, English Literary Analysis, and the Sciences. The Preparatory programme will also provide students with the necessary study, exam writing, IT skills, and research skills.

The Preparatory Programme partner, Seneca College, will design 100% of the curricula which will be revised by senior educators and independent experts. Faculty members hired to deliver the programme will undergo training prior to the start of programme delivery. At the end of the first year of delivery,

the programme will be reviewed, and revised if needed, for effectiveness and to incorporate student and faculty feedback.

Core Curriculum: SAS needs to ensure that the core curriculum corresponds to the definition of an educated child in Central Asia. The core curriculum will aim to foster an understanding of the ways in which we gain and apply knowledge of the natural world, society and ourselves. It intends to provide exposure to the aesthetic and intellectual experience of literature and the arts, history as a mode of understanding human affairs, the concepts and techniques of modern social science, and the experimental methods of the biophysical sciences. The curriculum also attempts to fill the knowledge gaps incoming students have in terms of major historical developments, and ideas that have shaped human understanding of society and the natural world.

The breadth of the Core Curriculum makes finding the diversity of faculty at one institution to develop curriculum difficult, thus a direct relationship will be developed between the SAS and faculty experts, potentially resulting in cross-fertilization in teaching and research at UCA and eventually becoming the basis of cross-institutional relationships. Care will be taken to incorporate guidance and course requirements from the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan, balancing intellectual excitement of a liberal arts approach with the disciplinary skills required for graduates to successfully compete in the labour market or become job creators themselves.

Undergraduate Majors

B.Sc. Computer Science: Partnering with the University of Toronto, the programme will create a new generation of leading information technology (IT) entrepreneurs and professionals with the knowledge and skills to develop infrastructure and generate opportunities for Central Asia in the twenty-first century knowledge society.

A focus group with CEOs of IT companies in Kyrgyzstan confirmed this human resource gap is stunting their ability to grow. Given the regional opportunities for e-governance, outsourcing, and e-commerce, graduates should be able to contribute to the growth of the IT industry in the region.

The Computer Science programme will reflect the importance of IT, information science, and computer science for the economic development of the region. Computer Science is the most appropriate programme offering as it: (a) is better aligned to the needs of Central Asia, particularly as it relates to software development; (b) provides skills for students to be entrepreneurs; and (c) is aligned to a 4-year bachelor programme and provides opportunities to enter into graduate programmes. The learning outcomes of the Computer Science programme were developed with particular attention to international curricular guidelines set by the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers and the Association for Computing Machinery in Kyrgyzstan.

B.A. Communications and Media: The approach to the study of Communications and Media will be guided by three primary influences. It will firstly be guided by existing global trends in communications and media education, secondly by the context and complexities of the Central Asian media landscape, and lastly by existing areas of best practice. It is recommended that Communications

and Media programme exist as a hybrid model of education drawing simultaneously but selectively from communications and media studies, journalism training as well as practical training and skill development in area of media production.

Partnering with the University of Technology Sydney, a key objective is to help design a detailed and implantable curriculum, aiming at having students graduate as storytellers able to develop impactful narratives in a culturally relevant manner. The curriculum will ensure key concepts relevant to the courses are matched with their relevant applications to industry and the real world. Students should be exposed to diversity, inclusion and pluralism aligning the curriculum to UCA and School's mission and mandate. Though students are from the Founding States, it is important they graduate with the understanding that the inter-connected nature of their home countries and potential to impact and contribute to the region.

Given the Central Asian communications industry is in its infant stages, it is important students are exposed to key communications for development concepts and understand the advocacy nature of this sector. This can potentially lead graduates to jobs with non-governmental and development organisations.

Core Literacies: UCA's curricula are being designed to enable students, in each year of study, to advance their mastery of 12 core literacies: (1) Written Communication; (2) Oral Communication; (3) Quantitative Literacy; (4) Information Literacy; (5) Creative Thinking; (6) Ethical Reasoning, Personal and Social Responsibility; (7) Inquiry and Analysis; (8) Critical Thinking and Problem Solving; (9) Digital Literacy; (10) Pluralism, Intercultural Knowledge and Global Perspective; (11) Entrepreneurship; (12) Interconnectedness of the Human Condition.

Co-operative Education: In line with Central Asia's internship tradition and "opportunities for practical experience" being highly ranked by university students in the market study, students at SAS will be required to participate in three-month work placements each year ensuring they graduate with 9-months of work experience. These placements will not be limited to campus towns in both the private and public sectors including with agencies of the AKDN. With 100% participation in co-op programmes in Naryn, 30 placements will be required by the summer of 2018, allowing two years for ramp up time to reach 90 annual placements by 2020.

Prior to these placements, students will undergo a Preparation for Professional Development course to instil soft skills required in the modern workplace and prepare them to be efficient and successful members of the workforce.

Acknowledging the need for students to interact with specialists from their discipline, specialists from the region and abroad including from the research institutes² of UCA which comprise the Graduate School of Development, and the AKDN, will facilitate seminars, guest lectures and week-long workshops which will be a mix of in-person and online sessions to provide current market knowledge,

² Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) and Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA)

opportunities for knowledge and skills application, and information on job opportunities post-graduation in Central Asia and beyond.

SAS will implement the academic plan under the leadership of the Dean. Post implementation of the proposed curricula an annual curriculum review will be undertaken by a Curriculum Review Committee comprising of experts in the field, faculty members, and consultants with the aim to evaluate and implement changes incorporating feedback from students, relevance of the material taught, and any updates that might be required. This will happen annually for all courses being delivered for the first time in that academic year.

To support the academic programmes, UCA's library will be a learning centre for both students and faculty to discover new ways knowledge is generated, organized, searched and accessed. In addition, the UCA library will be a space where faculty and students can be intellectually creative and work individually or collaboratively and across disciplines to achieve academic success and pursue intellectual curiosity. At UCA, a successful library collection will:

1. Allow students to enhance their understanding of curriculum;
2. Enable students to pursue more advanced curriculum related research;
3. Support the changing needs of faculty research agendas;
4. Serve as an excellent repository of materials capturing the intersection of curriculum, faculty research and Central Asian studies; and
5. Provide students an opportunity to pursue leisurely reading and peak their intellectual curiosity.

Although the size of the print collection at the UCA campuses for Phase 1 will peak at approximately 4,000 volumes based on capacity at each campus, the size of UCA's electronic collection will always be much larger. To begin, each library will contain a core collection of 2,500 print volumes, with electronic resources outnumbering print resources. To develop a final content list, UCA will undertake a 5-step process:

1. Consult existing libraries at institutions that are thought leaders in the areas of study offered at UCA;
2. Consult bibliographic recommendations from professional bodies such as the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries' Choice Reviews;
3. Work with turnkey curriculum development partners to identify bibliographies that support curriculum;
4. Survey 25 to 50 well reputed faculty in each of UCA's study areas to provide feedback on a proposed collection; and
5. Work with hired faculty to get their input on the final collection.

Research

A balance of interdisciplinary teaching and research is important for UCA academic staff. A SAS, high quality teaching will be the faculty's first responsibility; research that is relevant, usable, and that contributes to the currency and depth of curriculum and has a regional impact will be their

next most important charge. Faculty members should be willing to share teaching materials and assist colleagues with research challenges. In line with most liberal arts colleges in the West, faculty will be expected to maintain a research profile in their field which will be considered when seeking promotion.

Ensuring faculty members at UCA have the time and resources to remain research active plays a key role in faculty recruitment and retention. Faculty in industrialised countries work 51 hours per week versus 42 in developing countries; in industrialised countries, faculty spend 60% less time teaching and 60% more on research. The result is those faculty in developing countries often struggle to publish and produce research. SAS will institute a hybrid workload; 50% of its faculty will be on teaching-oriented workloads (5 courses/year) and the other 50% will be on research-oriented workloads (4 courses/year). Faculty will be encouraged to move between research and teaching tracks as these shifts naturally occur in a faculty member's career.

SAS benchmarked financial support for faculty research at 15 institutions in Central Asia, Canada, the US, the UK and a few other developing countries. SAS also surveyed 144 faculty from 17 countries to understand research support expectations if they joined UCA's ranks. To remain globally competitive while offering a conservative research support package to its faculty, the recommendations are:

1. Up to \$5,000 in start-up funding to all research faculty and \$2,500 for teaching faculty;
2. Establishing a competitive research pool of funds that grows at the rate of \$1,500 per faculty per year;
3. \$2,000 per faculty per year for academic expenses including books, memberships, travel to meet co-authors, etc., and
4. Maximum of \$5,000 per faculty per year for conference travel for those presenting papers. This should enable faculty to remain connected to their global academic communities of practice. Accessing all forms of research funding will be contingent on research proposals presented to UCA's Research Committee (RC) and a subsequent reporting of outcomes.

UCA's RC will develop strategies to help research development among the faculty, promote cross-disciplinary research and enhance scholarly outputs. It will additionally provide reports, advice and recommendations to the Academic Council on research matters and provide access to research funding to the academic staff subject to the presented research proposals. Compensation for faculty on different tracks will not be significantly different; the School will recognize excellence in research and teaching.

Community Outreach

UCA aims to bring development to the mountainous communities it operates in, viewing them as towns of opportunity. Beyond locating its undergraduate campus in Naryn, UCA aims to contribute to the socio-economic development of the town and improve the quality of life of its inhabitants.

In collaboration with the municipal government, four major areas of on-going work include: (i) town planning assistance; (ii) environmental quality improvement (rehabilitation of Zhakypov Park in the town centre); (iii) planning of new AKDN education, health and housing facilities; and (iv) planning assistance for a new AKDN tourist facility.

Important stakeholders for this purpose include (1) the Naryn government, to ensure UCA becomes a consultant specifically on educational development and avenues for economic growth (2) civil society actors, including hospitals, sporting teams, safety and security actors, and non-profit organizations to increase cross-cultural exchange opportunities and further integrate UCA into the community, (3) educational entities, to increase knowledge exchange on teaching and learning pedagogies and share professional development opportunities, and (4) local businesses to increase idea exchange and access to internships between the Naryn community and undergraduate students and fuel investment to further Naryn's growth into a campus town.

To provide a structured approach to community outreach a Community Engagement Committee will be set up that will enhance partnerships with community organizations in Naryn Town and Naryn Oblast hence providing impactful experiences for the students, faculty and staff and community organizations and youth. The Committee will focus on three main pillars: building a strong and collaborative community, providing learning experiences and empowering volunteers.

With the undergraduate programme and presence of students, faculty and staff members on-campus, community outreach efforts will be increased through academic and social projects including, but not limited to, efforts to train teachers in local school, providing support for academic upliftment of students in the town, assisting in town maintenance through environmental clean ups. On-campus, library and sports facilities can also be made available to community members in due time and with relevant guidelines.

Housing the campus in town will also bring with it more international visitors, such as academics collaborating with UCA and high calibre guest speakers who can be engaged to communicate with public beyond the campus. Other projects are to be explored given the interest of the incoming faculty members and students.