

Newly Appointed AKDN Diplomatic Representative Visits Naryn



At the UCA Naryn Campus. L to R: Zafar Kuvatbekov (AKAH), Adylbek Ismailov (AKDN Kyrgyzstan), Hofiz Mirzonabotov (UCA), Prof Sohail Naqvi, Dr Barkat Fazal, Mrs Minaz Fazal, Hadi Husaini, Davlatsulton Dorgabekova, Aqila Hassanzada (Student, UCA) and Dr Soheil Ashrafi (UCA).

On March 25, Dr Barkat Fazal, the newly appointed AKDN Diplomatic Representative to Kyrgyzstan, met with Mr Sabyrkul Ashimbaev, the Governor of Naryn Oblast.

Among the items discussed was the Naryn Urban Resilience Programme, a five-year initiative supported by the Government of Switzerland and the Aga Khan Development

Network to align communities, public institutions and civil society organizations for the enhancement of Naryn town’s resilience to environmental, social, and economic challenges.

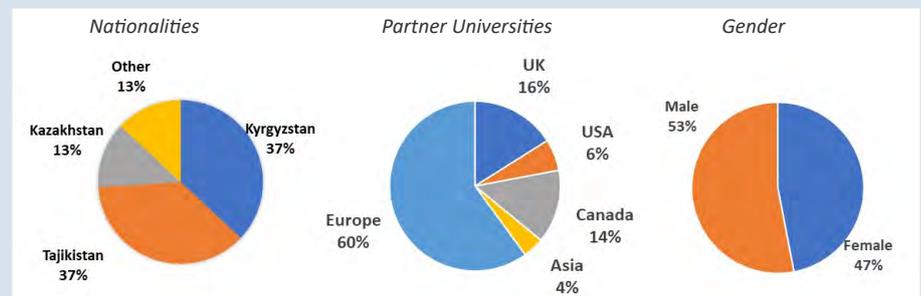
While in Naryn Dr Fazal also paid a visit to UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences, and the School of Professional and Continuing Education.

He was accompanied by his wife, Minaz, and several AKDN Agency Heads and senior staff members including Prof Sohail Naqvi (Rector of UCA), Hadi Husaini (Regional Head of the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat) and Davlatsulton Dorgabekova (CEO of the Aga Khan Foundation Kyrgyzstan).

A Gem in UCA’s Future: Central Asian Faculty Development Programme

There is a little doubt that faculty development constitutes a strategic necessity for institutional excellence, innovation, research, and quality of any university of repute. Irrespective of the institutional age, it remains essential for advancing institutional readiness to bring in the desired change in response to the ever-growing complex demands faced by universities and colleges globally.

Over a short span of time, UCA has managed to build solid relationships with some of the finest universities in the world including the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, where UCA fellows and faculty have studied.



CAFDP: 64 Fellows in 30 Universities

“This is a unique opportunity for scholars from Central Asia to receive full funding to pursue further studies. As the scholarship targets only Central Asian candidates, it allows us to compete within a relatively smaller pool. The most important advantage is job security upon our return after completing the studies,” said Salima Bekbolotova, recipient of the Central Asian Faculty Development Programme (CAFDP) scholarship in the academic year 2021-2022.

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1

Central Asian Faculty Development Programme

UCA has always been committed to providing world-class education in Central Asia. Faculty development is therefore an essential commitment for UCA, not only in terms of recruiting new and quality faculty and maintaining excellence, but also assisting existing faculty and staff to remain effective, relevant, and innovative.

CAFDP was set up as UCA's flagship programme in 2008, and has been providing access and opportunities through scholarships for suitably qualified Central Asian candidates (including those from Afghanistan and Northern Pakistan), to study at UCA's partner universities that are some of the best universities in the world. These scholarships, awarded to CAFDP Fellows, are co-funded by UCA and partner universities.

Upon completion of their studies, each

Fellow serves as a faculty member or staff at UCA or the wider AKDN for 2-4 years, depending on the length of their graduate studies. As in previous years, UCA continues to receive a large response to their annual call for the Cambridge Trust and DAAD scholarships.

Under Phase I (2008 – 2018), some partner universities and institutions included the Asian Institute of Technology, Carleton University, German Academic Exchange Services (DAAD), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, Michigan State University, University of Alberta, University of Bern, University of Cambridge and University of Exeter, among others.

Under Phase II (2018 - present), partners include the University of Cambridge, Simon Fraser University, Higher School of

Economics, Harvard University, University of Alberta, and various German universities under the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

So far, twenty-five CAFDP fellows have graduated and affiliated with UCA throughout the region in different capacities as faculty members, researchers and joint teaching and research appointments. In addition, 15 CAFDP fellows have begun their studies in the UK, Europe, and Canada.

At the Simon Fraser University, one of the significant partners of the CAFDP Programme, three UCA faculty members and one alumna, are currently enrolled. With generous funding, the UCA-SFU Central Asian Faculty Development Programme was initiated providing access and help to further develop UCA's faculty.

Investing in Children's Education Despite Civil War and Famine

Tajikistan is one of the countries of the former Soviet Union that suffered civil war and out-migration during its aftermath. The results of a study conducted by Louise Grogan, a Senior Research Fellow at UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration, suggests that despite civil war and its consequences, households in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) continued to invest in their children's education.

Grogan examines the relative impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on education in GBAO and Khatlon, the other southern border regions of the country. Data from several household studies and surveys, including the Living Standards Monitoring Study (1999), Demographic and Health Surveys (2012 and 2017), and Tajikistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (2005 to 2006), has been used in the study.

The author mentions that parents in GBAO have significantly higher educational expectations from their children than elsewhere in Tajikistan. Survey results show that adults in GBAO spend considerably more resources on pre-school children compared to other regions. Every third child in GBAO had been read to by an adult in the previous week, in comparison



An English class at SPCE Khorog.

to only about one sixth in Khatlon. About two-thirds of the children in GBAO had been told stories by an adult compared to almost every second child in Khatlon region.

When compared to other regions in Tajikistan, educational attainment was greater in GBAO for young people who attended school during the Soviet times, and this remained true amongst the later generation of children who studied during the war and famine. At the same time, in Khatlon, the educational attainment decreased due to heavy fighting and prolonged blockades of major towns.

Amongst those born in 1992 or later, women in GBAO completed nearly two more years of schooling than did those in Khatlon. Nevertheless, the researcher mentions that the quality of this education may have changed substantially during these years.

The results are particularly striking given that GBAO is much less wealthy than other regions of Tajikistan. This persistence of human capital might be explained by the fact that women in GBAO marry later and have fewer total births.

Read full paper: <https://bit.ly/IPPA-WP67>.

UCA Students Provide Tutoring for Admissions Test



Team D.U.M.B from the Naryn Campus. L to R: Eldar Ulanov, Kyzzhibek Zhanibekova, Ramil Saliyar, Sania Maripova, Anastasia Khavanskaya and Aida Yessimova.

A student-led project on Naryn Campus - Drive Your Mind Bravely (D.U.M.B), has been conducting online classes since 2019 to help high school students from Central Asia and Russia prepare for UCA's undergraduate admissions test.

Five students who attended D.U.M.B classes last year successfully cleared the test and were offered admission to the School of Arts and Sciences. Elnazar Ulanbek Uulu from Naryn, who attended D.U.M.B classes in 2021, and is now a Preparatory Year student at UCA, has joined the team this year and is tutoring to share his knowledge and train prospective students to enter UCA.

SPCE Celebrates Global Money Week



About 70% of the participants of the Financial Management Workshop in Afghanistan were women.

Various Learning Centres of UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education celebrated Global Money Week by inviting distinguished professionals to educate students about important concepts of financial literacy, family budgeting, and related topics.

Despite severe challenges faced by women in accessing education in Afghanistan, approximately 70% of the participants in the Financial Management Workshop held at the Learning Centre in Ishkashim were women who demonstrated a keen interest in becoming financially independent.

Students Participate in Professional Development Programme



UCA students during a session by volunteer speaker, Ayesha Kanji (top right), who has over 15 years of experience as a Technical Trainer in Career Coaching and Facilitation.

With support from volunteers contributing their time and knowledge, UCA's Cooperative Education Department organised a six-month long professional development programme to help students prepare for prospective internships, jobs, and graduate studies.

Throughout the programme, students attended workshops conducted by professionals from international agencies. The topics of the sessions included: elevator pitch, career counseling, professional social media sites – do's and don'ts, personal branding and networking, communication skills, interview tactics, preparing stellar resumes, securing scholarships at international universities, effective cover letters, and essay writing.

Training for School Teachers in Khorog



Dr Torokeldiev with AKL teachers during the Workshop.

Dr Nurlan Torokeldiev, Senior Lecturer of Science at UCA, delivered a two-part workshop dedicated to the professional development of teachers at the Aga Khan Lyceum (AKL), Khorog.

Within the framework of UCA's community outreach activities, Dr Torokeldiev designed a unique workshop focusing on developing curiosity and structuring self-induced vision while learning Science. During Part One of the workshop, he delivered a seminar on the fast changing face of science in the modern world followed by establishing a Science Club for AKL students. During Part Two, he organised a three-week workshop on the fundamentals of data analysis using R Studio.

Celebrating the New Year – Navruz Celebrations in Naryn and Khorog



Participants gather to enjoy dinner and performances during the celebratory event of Navruz at the Khorog Campus.

Celebrated in Iran for over 3,000 years, the festival of Navruz signifies the arrival of Spring as a victory over darkness. The festival survived several conquests of Persia and spread across the globe through the diaspora of Persian people. Navruz signifies a time of spiritual renewal and physical rejuvenation as well as an outlook of hope and optimism in life. The end of harsh winters and beginning of new life cycle on earth is celebrated across all Central Asian countries.

UCA campuses in Naryn and Khorog welcomed Spring by celebrating the festival along with local communities. On Khorog Campus, the event was attended by several distinguished guests including Nilufar Aslamshoeva, Deputy Governor of GBAO, and representatives of the Dasht Community, First Microfinance Bank, Aga Khan Health Services, Institute for the Humanities, and TV Badakhshan.

Naryn Campus welcomed guests from Naryn State University, the Music School, and the School of Professional and Continuing Education.

National, regional, and international cuisines were prepared and enjoyed by students, faculty, staff and community

members. Students and guests played musical instruments and performed skits and tablean dances. The guests and students also arranged table presentations showcasing beautiful souvenirs and cultural items symbolic of Navruz on both campuses.

Naryn Campus also hosted a fashion show representing the diverse student body at UCA. On Khorog Campus, students, staff and community members participated in competitive games including wrestling, tug of war and volleyball.



An ensemble from the Music School in Naryn playing cultural instruments on the occasion of Navruz.

CHHU Launches Kyrgyz Music Textbook – Ethnosolfeggio



Dr Elmira Kuchumkulova addressing the conference participants highlighting UCA's efforts in the preservation of Kyrgyzstan's musical heritage.

UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) officially launched its music textbook *Solfeggio Based on Kyrgyz Melodies and Songs (Ethnosolfeggio)* on March 24th at the Kyrgyz State University of Culture and Arts in Bishkek.

During the conference "Challenges of Teaching Music Theory, Ethnosolfeggio, and Harmony in Kyrgyz Language", Dr Elmira Kuchumkulova, Head of CHHU,

highlighted the significant contribution of UCA in promoting the musical heritage of Central Asia. She presented copies of the textbook to participants and said that the book will be distributed to libraries of all music schools across Kyrgyzstan free of charge.

The conference was attended by prominent scholars, musicologists, musicians and students.

New Era of Mental Health at Workplace



Staff at UCA's Bishkek Office engage in a thoughtful discussion on effective communication.

From stress management to effective communication, understanding and managing emotions is not only important at the workplace but also leads to a better outlook on life.

Taking "good" stress about deadlines and important projects at work is important, but to ensure that good stress does not turn into distress, UCA organised stress management and effective communica-

tion workshops for staff members on the Naryn Campus. Specialists from the field were invited to Naryn to introduce staff to tools and techniques to navigate through work-related challenging tasks.

Following the training in Naryn, a day long workshop on Emotional Intelligence and Communications was also organised for the UCA staff in Bishkek.

SPCE Extends Friendship to Ministry of Education and Science in Kyrgyzstan



L to R: Nurbek Nisharapov, Ulanbek Mambetkunov, and Asel Botalieva.

On March 23rd, Nurbek Nisharapov, the Country Head of UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education, along with Asel Botalieva, Manager of the Learning Centre in Bishkek, had the honor of meeting Ulanbek Esenbekovich Mambetkunov, the newly appointed Deputy Minister of Education and Science (MoES) of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Mr Mambetkunov was briefed about the School's efforts and initiatives dedicated to the delivery of quality education in Kyrgyzstan. The Deputy Minister was informed about outreach activities conducted by the Learning Centres of Naryn and Bishkek for the marginalized youth within the framework of Local Impact Project and the Naryn Centre for Entrepreneurship.

Mr Mambetkunov showed keen interest to extend collaboration between SPCE and MoES, particularly in the professional development sector for teachers from schools, colleges and universities in the areas of IT, English and Business. The Deputy Minister also intends to collaborate with SPCE for launching entrepreneurship trainings particularly for teachers and students. He stated that he is a graduate of SPCE's uniquely designed Media Literacy Training Programme, which he attended in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Starting from Square One: Hofiz's Journey at UCA



Hofiz explaining UCA's master plan to Elisabeth Millard, the US Ambassador to Tajikistan, during her visit to the Khorog campus in 2017.

"When I graduated from High School, we did not have many options in terms of choosing a field of study. Times were very difficult, and we just went with the flow of life," said Hofiz Mirzonabotov, one of the very first employees to join the University of Central Asia in 2001.

Hofiz always wanted to be in the construction business, "It feels good to see what you have created. When you come across a building that you helped build, you can proudly say that you were part of the project."

When the Working Group Commission arrived in Khorog for establishing UCA, Hofiz said, "People started talking about a great development project envisioned by His Highness the Aga Khan. Though I was already involved in a United Nations project, I really wanted to be part of the construction of this unique University."

Hofiz was offered a job as an Administrative Manager at UCA, where he worked for five years before joining the Construction and Facilities Division as Site Manager. "I am proud to say I have been associated with UCA since its inception. Initially I was involved in the launch of its first course for Continuing Education till today when we have both campuses up and running."

During Khorog Campus construction, Hofiz managed this project costing US\$63.6 million. Responding to a question about

what has been the most challenging task during this time, Hofiz said: "If I would have to choose between the complexity of Campus construction in a remote region, or relocation of houses that were on the Campus site, I would say relocation was one of the most difficult challenges of my career. Although UCA followed all World Bank regulations during relocation in terms of providing fair compensation and logistical support, it was not an easy process."

Hofiz recalls, "His Highness the Aga Khan was not in favor of cutting the trees on the site, so during relocation and construction, none of the trees were felled. Relocated families were additionally compensated for keeping their trees on site, and they are still welcomed on the Campus to pick the fruits from their trees."



Hofiz (centre) on UCA's construction site briefing his staff.

Apart from the relocation process, as Project Manager, Hofiz was significantly involved in supporting local economic fallout by providing tenders to local vendors for construction. Following the vision of His Highness the Aga Khan, Hofiz said, "The Chancellor wished that not only should the community benefit from the programmes of the University, but that the inhabitants should also profit economically during the construction process. Thus, 85% of the construction jobs were awarded to local residents and 50% of the sub-contractors were local vendors."

While managing Phase One of UCA's construction, Hofiz was also overseeing the construction of the Ismaili Jamatkhana and Ismaili Centre in Khorog, and three Early Childhood Development centres, along with the renovation of the Aga Khan Lyceum School.

For the past two years Hofiz has been based at the Central Administration Office in Bishkek as the Director of the Construction and Facilities Division of UCA. "Sometimes I just open construction site files and photos, and scroll through it because I really miss being in the field."

When asked, if after 21 years of work experience at UCA, does he want to continue the journey, "There were times, after Phase I, when I thought about moving on to another major construction company, but since UCA has done only 15% of the construction of the master plan of the University, there is still much to be done. My heart belongs to UCA, and I want to be part of at least one more phase of construction. Every time I drive by Khorog

Campus, my eyes shine with humble pride that I was part of such a magnificent project."

As part of UCA's professional development initiatives, Hofiz also pursued his Masters from the University of Bradford (UK) in Project Management and Policy Development.

Cultural Heritage and Human Development in Central Asia



Dr Barkat Fazal, the AKDN Diplomatic Representative to Kyrgyzstan (2nd from right), visits CHHU exhibition in Bishkek along with colleagues from the AKDN office. L to R: Adylbek Ismailov (AKDN), Dr Elmira Kuchumkulova (UCA), Altaaf Hasham (AKDN), Mrs Minaz Barkat Fazal and Altyn Kapalova (UCA).

Speaking to people's hopes and fears, the new Silk Road is evoking old images of caravans and new images of enhanced global communication and cooperation. Known for its challenging geographic terrain and harsh climatic conditions, the famous Silk Route in the high mountains of Central Asia carries a rich culture of migration, sharing of knowledge, and an invaluable heritage yet to be discovered.

Revisiting these mountain communities to seek stories of engagement, survival, resilience and perseverance, the University of Central Asia's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) as part of the "Resilient Silk Route Heritage Network" funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund, UK, organised an international traveling exhibition called "Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia". The initiative is devoted to various forms of artistic expressions of the mountain communities of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan. The exhibition has been displayed in Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan, and will continue its travel to Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. View a glimpse of the exhibition: <https://youtu.be/sEGio50vas0>.

Realising the immense potential of culture as a development resource for improving the quality of life of people, CHHU's primary role is to preserve the values of Central Asian culture and traditions. Alongside the traveling exhibition, CHHU has made a significant contribution over the years, through public-private partnerships and

obtaining support from the government and local communities, to help safeguard the region's culture.

Earlier this year in January, CHHU supported the publication of a music encyclopedia, *Solfeggio Based on Kyrgyz Melodies and Songs (Ethnosolfeggio)*, in response to a special request from young musicians of Kyrgyzstan. Even after the collapse of Soviet Union, Kyrgyz musicians have been learning music using Slavic and Western European notated songs and melodies. Fostering the music heritage by enabling modern young musicians of the country to study best examples of Kyrgyz traditional classics, and making valuable archival records available to all music institutions in the Republic, the textbook contains transcription of 300 original recordings and some personal collections of musicians. Download the book: <https://bit.ly/3A03hGd>.

Within the framework of the Cultural Production Series led by CHHU, the Unit has produced several powerful stories of hope and resilience. The series sheds light on the bearers of traditional knowledge, who are aging, and unfortunately the younger generation of Central Asians are showing little interest in the practices and traditions of their ancestors. In a documentary film series titled *Man - Universe*, Aibek Baiymbetov (a filmmaker and Junior Research Fellow at CHHU), informs the public about the life and work of cultural practitioners living an ordinary life in the villages with an extra-ordinary fate

and mission. Watch all films: <https://bit.ly/CHHU-Films>. One of the films, *Akkel (Grace)*, based on the oral folk art of Kyrgyzstan, featuring an epic storyteller known as *Manaschi*, has won national and international awards.

Among some of the significant initiatives of CHHU is the extension of support to the preservation of museums in Kyrgyzstan. Strengthening the role of museums as independent social and cultural institutions, CHHU supported the organization of the first National Museum Forum "Sustainable Museum: Driver of Regional Development". Attended by more than 50 museum specialists, the forum discussed financial challenges faced by the government in supporting museum initiatives, and the need to develop innovative ways of expanding the audience by learning multimedia approaches, tools, and technologies to present old historical objects, artifacts and stories.

Following its mission of installing innovative artistic and visual exhibitions and museums, CHHU organised an art and research exhibition called "Phantom Memories" in remembrance of the lives lost during the Central Asian Revolt in 1916 (*Urkun*). The exhibition could not show historic artifacts as there are no surviving resources available from a tragedy that took place over hundred years ago. Instead it is a collection of stories voiced by the descendants of the victims who are keeping the memories alive.

"Akykry Sabak" Gains National Popularity



The cast of Akykry Sabak at UCA's Naryn Campus urging high school students on the importance of pursuing higher education.

Finally, a show which young and old can watch together as a family. Ruslan Akun's new 10-part drama series, Akykry Sabak (Final Lesson), has become popular overnight in Kyrgyzstan, and currently has 18.8 million views on YouTube, and another 14 million live views on the national TV channel, KTRK.

In the make-believe world of entertainment it is difficult to come across a show in which characters resonate with real life, and the storyline portrays authentic scenarios. The socially conscious series of Sabak brought issues from bullying in schools to the urgent need of quality education, with a bit of romance thrown in to soften the stark reality.

With each episode featuring a new issue of social concern, the story of Urmat (hero) sparked curiosity among netizens about his final destination – jail or college. The struggle of being born poor but with high hopes resonates with almost every young person from developing nations.

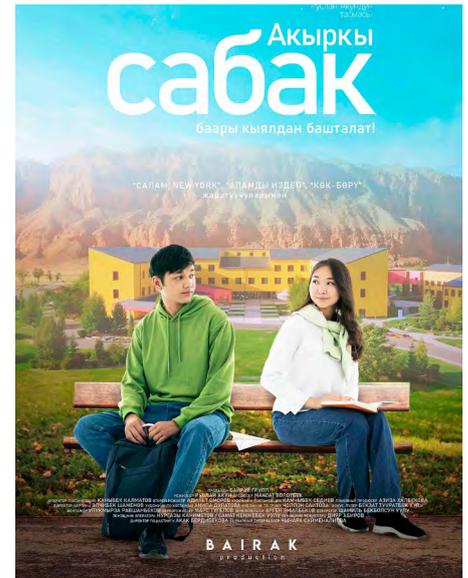
The show featured Urmat attending an IT course at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education based in Naryn, and its huge red building in the town square of one of the most rural regions in the country. SPCE's continuous efforts in pro-

viding vocational and continuing education courses to help people of all ages in attaining either a sustainable livelihood or pursuing further studies was widely appreciated.

Overcoming considerable peer pressure to enter a life of crime, Urmat finally gains admission to UCA's School of Arts and Sciences. TV viewers shared much excitement and amazement about UCA, which most were seeing for the first time. The location of such a world-class undergraduate school in Kyrgyzstan near the Tian Shan Mountains bordering China created much buzz, because the campus facilities seemed even more attractive than some of the world's top-class universities.

While touring the country to promote the drama series and emphasize the power of education in transforming lives, Sabak's cast also hosted an event on UCA's Naryn Campus. Speaking to a packed crowd of future UCA students, the actors highlighted to the youth of Naryn how fortunate they were to have a university such as UCA in their backyard.

The show also prompted discussion in the Kyrgyz Parliament, and various ministers were given assignments to help resolve social issues highlighted by the series.



Poster of "Final Lesson" with UCA in the background.

Announcement

Call for Sessions and Papers: 8th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference

The Institute of Public Policy and Administration of the University of Central Asia, the Leibniz Institute of Vegetable and Ornamental Crops, and the International Security and Development Center invite submission of proposals for sessions and individual research papers for the 8th Annual Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference (LiK) to be held in Bishkek during October 11-12, 2022.

The annual Life in Kyrgyzstan (LiK) conference brings together national and international experts from government and the public sector, development agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, and research institutions to exchange knowledge and experiences on recent socio-economic developments in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia and promote evidence-based policy making. Deadline for submissions is 15 June 2022. For more information, please visit: www.ucentralasia.org/LiK2022.

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