

UCA Brief Profile

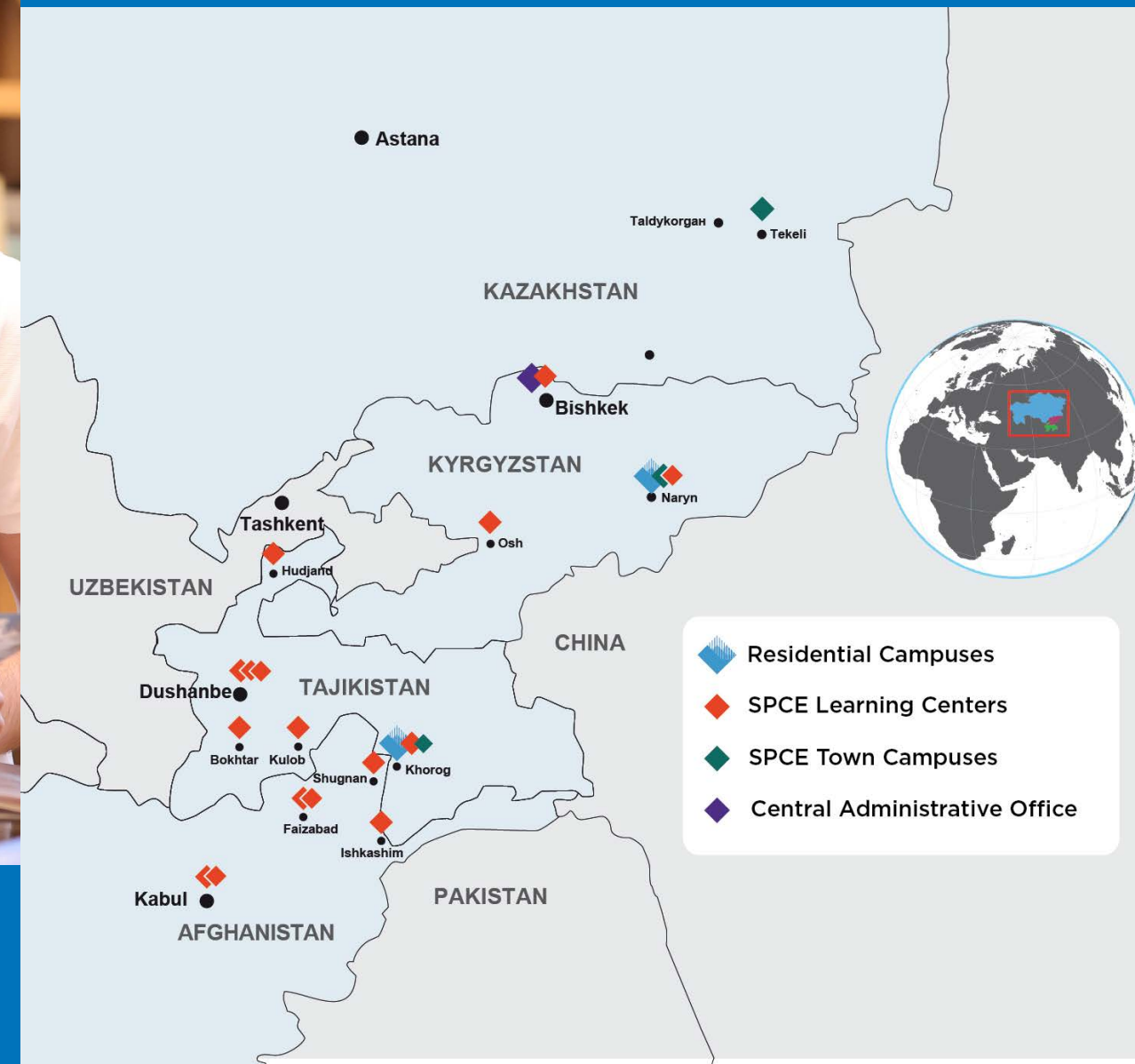
The University of Central Asia (UCA) is an internationally chartered university dedicated to advancing the sustainable development of mountain societies through education, research, innovation, and regional engagement. UCA works to improve the resilience, prosperity and quality of life of mountain communities across Central Asia and beyond.

Founded in 2000 as a private, not-for-profit and secular institution, UCA was established through an International Treaty signed by the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and His Late Highness the Aga Khan IV. The Treaty was subsequently ratified by the respective parliaments and registered with the United Nations. The Presidents of the founding states serve as Patrons of the University, and His Highness Prince Rahim Aga Khan V is the Chancellor.

UCA's mission is to promote the social and economic development of Central Asia, particularly its mountain regions, through internationally recognised

education, applied research, innovation and the preservation of cultural heritage. Today, UCA combines undergraduate and emerging postgraduate education with research, policy engagement and professional learning to address the opportunities and challenges facing mountain societies in a rapidly changing world.

With campuses in Khorog, Tajikistan, and Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, and learning centres across the region, UCA serves as a platform for regional cooperation, knowledge exchange and leadership development. Through its School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), Graduate School of Development (GSD), and School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE), and with the wider support of the Aga Khan Development Network, UCA brings together students, researchers, policymakers, practitioners and community leaders in a shared endeavour to strengthen the future of Central Asia's mountain societies.



UCA Graduate School of Development

The Graduate School of Development (GSD) serves as UCA's platform for applied research, policy engagement and knowledge exchange on the opportunities and challenges facing mountain societies. Through interdisciplinary research, partnerships and public engagement, GSD works to generate evidence, inform policy and strengthen institutional and

community capacity across Central Asia.

GSD's work spans climate change and mountain systems, economic development and public policy, cultural heritage and the humanities, and regional cooperation. Its principal units include:



Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) — advancing research on climate change, mountain environments, disaster risk and natural resource management



Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) — supporting evidence-informed policymaking on economic development, governance, urban resilience and energy



Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) — preserving, studying and promoting the rich cultural heritage of Central Asia



Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) — advancing humanities education, pluralism and intercultural understanding



Afghanistan Research Initiative (ARI) — generating knowledge on Afghanistan and supporting scholarly engagement with issues affecting the country and wider region

In 2025, GSD researchers produced many peer-reviewed publications and expanded collaborations with national partners in government and academic as well as leading international partners, including the World Bank, UNDP, GIZ and the European Union. Through research, policy dialogue and capacity-building, GSD contributes to UCA's broader mission of supporting sustainable and inclusive development across Central Asia.

Executive Education

Executive Education at UCA's Graduate School of Development supports the professional development of leaders, managers and practitioners across Central Asia. Through short, practice-oriented programmes, it helps strengthen institutional capacity, leadership capability and workforce skills in areas critical to the region's social and economic development.

Current programmes address themes including digital transformation, cybersecurity, leadership, public policy, environmental governance and higher education management. Flagship offerings include the Canadian-certified Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW), delivered in partnership with UCA's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology, and specialised programmes in quality assurance, environmental governance and information technology.

A growing area of focus is digital skills development. In response to increasing regional demand, UCA launched its Cybersecurity Specialist Programme in 2025. Delivered online by UCA faculty, the programme provides advanced professional training in cybersecurity and digital resilience and represents one of the first extended-format initiatives of its kind in Kyrgyzstan.

Postgraduate Studies

The introduction of postgraduate education marks an important milestone in UCA's evolution from a strong undergraduate institution towards a more comprehensive research and graduate university.

In August 2026, UCA launched its first Master's degree programme - MSc in Economics and Data Science. Designed to equip graduates with advanced analytical, quantitative and policy skills, the programme reflects UCA's commitment to addressing regional development challenges through rigorous, data-informed approaches.

Building on this foundation, UCA is developing two additional graduate

programmes aligned with its mission and research strengths:

MSc in Climate Change and Mountain Systems — focused on climate resilience, environmental change and sustainable development in mountain regions

MA in Heritage, Culture and Society in Central Asia — exploring the region's rich cultural heritage, identities and social transformations

Together, these programmes represent the first phase of UCA's postgraduate expansion and reflect the University's growing role as a centre for advanced education, research and knowledge generation in Central Asia.



UCA School of Arts and Sciences

SAS offers Bachelor’s degree programmes in Computer Science, Communications and Media, Global Economics, and Earth & Environmental Sciences at its residential campuses in Khorog and Naryn.

As a residential, English-medium liberal arts institution, SAS combines academic rigour with an immersive student experience, bringing together young people from across Central Asia and beyond.

SAS Students Profile



70% rural



80% from the Founding States



376 graduates awarded Bachelor’s degrees across four majors



UCA School of Professional and Continuing Education

The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) is UCA’s principal platform for lifelong learning, workforce development and skills training. Through a network of 18 learning centres across Central Asia and Afghanistan, SPCE provides accessible, practice-oriented education designed to improve employability, support entrepreneurship and expand economic opportunities for individuals and communities.

SPCE is also the only official provider in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan for several internationally recognised qualifications, including the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) and Cambridge Assessment English.

SPCE at a glance				
				
49% female	300,389 learners have benefitted since 2006	2,562 jobs created (2020–2025)	95% learner satisfaction	99% learners recommend SPCE

Over nearly two decades, SPCE has become one of the largest providers of continuing and professional education in the region, extending UCA’s mission beyond traditional degree programmes and helping individuals acquire the skills needed to participate in changing labour markets and economies.



UCA Central Asian Faculty Development Programme

As part of UCA’s commitment to developing regional talent, the Central Asian Faculty Development Programme has provided scholarships to 84 Central Asian researchers, including 44 women, to pursue Master’s, PhD, and postdoctoral studies at partner institutions such as Cambridge, Oxford, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Alberta.



Looking ahead

As UCA enters its third decade, it is building on a successful undergraduate foundation to become a leading regional university for education, research and innovation focused on the sustainable development of mountain societies.

The launch of its first Master’s programme, the development of additional postgraduate degrees in climate change, mountain systems and cultural heritage, and the continued expansion of executive and professional education reflect this next stage in the University’s evolution. Together, these initiatives will strengthen UCA’s capacity to generate knowledge, develop leaders and support evidence-informed solutions to the opportunities and challenges facing Central Asia.

Throughout this journey, UCA remains firmly anchored in its founding mission: improving the quality of life of mountain communities through internationally recognised education, applied research, professional development and enduring regional partnerships.



“By creating intellectual space and resources, the University of Central Asia will help turn the mountains that divide the nations and territories of Central Asia into links that unite its peoples and economies, in a shared endeavor to improve their future wellbeing.”

His Late Highness Aga Khan IV
UCA Charter Signing Ceremony,
31 August 2000 Astana, Kazakhstan



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