In response to an urgent appeal for medicine from the Central Regional Hospital in Khorog (Tajikistan) to treat patients suffering from Covid-19, the University of Central Asia (UCA) donated medicine and related supplies.

The Chief Medical Officer of the Hospital, Davlatbekov Saidbek, expressed gratitude to the employees of UCA for their generosity and “timely humanitarian support which will help us save lives.” UCA employees have established a Covid-19 Solidary Fund. Well over 100 employees have donated one or more day’s salary to provide food and medical supplies to families and hospitals in dire need as a result of the pandemic. To help mitigate the spread of Covid-19, UCA has also set up facilities for 50 observation beds on the grounds of its Khorog campus. With rising cases of patients testing positive for Covid-19 in Khorog, and increased risk to front line health workers, UCA is also arranging personal protective equipment (PPEs) for doctors and nurses.

Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Lauds AKDN Programmes

Dr. Shamsh Kassim-Lakha (left), Chairman of UCA’s Board of Trustees and the Diplomatic Representative of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) to the Kyrgyz Republic, met with Chingiz Aidarbekov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan on May 28th. They discussed areas of cooperation in Kyrgyzstan in the fields of education, healthcare, and the development of small and medium-sized businesses. The Minister expressed hope that AKDN projects and programmes will continue to contribute to the sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan.
Roses Lift Spirits of Covid-19 Front Line Workers

Kalyikul Ysyraliev had admiration for the front line health workers who put their lives on the line every day. He expressed a desire to shower them with roses from his greenhouse, where he grows some of the most sought after roses in Kyrgyzstan. With the help of the local authorities, dozens of his rose bouquets were presented to health workers, as well as police officers in Naryn.

As a graduate of UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education Entrepreneurship Programme, Mr. Ysyraliev built his first greenhouse in 2013, with financial assistance from the University of Central Asia and the Kyrgyz Investment and Credit Bank.

Covid-19 Accelerates Digital Transformation at UCA

UCA is leading the way towards digitisation in Central Asia, and Covid-19 has been a catalyst in accelerating this progress. Following the Digital Transformation in Central Asia (DTCA) conference in October 2019, UCA has introduced a variety of new systems, developed partnerships, and has considerably increased its digital footprint.

UCA has successfully implemented a SAP based cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system across all University locations since January 2020, which is enabling UCA undergraduate students to gain digital skills through access to over 2,400 online courses from the SAP portal. UCA has also built new partnerships and joined the UiPath Academic Alliance programme, offering UCA students and staff training in Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

Under an agreement with Celonis, a software company harnessing process and data mining, UCA also has access to the Celonis Academic Intelligent Business Cloud and other e-learning modules on data analytics, information systems, and process mining.

UCA is also transforming its website in line with industry standards and best practices, to provide relevant information to attract top quality researchers, faculty, and students. Research by UCA’s Graduate School of Development is available for free download from UCA’s website at: https://ucentralasia.org/Publications/ Index/EN. UCA’s Online Public Lecture Series is also providing a platform to share knowledge from around the world. Lecture recordings can be watched on UCA’s YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/ucentralasia.

With an increased focus on cybersecurity, UCA is conducting vulnerability assessments to manage potential risks, and is regularly holding IT security awareness training for staff. The University also rolled out the use of Microsoft Teams across all its locations, which has enabled a smoother transition to remote working during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teams is being used for distance learning at UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education, as well as its undergraduate programme in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan), and Khorog (Tajikistan), where the faculty is delivering lectures remotely. Read more: https://ucentralasia.org/Resources/Item/2726/EN.
As part of the DTCA Conference hackathon event in October 2019, undergraduate students at UCA had made a presentation on an innovative tech project designed to connect women and provide resources for people subjected to abuse or domestic violence.

Zarastin Kholbash, Aida Yessimova, and Manuchekhr Makhsutshoev, who are studying Communications and Media and Computer Science at UCA, came up with the idea of developing such an app.

"The issue of domestic violence in Central Asia has been looked at from the same angle for many years," says Zarastin Kholbash. "Our app will help tackle domestic violence, and we hope to make a big difference for those in need. Technology is everywhere, and is helping to solve a lot of issues around the world, so why not in Central Asia?"

The project team is currently in the process of conducting research on what type of users will be using the app, and hopes to pilot this project in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) in 2021, for later implementation in other Central Asian countries. "Victims of abuse often lack awareness of their legal rights, have poor access to services, as well as minimal support from their family and community," said Zarastin. "Our ‘We Also Have a Voice’ project is aimed at connecting women, particularly in rural areas, to share experiences, and gain support."

John DiMarco, IT Director at the University of Toronto (UofT), and conference keynote speaker at the DTCA conference, expressed interest in future collaboration on this project. Alongside other UofT representatives, DiMarco plans to provide advice and support to UCA students in developing this app, which will allow women to share stories about issues they are facing, receive counselling, and gain access to a 24-hour crisis hotline for individual consultation. A button within the app can alert the authorities in case of an emergency.

Aida Yessimova, UCA undergraduate student, presented the ‘We Also Have a Voice’ Project at the Digital Transformation in Central Asia Conference at the Naryn campus.

UCA Students Develop App to Combat Domestic Violence

Building a Strengths-Based Culture at UCA

UCA’s Human Resources (HR) department held an online workshop on May 10th on building a Strengths-Based Culture, for UCA’s HR staff in Almaty (Kazakhstan), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), as well as Dushanbe and Khorog (Tajikistan). Each participant completed the Clifton Strengths Assessment, and received individual coaching sessions with Robin Higgins, Counselling Consultant, and Alisha Rajani, Former Deputy Director of HR at UCA, on understanding and implementing their top five strengths. Participants also had an opportunity to explore each others strengths, and discussed how they can be used during the Covid-19 pandemic. This strengths assessment has also been used by many students, the Student Life Team, and faculty members at UCA.

Online Conversation Café Connects UCA Community

UCA students, faculty, and staff attended a virtual Conversation Café on May 8th on “Navigating Uncertainty and Change: Resilience in Difficult Times”. Participants joined from around the world, including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Malaysia, Austria, and Canada. Alif Khalfan, Vice President of Product Strategy at the Walt Disney Company, and Ian Canlas, Senior Lecturer of Science at UCA, led discussions about the challenges people face during lockdown, and what they are learning about themselves. Participants also shared their coping strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as creating new routines, baking, staying in touch with friends, and exercising. UCA undergraduate students plan to organise weekly online gatherings to help the UCA community stay connected.
SPCE Students Win Competition to Study Abroad

Aizada Berdibekova and Aidar Zhakypov, students at UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education in Naryn, have been selected to participate in the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Programme, starting in Autumn 2020. FLEX provides an opportunity for high school students to spend one academic year in the United States, live with a host family, and enroll in an American high school. It also seeks to develop leadership skills and cultural awareness.

Aizada and Aidar competed with over 6,000 applicants from Kyrgyzstan, and were two of nine finalists selected from Naryn.

"Becoming a finalist was not easy, but thanks to my long-term preparation at SPCE, and the support from SPCE instructors, I prepared myself both mentally and intellectually for the competition,” said Aizada.

Aizada is in Grade 11 at the Arstanbek Builash uulu School #8 in Naryn. She has been enrolled in SPCE’s English language courses since 2016, and has also completed courses in mathematics, Russian language, biology, chemistry, and IT, as well as SPCE’s National Test Preparatory course. After returning from the United States she hopes to continue her higher education in Kyrgyzstan.

Aidar Zhakypov is in Grade 10 at the V.P. Chkalov School #2 in Naryn. He enrolled in SPCE’s English language Academic Achievement Programme in 2019, completed two levels of SPCE’s German language course from 2018-2019, and is currently taking SPCE’s SAT preparation course in Math in the English language.

“If you want to succeed, never stop learning,” added Aidar. “I was successful in this competition thanks to the support from my family and SPCE. I hope to use my acquired skills to help the future development of Kyrgyzstan.”

Juniper Forests and the Survival of High Mountain Communities

One third of forest lands in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are covered with juniper trees, and at moderate and high altitudes in mountain areas of Central Asia, juniper forests make up as much as 80% of all forest lands. With no existing database on the growth of juniper forests, Gulzar Omurova, Research Fellow at UCA’s Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI), believes that there is an important need to develop a sustainable model of growth and productivity for these forests.

Together with a group of researchers from Germany, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, MSRI launched the “Juniper Central Asia Project” in 2019. The two-year project has five areas of focus including socio-economic research, year-ring analysis, assessment of the distribution zones and the biomass of juniper forests through remote sensing, and the creation of models to describe dynamics of development and degradation of these forests.

Gulzar’s research focuses on dendrochronology, an academic discipline studying trees, which looks at trees as living and accurate depositories of historical information. Since last year, she has collected and analysed over 20 juniper tree samples from different areas of the western part of the Zeravshan Valley in Tajikistan. Her samples cover a 126-year period from 1893 to 2019. This research will help prepare process models related to erosion, water balance, and yield of juniper forests, as well as forecast potential changes in these indicators, building on social and environmental data. It will provide government agencies and local communities with practical solutions for forest resource management. It is also increasingly important to find a solution, especially for Tajikistan which has only 3% of its territory covered by forests.

The project team has also conducted household surveys in five villages in Tajikistan living adjacent to juniper forests, and found that while local communities prefer using juniper trees for their household needs, these practices are unsustainable for forest growth. This year, the project will continue to collect data to identify the most detrimental practices, find alternative solutions, and help plan and manage forest resources sustainably. Read more in English, Russian or Tajik.
Spotlight on Faculty Development at UCA

Dr. Chorshanbe Goibnazarov is from Tajikistan, and was one of UCA’s first CAFDP fellows, completing his PhD in Area and Cultural Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin in 2017. Since obtaining his PhD, he worked as an Assistant Professor at UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences, and has a joint appointment in the Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit, as a Research Fellow. He is currently conducting his post-doctorate studies at the Music Department of Harvard University’s Faculty of Arts and Sciences, as part of the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Fellowship, funded by UCA’s CAFDP.

At Harvard University, Dr. Goibnazarov is undertaking the first in-depth scholarly investigation of the Pamiri rubob, a plucked lute popular among people living in the remote Pamir Mountains of southeastern Tajikistan. Over the course of his residence at Harvard, he intends to bring nearly twelve years of ethnographic fieldwork in the region into dialogue with archival materials and theoretical literature accessible only in the United States. In the long term, his proposed project will result in a monograph on Pamiri Ismaili music culture. While conducting his research, he is also a guest lecturer at Harvard and Wesleyan Universities. His lectures explore the relationship between religion and music in Muslim societies.

Live-Streamed Economics Courses Piloted in Bishkek

UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration and the Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education’s Economics Institute (CERGE-EI) Foundation in Prague, piloted four live-streamed Economics courses on health, energy, experimental, and environmental economics from February to April. The courses were delivered through live-streaming at UCA’s office in Bishkek, and were later moved remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thirty-four participants were enrolled, including representatives from international aid organisations, non-government organisations, as well as students, faculty members, and applied researchers. Courses were offered free of charge, and aimed at building capacity of professionals working in managerial positions.

Viral Procurement Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

Prompt and efficient procurement of essential goods and services is fundamental in the fight against the Covid-19 virus. In most countries of the world, procurement related to the control of the virus has been excluded from standard rules. State procurement systems are purchasing without prior tender procedures, and many with full prepayment. A webinar on “Viral Procurement - How are State Funds Spent to Fight Coronavirus, and How to Deal with it?” was held on May 26th, with presentations by speakers from Ukraine, Moldova, Mongolia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. The event was organised in partnership with the UCA’s Civil Society Initiative, Open Government Partnership, United States Agency for International Development, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Soros Foundation, Transparency International, and the Open Contracting Partnership. Watch the webinar in Russian at: https://youtu.be/D_L0tB54Qgo.
Harvard University’s Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies organised a webinar on the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19 in Central Asia on May 5th. Dr. Roman Mogilevskii, Associate Director at UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration was one of three speakers at the webinar, which discussed how Central Asian states are dealing with the outbreak of Covid-19, and bracing for the second peak of the pandemic on their economies. Watch the webinar in English at: https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=2940341676056678.

Covid-19 in Kyrgyzstan: Socio-Economic Implications

Roman Mogilevskii
University of Central Asia
5 May 2020

Shaukat Ali Khan, Chief Information Officer at UCA, has been appointed as a member of the Karakoram International University (KIU) Senate. The appointment was made by the President of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and Chancellor of KIU, Dr. Arif Alvi. At UCA, he is responsible for the overall management of all aspects of IT services, including leading and innovating seamless operation of IT systems and digital transformation. Read more in Pamir Times news.

Good to Know

In May, UCA organised five public lectures on a variety of topics including the Research Stages in Modern Natural Sciences, Civic Activism through Arts, When Covid-19 Leads to Digital Transformation, Jadidism in Kyrgyzstan, and Archaeology in Kyrgyzstan. The lecture recordings are available on UCA’s YouTube channel. To receive UCA lecture announcements directly to your inbox, sign up at: http://bit.ly/UCAnews.

On June 9th, Josephine Hubert will deliver a lecture on “Turning Data into Value with Process Mining,” covering an introduction to Process Mining both from an academic and applied perspective. Click here to join via Zoom.

On June 18th, Dr. Jessica Barker will explore the human side of cyber security, and what we can do to better understand people-centric cyber security. Click here to join the session via Zoom.

On June 30th, Roxana Giubernea will discuss common mistakes and tips for writing a CV, as well as how to prepare for an interview. Click here to join the session via Zoom.
Social Entrepreneurship Programme Launched Online

UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) is launching an online training programme on social entrepreneurship in Tajikistan. Participants from cross-border districts of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, and the Khatlon Oblast in Tajikistan, with some experience in business, as well as managers and employees of enterprises, public associations, farmers and farm leaders, are eligible to apply.

It is being implemented as part of the “Thrive Tajikistan: Partnership for Socio-Economic Development” project, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Aga Khan Foundation. **Apply by June 15.**

Grow Your Business Accelerator Programme

SPCE in collaboration with PEAK Kyrgyzstan’s Bishkek Business Innovation Centre have announced a call for applications for a seven-week virtual programme for small enterprises in Bishkek and across Kyrgyzstan. Participants will engage in weekly online seminars focused on topics relevant to the needs of small businesses in Kyrgyzstan, receive one-on-one mentoring sessions, have 24/7 access to PEAK’s online resources, and networking. Applications are open to Owners, General and Senior Managers of registered small enterprises of Kyrgyzstan with fewer than 15 employees, have been operating for at least 12 months, and generate revenue less than 8 million Kyrgyz soms annually. Learn more at: [https://bit.ly/PEAK-UCA](https://bit.ly/PEAK-UCA).

Publications

**UCA Annual Report for 2019**

The University of Central Asia is pleased to share its Annual Report for 2019. The Report highlights UCA’s major initiatives, events, and accomplishments during 2019. It is available in English and Russian on UCA’s website, and can also be downloaded as a pdf for sharing.


**Building University Towns**

For several years the University of Central Asia (UCA), as an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), has been supporting the transformation of its undergraduate campus towns in Khorog (Tajikistan) and Naryn (Kyrgyzstan) into university towns. UCA, in partnership with Government and other AKDN agencies, is pursuing social sector development initiatives in education, health, hospitality, tourism, enterprise, and rural development. This includes partnering with town municipalities to work on the master plan for the development of Naryn and Khorog. UCA’s campus construction and operations, as well as various AKDN development programmes across Central Asia, are contributing to the economic and social benefits of these emerging university towns.

UCA has published two comprehensive brochures covering the work of AKDN agencies in Naryn ([English](https://universityofcentralasia.org), [Russian](https://universityofcentralasia.org)) and Khorog ([English](https://universityofcentralasia.org), [Tajik](https://universityofcentralasia.org)), and are available for download from UCA’s website.