

SPCE Celebrates 15th Anniversary in Khorog



Yodgor Fayzov (left), Governor of GBAO, presents a Certificate of Honour to Dilovar Butabekov, Director of SPCE, in recognition of the School's 15 years of contribution to Tajikistan's education and vocational sectors.

Marking a major milestone, the School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) of the University of Central Asia (UCA) celebrated its 15th Anniversary in Khorog on September 25, 2021. Prominent dignitaries along with the University's management, staff, faculty, students, and graduates came together

to recognize the ongoing programmes and achievements of SPCE in improving the quality of life of people. Gratitude was also expressed for the contribution of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) over the past 30 years in the development of the economic, social, and cultural sectors in Tajikistan.

"This is not only a journey of growth for SPCE, rather a journey of providing skills and education to people that gives them an opportunity to improve their livelihoods. Most importantly, it gives these opportunities regardless of their age, gender, economic or social background," said Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA.

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UCA and Tcell Sign Memorandum of Understanding

Extending its partnership with Tcell, a leading cellular operator in Tajikistan, the University of Central Asia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to further foster and strengthen their collaboration for promoting career growth and professional development in the region. The Memorandum signed on 22 September 2021 acknowledges the value and benefits of working together in addressing shared concerns with respect to the development of human resources.

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Prof. Sohail Naqvi (left), Rector of UCA, and Ozodkhon Davlatshoev, CEO of Tcell, exchange MoUs.

Bell Ringing Ceremony Welcomes Class of 2026

A symbolic bell ringing ceremony officially started classes for the new cohort of students – the Class of 2026. The ceremony took place simultaneously at the Khorog, Tajikistan, and Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, campuses on September 20, 2021.

Welcoming the students, Dr Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, Chairman of UCA's Board of Trustees said: "UCA achieved a major milestone in June with the graduation of its first cohort...these graduates have set a fine example for future classes. Like all universities, UCA focuses on teaching, research and service, however, the vision of the Chancellor and Founding Presidents is for UCA to excel as a research university."

Congratulating the students, Yodgor Fayzov, Governor of Gorno Badakhshan, Tajikistan, said: "The key question is to improve the quality of education...and the qualification to compete in the labor market within the country and internationally, and UCA as our partner has been doing just that. During the inauguration ceremony of UCA, His Excellency President Emomali Rahmon mentioned: "I hope this University will open doors for our children to international standards of education, and I am glad that it is already happening."

Every year, undergraduate students admitted to SAS sign the legacy book with their names and the date to mark the



Dean Maxim Khomyakov rings the bell to officially start the Academic Year 2021-2022 along with Yodgor Fayzov, Governor of GBAO (3rd from right).

historic moment of the beginning of their journey at UCA. They also write a letter to their future self, which will be opened during their graduation week five years from now.

"You have exciting traditions at the University of Central Asia. The most interesting is when new students write their expectations and seal it for the next five years," said Sabyrkyl Ashimbaev, Governor of the Naryn Oblast.

During the ceremony, 92 students from both campuses also received the Dean's Honor List Awards for academic excellence during the 2020-2021 term.



At the Bell Ringing Ceremony, Achievement Awards were also presented. Romiz Abdullaev of the Class of 2023 (3rd from right) was among the winners of the Dean's Honour List Award, standing with the Rector of UCA, Prof Sohail Naqvi (4th from right) and the Governor of Naryn (2nd from right).

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UCA and Tcell Sign MoU

"UCA is looking forward to furthering our mutual interests in the development of human capital for the long-term benefit of both our institutions," said Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA.

As a research university, UCA aims to comprehensively study and analyse the issues related to human resources at Tcell, along with setting goals and objectives to increase the level of competence of Tcell's staff. UCA will also study and provide recommendations for the development of advanced technologies in the field of personnel management.

"Tcell is very pleased to have signed this memorandum with UCA in the area of human capital development. As one of the leading telecommunication companies in Tajikistan, we will strive to continue our research with UCA in different directions to become even more advanced," said Ozodkhon Davlatshoev, CEO of Tcell.

The MoU builds on the development of an Executive Education Programme delivered earlier this year to Tcell executives by UCA. Organised in collaboration with Cambridge Judge Business School, UCA designed a unique programme to support Tcell to position its brand for growth in a post-pandemic environment.

SPCE Celebrates 15th Anniversary in Khorog

Established in 2006, SPCE has 16 learning centres across four countries: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. The School was established to support people who could not afford a formal education and needed to enter the job market to support their families. "Within the context of a new market economy and collapse of the Soviet Union, people needed skills to survive. Full-time studies were out of the question. Programmes had to be part-time and of good quality," said Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of the Graduate School of Development at UCA. SPCE has grown into the leading provider of post-secondary, short-cycle professional education in Central Asia, covering a broad range of subjects.

"From just three centres in 2006 es-

tablished in the mountainous towns of Khorog, Tajikistan, Naryn, Kyrgyzstan, and Tekeli, Kazakhstan, SPCE today enjoys presence in 12 locations and 16 centres with over 180,000 learners and 300 qualified staff," said Dilovar Butabekov, Director of SPCE.

"SPCE offers a unique model of learning designed to meet individual needs. Today, SPCE graduates are serving in national, regional, and local administrations. They are competent enough to thrive in all walks of life," said Yodgor Fayzov, Governor of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region of Tajikistan.

"The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) in Tajikistan works in several areas. However, education and training

are one of AKDN's priorities. The current activity of UCA is one of the best examples of long-term cooperation at the national and regional levels. The mission of the University is to provide a universally recognized standard of higher education, training of world-class specialists, and the creation of new jobs," said Mr Kozidavlat Qoimdodov, AKDN's Resident Representative to Tajikistan.

The celebration in Khorog included graduation ceremonies of various SPCE programmes, where over 200 students were awarded completion certificates, and concluded with the opening ceremony of the Electrician's Training Workshop.

UCA Signs Agreement to Promote Sports in Naryn

The University of Central Asia (UCA) and the Department of Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sports of Naryn, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation to promote sports and a healthy lifestyle among people in the Naryn region.

The joint initiative aims to introduce athletic skills among young people and encourage their participation in local, republican, and international competitions. UCA will provide access to available sports facilities on campus including the sports bubble and outdoor stadium for organising sports events and tournaments. The agreement further highlights UCA's commitment to the development of mountain communities.

The signing ceremony took place at UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education in Naryn on September 16, 2021. It was attended by Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector, UCA and Erkinbek Arabaev Acting Chief, Department of Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sports, along with other dignitaries.

"It is a matter of great pride for UCA to support Naryn's Sports Centre that continues to play an important role in the promotion of sports in the region and is helping the nation succeed at international events," said Dr Naqvi.



Erkinbek Arabaev (Left), Acting Chief, Department of Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sports presents a Certificate of Honour to Prof Sohail Naqvi (Right), Rector of UCA.

"UCA has always been supporting the Naryn region. On behalf of the sportsmen and trainers of Naryn, I would like to convey our gratitude to UCA, and hope we will continue to work together to support and promote sports activities," said Erkinbek Arabaev.

UCA has also installed new sports equipment at the Specialized Children and Youth Sports School of the Olympic Reserve, including a wrestling mat, athletic rope, wrestling dummies, etc.

Aizat Murzakanova, Representative from the Mayor's Office, appreciated the growing partnership between UCA and Naryn community, "On behalf of the Naryn Mayor's Office, I would like to thank UCA for its ongoing support...As of today, 240 boys are training in freestyle wrestling in this school's gym. UCA and Naryn community have been working closely for years, and I am confident that this partnership will continue."

AKHP Conducts Cross-Debate Format Training in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan

The Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) of UCA conducted Cross-Debate Format (CDF) training in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in Aug-Sept 2021. The training aimed at familiarizing participants with debate skills and help them grow into professional trainers.

At the end of the training AKHP chose nine participants from each country to fill the positions of National Trainers and their Assistants. The goal is to further strengthen the presence of AKHP in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

The next phase of the project includes a plan to conduct a similar training in Tajikistan, followed by a national debate tournament for training participants. Three of the best teams from each country will be chosen to further participate in the regional debate championship.



Participants discuss arguments before the debate practice session.

“CDF develops critical thinking skills in young people because it allows you to evaluate and choose the best option to solve a problem. It also helps acceptance of differences in cultural and historical aspects of

life. It strengthens cross-disciplinary skills, where students find a balance between culture, economics and politics,” said Dr Pulat Shozimov, Acting Head and Faculty Development Programme Manager, AKHP.

CHHU Supports Exhibition in the Memory of Urkun

UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit supported the Art and Research Exhibition, “Phantom Memories”, organised at the Karakol History Museum in September. The exhibition was organized in memory of the lives lost during the Central Asian Revolt in 1916, also known as Urkun.

“We restored the historical events piece-by-piece of Urkun by collecting individual memories of grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the victims,” said Altyn Kapalova, CHHU Research Fellow, who also served as curator at the exhibition.

Phantom Memories was an artistic visual installation based on the family histories of the descendants of Urkun. The exhibition was not a collection of historic artifacts as there are no such resources available from a tragedy that took place over hundred years ago.

Kapalova further said, “Though it was a conspired amnesia, yet memories of Urkun continued to live in the oral history of every affected family. Even after decades, the shared stories by their generations remain full of tragedy and empathy for the victims.”

The exhibition was an attempt to include voices of the Kyrgyz people, who kept the



Altyn Kapalova leading visitors through a tour.

memories alive. She further added, “we hoped to share the story of an ordinary person to keep a national tragedy alive that took the lives of thousands of people. The event left thousands without homes, land, and livestock, with just horrifying memories of suffering of their loved ones. The stories make *Phantom Memories*.”



UCA Supports First National Museum Forum in Kyrgyzstan

To strengthen the role of museums as independent social and cultural institutions, the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) of the University of Central Asia (UCA) supported the first National Museum Forum "Sustainable Museum: Driver of Regional Development" held in Kyrgyzstan. The forum organised in the Issyk-Kul region in September was attended by more than 50 museum specialists from around the country along with several other international participants who connected online.

"State museums in Kyrgyzstan are the main repositories of the country's rich cultural and historical heritage. Unfortunately, the government has been struggling to provide the much-needed financial support to develop them. Therefore museums are looking for innovative ways to expand their audiences and attract diverse visitors using the small budget they have available. They want to learn new multimedia approaches, tools, and technologies to present their old historical objects, artefacts and stories to diverse audiences in physical and virtual formats," said Dr Elmira Kuchumkulova, Head of CHHU.

Kyrgyzstan has 58 registered state museums and almost 100 museums of various public and private profiles. The goal of this forum was to unite individual efforts towards the preservation and development of museums in the country. One of the major agendas of the Forum was to initiate the development of a sustainable model that can contribute to the consolidation of museums and the implementation of strategic initiatives involving local communities and simultaneously improving their quality of life.



Kairat Imanaliev, Minister of Culture, Kyrgyzstan, conveys congratulations to the organisers and supporters of the First National Museum Forum.

"UCA supported the first National Museum Forum since a museum is more than just a custodian of cultural and historical values. Museums in the contemporary era are changing, by providing a platform to promote education, science and creativity among all age groups," said Altyn Kapalova, CHHU Research Fellow.

Several organisations came together to promote the vision of using museums as one of the driving forces for regional development. These included the University of Central Asia, the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, National Commission for UNESCO in the Kyrgyz Republic, Institute for Sustainable Development Strategy, National Committee of International Council of Museums in Kyrgyzstan, Asso-

ciation "Consortium of Museums of the Kyrgyz Republic" and Center for Nomadic Civilization.

During the Forum, CHHU also hosted a session on "Museums Along the Silk Road" during which partners from Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan had a panel discussion on community-based museums and the culture of museums in mountain communities.

"National Museum Forum is of utmost importance as it makes possible those connections and dialogues that help us to think collaboratively about our identity, diversity, and unique practices that keep our cultures alive," said Dr Zahra Hussain, Member of the Silk Route Network Project which is being implemented by UCA's CHHU.

UCA Student Participates in WACE 2021

A Junior at the School of Arts and Sciences, Rabia Faqir, participated in a three-week virtual project - World Association of Co-operative Education (WACE) Global Challenge 2021. The project brought together students from across the globe to work on real-life industry problems which can have social and economic impact on the world.

"I had a great opportunity to be part of WACE. We conducted market research for Dundee University Students' Association to understand and analyse how United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10 - Reduce Inequalities, can be applied to enhance inclusion and diversity within its domain," said Rabia.



UCA Installs High-Performing Computing Lab at Karakorum International University



Aliyor Marodaseynov, MUP Director, speaking about future research collaboration between UCA and KIU.

Within the framework of Mountain Universities Partnership (MUP) programme, UCA established a high-performing computing lab in September at the Karakorum International University, Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan.

Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Gilgit Baltistan, Hussain Shah, inaugurated the lab for the Department of Computer Science that will be of additional value to research activities at KIU. The Head of

the Computer Department at KIU, Dr Aftab Ahmed Khan, extended his gratitude to the donors for their generous support.

MUP is committed to helping the mountain universities improve their academic programmes, learning resources, facilities, services, and research capacities. Aliyor Marodaseynov, MUP Director, congratulated the university and gave assurance that this is not the end, but just the beginning of many future partnerships between UCA and KIU.

UCA's MUP programme is also collaborating with Naryn State University in Kyrgyzstan, Khorog State University in Tajikistan, Karakorum International University in Pakistan, and Badakhshan University in Afghanistan.

CHHU Fellow Directs Documentary of Aboriginal Kyrgyz Horse



Aboriginal Kyrgyz horses at the pasture in Taldy Bulak Gorge, Kyrgyzstan.

Aibek Baiymbetov, Junior Research Fellow at the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit of the University of Central Asia, has directed a documentary "The Flying Horse" based on an aboriginal Kyrgyz horse breed as part of a joint project between the Aga Khan University, the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, and the University of Central Asia.

"It is an important film because it touches on several issues at the same time. It talks about the extinction of the Kyrgyz horse, and the inter-relation with climate and ecology," said Baiymbetov.

The Flying Horse is produced as part of the project Voices from the Roof of the World, which highlights issues faced by the inhabitants of world's highest mountains from the Himalayas to the Tian Shan. The project selected a group of young Asian filmmakers with an objective to train, mentor and support them into producing groundbreaking environmental films.

The film explores relationships between degraded pastures and the sustainability of livestock and animal husbandry with the country's well-being. It poses a question if the revival of a small herd of tradi-

tional Kyrgyz horses can lead to a better future? The film features animal geneticist, Mirbek Isaev, who dreams of hearing hooves of Kyrgyz horses on high mountain valleys. He has dedicated his life to studying the genetic make-up of indigenous Kyrgyz horse breed.

One of the main objectives of these documentaries is to not only highlight problems, but also present solutions that may inspire governments, businesses, and civil society actors to reverse the regions' ecological destruction.

UCA Researcher Presents Case Study of Talas Bean Farmers

Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Central Asia, Dr Kanat Tilekeev, was invited in September to a conference - Global Transformation in Central Asia, to present the Agricultural Transformation in Central Asia: An Example of Talas Bean Farmers. The conference was organized by OSCE Academy and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Kyrgyzstan.

"The case study caught my attention in early 90s, when Talas farmers started growing an unusual crop in Kyrgyzstan because we do not normally consume beans. The practice of cultivating beans was adopted by Turkish merchants, and now 60% of our land in Talas is used for beans," said Dr Tilekeev.

In a short period of time, beans have be-



Dr Tilekeev presenting a case study of how bean production in Kyrgyzstan created an agricultural transformation.

come the most exported agricultural crop in Kyrgyzstan, which significantly contributes to country's GDP. Dr Kanat has previously published two research papers on

this topic in 2013 and 2018. The upcoming publication will shed light on food consumption patterns among Talas farmers, and how COVID-19 has affected their lives.

Understanding Citizenship in Kyrgyzstan

"This is something very new for our region. There has been little or no attempt to understand what it means to be a good citizen in our country," said Dr Kemel Toktomushev, Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Central Asia.

Though there has been significant research conducted in the developed world to understand the concept of citizenship, there has not been enough academic attempts to study inter-relations between being a good citizen and democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

In his recent publication, "Good" Citizen: Understanding Citizenship in Kyrgyzstan, published by the Civil Society Initiative of UCA, Dr Toktomushev raises the question of responsible citizenship, and whether it promotes democracy in the state or not?

There are some assumptions that a good citizen helps to promote democracy in the state. However, there is no universal definition of democracy to validate this assumption. "The value of this work is to introduce policy implications and to pose a question: can we really teach good citizenship in schools?"

Dr Toktomushev continues, "if we can really teach good citizenship then what values should be delivered? There is an assumption that upon graduation, students will turn into a good citizen, however, schools only communicate orthodox values of good citizenship which asks you to obey the law, pay taxes and act responsibly."

He further added, "we need to classify citizens in three ways: responsible, participatory and justice-oriented. Responsible citizens are the quickest fundraisers and will always be ready to help. Is it good for the state? Perhaps, yes. However, can they embed democracy in the system? Maybe no, because they are working within the system but not questioning it."

Philanthropy and activism are needed in a world of chaos but to install democracy, perhaps we need to develop the intellectual capacity to question the system. "Justice-oriented citizens critically analyze the system. Before fundraising, they question: if we are paying taxes then why the needed resources are not funded by the state."

Read full paper: https://bit.ly/csi_dp5.

Dr Toktomushev presents his publication to UCA staff.



Students and Parents Attend Open House at SPCE Naryn

School of Professional and Continuing Education in Naryn held an Open House for students and parents starting in early September to promote awareness about the School and available courses. Simultaneously, staff and teachers from SPCE are also visiting schools and orphanages in the region to inform people about the services offered at the Learning Centre in Naryn. The awareness campaign will continue until the end of October.

"After graduating from SPCE, I was hired by the Aga Khan Medical and Diagnostic Centre in Naryn as an accountant. Though, I graduated four years ago, I am attending the Open House again with my daughter because I want her to study from this Learning Centre. Thank you for giving our region a chance to prosper," said Miraida Kasymova, SPCE Alumna.



Students from Naryn schools visit the SPCE library during the Open House.

During the field visits and open doors, SPCE teachers are providing students with learning materials and demo lessons to help them realise the quality of teaching at SPCE. "The results have been very en-

couraging. We have enrolled over 250 students already in different programmes and courses during the awareness campaign," said Nurbek Nisharapov, Head of SPCE Kyrgyzstan.

UCA Students Visit Central Mosque in Naryn

As part of a field visit on cultural studies and the relationship between faith and culture in Central Asia, freshman students from the School of Arts and Sciences, Naryn Campus, visited a nearby mosque named after Hazrat Ali on 25 September 2021.

During the visit, students had an interactive dialogue with the Qadi of Naryn Region, Erik Moldokulov. The discussion centered around Kyrgyz culture and Islamic traditions in Central Asia. He responded to questions about religion and culture, the function of the mosque, and the notion of tolerance in Islam. Responding to a question about growing radicalism, the Qadi said, "Islam condemns any action against its principle of tolerance." The Qadi also introduced students to the unique architectural design and symbolic elements of the mosque.

"Although I am from Naryn, I did not know about the history of the Central Mosque. It was interesting to see how the mosque has incorporated cultural symbols in its architectural design. I was impressed that madrassa students are learning secular subjects such as music apart from reli-



UCA students dialogue with madrassa students about their curriculum.

gious education," said Kairat Berdishaliev, UCA student.

UCA students also visited the madrassa, dormitory, library and classrooms. They engaged in conversation with madrassa students, who played songs, skits and poetry for their guests. In exchange, Erbol Sovetaly Uulu, a UCA student, also played songs on the *komuz*, a traditional Kyrgyz musical instrument.





According to the Qadi, unlike many mosques around the world, the Central





Mosque in Naryn welcomes women to pray as well. Due to a large number of visitors on Friday, women pray separately on the first floor of the mosque. Apart from that, mosque also facilitates the religious and secular education of young girls and special courses for housewives in another madrassa in town.

"Thanks to Qadi Erik for his warm hospitality and invitation, I learned how Kyrgyz culture and Islamic practices are intertwined with each other," said Erbol, a UCA Student of the Class of 2025.

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