On a working visit to the Naryn region on August 20, the President of Kyrgyzstan, Sooronbai Jeenbekov, showed keen interest in the Smart City Programme of Naryn, and assistance provided by the University of Central Asia (UCA) in this endeavour.

While visiting the office of the Mayor of Naryn, the President was introduced to the Geographic Information Systems (GIS), a project funded by the Aga Khan Foundation Canada and Canada’s Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development. The GIS Room, donated as part of this project, is equipped with computer work stations that were used to develop interactive maps of Naryn, which are helping to effectively manage municipal enterprises such as water supply and garbage collection. As part of the GIS Project, micro grants were also given to local entrepreneurs to help with implementation of public utility works.

The Mayor of Naryn, Nurbek Moldokadyrov, also made a presentation on the Smart City Programme of Naryn, and highlighted the role of the University of Central Asia in this important project that is at the forefront of the regional Digitization Programme of the Government of Kyrgyzstan. The President was pleased with the progress, and expressed interest in further discussions with the management of UCA at the next opportunity.

**New Dean at UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences**

The University of Central Asia is pleased to announce the appointment of Professor Maxim Borisovich Khomyakov as Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), effective 1st September 2020.

Professor Khomyakov, who started his new responsibilities on September 1, comes to UCA with a distinguished academic background, an international mindset, extensive experience in academic management, and a track record of research and publication across a broad range of subjects.

He began his academic career in the Department of Philosophy at the Ural Medical Academy in Ekaterinburg as Assistant Professor. Subsequently in 1996 he was an Associate Professor and Deputy Dean, and in 2000 Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Gorky Ural State University and Ural Federal University (UrFU) in Ekaterinburg. Since 2017 Professor Khomyakov has been the Vice-Director (strategy, research, international affairs) at the St Petersburg Campus of the Higher School of Economics, and a Director of the BRICS Studies Centre at UrFU.

Dr. Diana Pauna, who served as Dean of UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences from 2016 to 2020, and was responsible of the early growth and achievements of SAS, will continue in an advisory role until the end of 2020.
Eid festivities in the district of Tosh-Bulak in Naryn received a welcome surprise when the University of Central Asia (UCA) brought care packages containing food, hand sanitizers, masks, and other supplies. These were distributed on August 1st to 30 vulnerable families identified by the Mayor of Naryn.

Synaibubu, a single mother with 7 children, including two nieces whose father died in a car accident, was delighted. “Our district is close to the UCA campus in Naryn, and we are always grateful for the benefits we have received from the University and the Aga Khan.” Also present on the occasion was the Vice-Mayor of Naryn, Nazira Zhumakadyrova, who added, “Since the beginning of the pandemic we have been receiving much needed help and support from the University of Central Asia, and very much value their cooperation with the Naryn Administration.

Previously UCA provided food and medical supplies to 500 vulnerable families, and protective suits and medicines to front line workers in the Naryn Hospital.” UCA has also provided similar assistance to families in need in Tajikistan and Khorog Hospital. The cost of the supplies were donated by UCA’s Covid-19 Solidarity Fund established by the employees of the University.

The establishment of the University of Central Asia in Naryn, at an investment of over US$ 100 million, has resulted in significant social economic development in the region, and Naryn is rapidly becoming a university town. Erkin Asanaliev, team leader of the youth initiative group in Tosh-Bulak, said he looked forward to continued support from UCA, and expressed gratitude for the employment opportunities provided to local residents on the campus, as well as during the construction of the buildings.

Youth of Tosh-Bulak Help with Environmental Cleanup at UCA

The Naryn campus of the University of Central Asia is on a picturesque location. On some of the remote sections of the property by the river, local residents picnic and often leave refuse overflowing from garbage bins. This is not only unsightly, but also poses a health and safety hazard to the water supply down stream. The youth of neighboring Tosh-Bulak district, in gratitude for the food and medical supplies provided to the residents, organised a cleanup party. About 20 youth spent the better part of August 8, and again on August 22, cleaning up the site. UCA provided gloves, lunch, refreshments, and garbage bags, while the Mayor of Naryn provided trucks to pick up the garbage. The youth of Tosh-Bulak expressed much satisfaction with this collaborative environmental cleanup, and as their next project plan to post signs discouraging picnickers from polluting the environment.
Second Executive Masters Graduation in Afghanistan

The University of Central Asia (UCA) celebrated the achievements of 32 students who graduated from the Executive Masters in Economic Policy (EMEP) programme offered through UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration. This cohort included Afghan civil servants who were supported by the Ministry of Finance, National Technical Advisors, and several self-funded students from the private sector and civil society. This and the previous cycle of the programme, a total of 56 graduates including 18 women, were funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre, the Aga Khan Foundation-Canada, and the Afghan Ministry of Finance through the Pathways to Innovation: Strengthening Mathematics, Science, and Economic Policy Capacity in Afghanistan and Central Asia project.

The graduation ceremony took place in Kabul, Afghanistan on 24 August 2020 in the garden of the Kabul Serena Hotel. It was attended by over 150 guests including dignitaries from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Higher Education, Kabul University, the diplomatic community, representatives of international and national development organisations, and the families of the graduates. The event was also broadcast live through Zoom for international partners.

EMEP, designed to meet the needs of Afghan civil servants, was offered over a twelve-month period, divided into three semesters. Two were spent in Bishkek, and one at UCA’s residential campus in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. The programme aims to equip learners with sound theoretical knowledge and tools of economic management and policymaking required to tackle specific issues facing the country.

In their speeches, Mr. Abdul Hadi Argandwal, Minister of Finance, Ms. Sheherazade Hirji, Aga Khan Development Network’s Resident Representative, and a representative from the Ministry of Higher Education praised the hard work and commitment of the students. They congratulated each student for their achievement and reiterated the importance of the programme in developing essential human resource capacity to serve their country for years to come. Through a pre-recorded video, Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of the Graduate School of Development, congratulated the graduates and thanked the donors and the Ministry of Finance for fostering a close and productive collaboration with UCA.

The Ministry of Finance, AKDN and UCA also paid tribute to Mohammad Sharif Mirdad, a student of the programme who recently passed away from COVID-19. The student’s degree was presented to his family, and a tree will be planted in his name at the UCA campus.

UCA Summer Institute: Pluralism for Resilient Societies

Sixty participants from 15 countries attended UCA’s online Summer Institute programme entitled “Pluralism for Resilient Societies.” This was the third annual summer institute exploring knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to engage meaningfully in pluralistic societies. Sessions were facilitated by Canadian educators, Jonathan Morris, Randy Janzen, Mary-Ann Morris, and Robin Higgins who had all taught at the Summer Institute in previous face-to-face trainings in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) and Khorog (Tajikistan). The range of topics included collaborative problem solving with motivational interviewing, de-escalating conflicts, global mental health, and supporting people experiencing grief and loss.

A new addition to this year’s summer institute was a session offered by Katie O’Brien and Nicole Sylvester-Fournier from the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa. They introduced topics related to personal identity and helped the group explore factors that lead to inclusion or exclusion in society.

There was consensus among the participants, that despite its online format, they enjoyed the break-out sessions where they had an opportunity to discuss topics with small groups of people from around the world. Each group became an experiment in pluralistic dialogue, and people reported it being a rich and rewarding experience. Although some people missed the in-person training programmes of the past, the new zoom format gave an opportunity to learn from people from many parts of the world and different walks of life.
Musicians Respond to COVID-19 in Tajikistan

The role of music and art during a global pandemic was discussed on August 18th at an online public lecture organised by the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) of the University of Central Asia. The lecture “Music is All We Have: Musicians respond to Covid-19 in Tajikistan” was delivered by Dr. Chorshanbe Goibnazarov, Assistant Professor at UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences, and Research Fellow at CHHU.

Historically, in times of crises, nations, communities, families, and individuals have often sought refuge in music. Such comfort has been even more evident during the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic, where people around the world turned to the familiar sounds of music to alleviate fear and stress of isolation, and to come together in novel ways. Drawing on the historical role of music and the arts in times of crisis, Dr. Goibnazarov discussed the work of contemporary musicians in Tajikistan. He focused on the musicians’ work, as well as the way they responded to the pandemic, and showed their solidarity with the people in a variety of ways.

SPCE Graduates Launch Yurt Resort in Naryn

Talaibek Osmonov, and his wife Elza, completed SPCE’s Entrepreneurship programme in Naryn in 2016-2017, with plans to build a yurt business and promote tourism in their hometown – the Alysh village of Naryn. With a loan provided by UCA and the Kyrgyz Investment and Credit Bank, they set up three yurts offering a kitchen, accommodation, and horseback riding tours. They are now also conducting tours to Naryn’s historic Tash Rabat Caravanserai, as well as hiking and camping.

Looking to expand, they attended the Naryn Investment Forum hosted by the University of Central Asia in 2017, and secured a $45,000 loan from the Kyrgyz-Russian Development Fund to continue building and launch their dream “Bai-Tor” resort in Salkyn-Tor Park in Alysh village. The resort will accommodate up to 350 people, and includes a restaurant.

“We moved from Bishkek to start our own business, and with the help of SPCE’s entrepreneurship course, were able to gain the required skills to follow our dream,” said Talaibek. “Our business is currently welcoming visitors from neighbouring villages in Alysh and Kenesh, as well as Naryn town. We hope to boost local tourism in the Naryn region, and look forward to hosting international guests in the future.”

Talaibek and Elza are now in the final stages of constructing their resort, and anticipate an official launch in August. While they have already hired 15 local youth during the construction period, they plan to create even more jobs as their business grows.

“Through my work with EIP, I gained valuable experience in managing information, identifying reliable sources, and working remotely with teams. I also helped prepare videos and presentations for students learning science, technology, engineering, and mathematics,” said Takhmina. “I firmly believe that my contribution at EIP will make positive changes in the lives of students, as well as contribute towards the development of Kyrgyzstan’s education system.”

The Covid-19 pandemic has plunged the Afghan economy into a deep recession. The economy is projected to contract by 8.2 percent in 2020, and the rate of poverty increasing from 55 percent in 2017 to around 72 percent in 2020. Revenue collection is severely affected by the economic slowdown, worsening the prospects for medium-term fiscal sustainability. Furthermore, the on-going ‘peace’ process and the upcoming donor pledging conference in November 2020 in Geneva add to the growing complexities for economic management during the crisis.

UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) in partnership with the Biruni Institute, a Kabul-based economic policy think tank, organised a webinar on August 10 on: “Covid-19: Outlook and Prospects for Economic Recovery in Afghanistan” to discuss key issues and findings from the latest ‘Afghanistan Economic Outlook’, a document outlining the state of the economy and prospects for recovery.

The Webinar also included a panel discussion chaired by Dr. Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director of IPPA, with contributions from Mr. Naser Siddique, Director General—Coordination, Monitoring & Reporting from the Afghan Ministry of Finance, and Mr. Sayed Zaman Hashimi, CEO of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Industries.

Mr. Nazir Kabiri, Executive Director of the Biruni Institute, gave an overview of the economic situation in Afghanistan, followed by a presentation by Dr. Omar Joya, Head of Research at the Biruni Institute who provided details about Afghanistan’s economy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Dr. Joya explained some of the interventions which had taken place to date and the challenges faced by the Government in implementing these initiatives, including a fall in revenue collection, limited donor funding, and a rise in the unemployment rate. Despite the many challenges and issues, he commended the Afghan Government for reacting quickly and continuing to provide support across the country despite other pressing issues related to peace and security.

Mr. Siddique offered the Ministry of Finance’s perspective on the issues related to the pandemic as well as broader issues facing the Afghan people. He discussed the upcoming Ministerial Conference to be held in Geneva in November and explained that the Government will campaign for further financial commitment from the international community for the planned regional projects such as the TAPI pipeline project.

Mr. Hashemi discussed the areas in which the government needs to further support the private sector in Afghanistan including the development of longer-term strategies and policies which would encourage and build confidence for foreign investors looking to invest in Afghanistan. He also explained the role of the private sector in supporting the government during the pandemic and how support from the Government to develop a strong local infrastructure could help grow and stabilize the private sector in Afghanistan during times of crisis.

This webinar is part of the University of Central Asia’s Executive Masters in Economic Policy Programme in partnership with the Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan. Funding is provided by the International Development Research Centre and Aga Khan Foundation Canada through the Pathways to Innovation Project: Strengthening Mathematics, Science and Economic Policy Capacity in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

UCA is First Central Asian University to Join WACE Network

On August 14th, UCA officially joined WACE, an international professional organisation dedicated to developing, expanding, branding and advocating for cooperative and work-integrated education programmes within industry and educational institutions.

UCA is the first higher education institution to become a WACE member in the Central Asia region. As part of this membership, UCA’s Cooperative Education Programme will receive international accreditation, and UCA undergraduate students will have access to international internships, as well as networking opportunities. As a member, UCA faculty, students and staff will also be able to publish articles and research in the WACE peer reviewed journal, International Journal of Work Integrated Learning (IJWIL), and attend annual workshops, conferences and webinars.
Rethinking the Meaning of Neighborship in the Ferghana Valley

Asel Murzakulova, Senior Research Fellow at UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute delivered a presentation at a webinar on "Borders of States and Borders of Living Space: The Issue of Border Problems in Central Asia." It was organised by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and Bilim Karovoni (Uzbekistan). Her presentation covered MSRI research on “Rethinking the Meaning of Neighborship: Transformation of Border Areas in the Ferghana Valley.” Watch the presentation from 00:48 minutes on Facebook.

EIP Conducts Online Professional Development

UCA’s Education Improvement Programme (EIP) conducted an Online Professional Development Programme (OPDP) in August for EIP partner and non-partner schools in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The programme’s focus was on addressing the needs of teachers, and identified best practices for online teaching. It focused on developing teachers’ knowledge and skills in the effective use of online platforms, designing lesson plans, and exploring different assessment methods to foster creative thinking.

The programme modules were designed to develop autonomous, resourceful, and independent learners. Teachers were encouraged to ask open-ended questions, learn collaboratively, and conduct mock lessons with their colleagues to receive peer feedback. Teachers also designed unit plans and created lesson recordings. It was offered in English, Russian, Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages, and was facilitated by EIP staff, in cooperation with faculty members and teachers from partner institutions.

The participants were grateful for the opportunity. “The course was productive and helpful, and with my gained knowledge, I am more confident that I can conduct interesting lessons online,” said Farida Tanieva, English teacher from Kazakhstan. “I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to participate in EIP’s professional development programme. It exceeded all my expectations, and I plan to apply these new skills in my teaching,” added Irina Maslova, History teacher from Kyrgyzstan.

Undergraduate students at the School of Arts and Sciences at UCA are starting classes online from September 7, 2020. The University is watching the Covid-19 situation closely, and until it is safe for students to return to campus, they will be connecting remotely from their homes to their lectures and classes.

Students living in remote villages have been provided hardware by the University to use their cell phone signals to log into UCA. The faculty is excited about remote learning and its wider possibilities.

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SPCE Offers Tools for Success

Rohullah Mowahid is a graduate of UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education in Faizabad (Afghanistan), and has completed programmes in English, IT, and the Cashier/Financial Assistant programme. Rohullah graduated from the Faculty of Economics at Badakhshan University, and currently works as a Procurement Manager at the Ministry of Higher Education.

“SPCE’s programmes were invaluable in providing skills that enabled me to get a great job. At least 80% of my success is thanks to SPCE. I improved my English language proficiency, upgraded my computer literacy skills and learnt how to do complex calculations, all of which I am applying in my work,” said Rohullah. “I recommend SPCE to anyone looking for a better job to enhance their career.”

Suhaima was born in Mazar-i-Sharif in the Balkh province of Afghanistan, and now lives in Faizabad with her family. After finishing university and entering the labour market, she learnt that command of the English language and computer literacy are vital to finding a good job.

To address this need, she enrolled in English courses at SPCE, and completed the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) certification in 2018. “With the help of SPCE, I improved my English proficiency, and gained new computer skills. To put my learning into practice, I decided to start a business teaching computer courses in my community. I have now recruited other SPCE graduates, and plan to further expand the business,” said Suhaima. “I would like to express my gratitude to UCA’s SPCE for offering various programmes and courses that are developing the potential of youth and providing new opportunities. I hope more SPCE centres will be opened throughout Afghanistan in the future.”

“I recommend SPCE to anyone looking for a better job to enhance their career”

The Statesmanship of Jusup Abdrakhmanov

A new publication on the statesmanship of Jusup Abdrakhmanov by Jumagul Baydildieev has been published by UCA’s Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit. Download the publication in Kyrgyz from UCA’s website at: http://bit.ly/CHHU-RP10-kr.

Based on new archival research, this report examines Jusup Abdrakhmanov, the Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and his critical views about the Soviet government’s policy on dekulakization and the basmachy movement in the 1930s. It also highlights his attempts to prevent the Kyrgyz people from starvation as well as his support for Kazakhs who fled to Kyrgyzstan during the great famine of 1932.

M. S. Andreev in Historical Perspective: Review of Tadzhiki doliny Huf

UCA’s Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit has published a research paper by Saynak Saynakov, covering a review of “Tajiks of the Huf Valley”, a two-volume book by famous Russian-Soviet ethnographer Mihail Stepanovich Andreev. The author notes that Andreev’s scientific legacy is an invaluable treasure trove for ethnography, a key to knowledge about ancient Tajik customs and a helpful tool for studying ethnographies of neighboring nations. The book also contains an ethnographic and anthropological glossary, which is useful for research in the field of eastern studies. Download a copy in English or Russian from UCA’s website.

Youth Employment in the Garment Sector in Kyrgyzstan

Kanat Tilekeyev, Bakytbek Tokubek uulu, and Dilbara Kirbasheva from UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration have published a Working Paper on “The Garment Sector and Youth Employment in Kyrgyzstan.” To download a copy in English, click here. This paper provides a value chain analysis of the garment sector, and identifies gaps in the knowledge and skills of youth workers in sewing workshops in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. It discusses issues related to migration, unemployment, gender, and core literacy skills relevant to the current state of the garment sector. The study also offers policy recommendations to international and governmental organisations and garment sector stakeholders, including donor organisations.
Labour Market and Technological Development in Central Asia
Dr Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director of the Institute of Public Policy & Administration of the University of Central Asia has published a Working Paper on “Labour Market and Technological Development in Central Asia.” To download a copy in English, click here. This paper discusses the current situation in labour markets of the economies of Central Asia and considers the options available to use labour market policies to support the technological development of these economies. It analyses contemporary issues in the labour markets of these countries including labour migration, informality, inequality, and financing of pensions through the taxation of labour. The paper provides recommendations for the modification of labour market policies to promote the economic diversification and productivity growth in Central Asia.

Inland Waterbody Livelihoods in Kyrgyzstan
In collaboration with authors from the University of Technology Sydney in Australia, Ian Phil Canlas, Senior Lecturer of Science at UCA, and Samat Kalmuratov, Senior Lecturer of Physics and Mathematics at UCA, published an article in the Journal of Marine and Island Cultures on “Changing Inland Waterbody Livelihoods in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan”. To download a copy in English, click here. Livelihood activities along the Issyk-Kul lake are diverse and seasonal. The paper examines livelihood transition along inland waterbodies, focusing on tourism and fishing. It observes how tourism is increasing, while fisheries have been drastically reduced, and argues that livelihood activities in Issyk-Kul are characterised by the increasing importance of both expansive and material connections beyond the lake itself.

Non-Tariff Measures and Sustainable Development
Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as newer members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), have an objective of eliminating intra-block barriers in the trade of goods, services, capital, and labour. Zalina Enikeeva, Research Fellow and Academic Programmes Coordinator at UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration published a paper examining the “Non-tariff measures and sustainable development in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.” It was published as part of the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT) Working Paper Series. The study analyses the relationship between non-tariff measures applicable in the agricultural sector of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and sustainable development goals. To download a copy in English, click here.

Opportunities and Challenges for Agrifood Trade
Roman Mogilevskii, Zalina Enikeeva, and Mariia Iamshchikova, from UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration co-authored an article with researchers from the Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan. It covered the “Opportunities and Challenges for Agrifood Trade between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan.” The publication included an analysis of the current situation, trends, and challenges in agrifood trade. It also covered existing government policies as well as recommendations for the government and business communities in Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan, and international development stakeholders. It was published in the Agriculture Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia Bulletin of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. To access the article (page 14), click here.

Call for Participation: Free Live-Streamed Courses in Economics
UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA), in cooperation with the Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education’s Economics Institute (CERGE-EI) Foundation, invites all master level students, faculty members, applied researchers, and other interested individuals to participate in a live-streamed economics course starting in September and November 2020.

Courses covering International Trade, Energy Economics, Labor Economics, Comparative Economic Systems (Transition Economics), and Innovation Economics will be delivered online from CERGE-EI’s Digital Media Center in Prague, and coordinated by UCA to allow live streaming to multiple locations. The courses are free of charge for course participants, and will be delivered in English. Learn more.