Open Competition for UCA’s Graduation Regalia Sparks Excitement

The University of Central Asia announced an open competition to design its graduation robes and caps with a first prize of US$5000, and is particularly keen to attract designers from Central Asia.

The design of UCA’s graduation regalia will be an opportunity to be part of UCA’s history, as the regalia will be worn by UCA’s leadership, special guests, faculty, and graduates for decades to come. The competition’s submissions are in three stages, with the final submission in June 2020.

UCA’s Regalia Design Committee is looking for established designers who are familiar with the cultural nuances of each region where UCA has a presence (Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan), and possess skills to create a fusion of traditional contemporary motifs into a cosmopolitan design. Learn more.

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One of the design criteria for UCA’s graduation gowns and caps is the desirability of maintaining some consistency with the regalia of AKDN’s Aga Khan University.

The University of Central Asia (UCA), together with volunteers and social workers, brought smiles to the faces of Naryn residents on March 28th 2020, as families in need received care packages at their doorsteps. “We were very happily surprised that the University of Central Asia came to our homes today with much needed medical and food supplies, and are most grateful for their support in these times of need,” said a grateful recipient.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UCA distributed food and medical supplies to 500 families identified by the Mayor’s office in the socially vulnerable category in Naryn (Kyrgyzstan). This included masks (2000), hand sanitizers (500 litres), antibacterial soap (1500 bars), flour (2500 kg), pasta (1500 kg), and cooking oil (500 litres). This donation was made possible through a partnership between the University of Central Asia, the Aga Khan Development Network, the Aga Khan Foundation Kyrgyzstan, and the Kyrgyz Investment and Credit Bank (KICB).

“The University of Central Asia’s initiative to provide food and medical supplies to families in need has won the gratitude of the people and government of Naryn,” said Nurbek Moldokadyrov, Mayor of Naryn. “We hope other NGOs will be inspired by UCA’s example.

Continued on page 2.
UCA Distributes 500 Care Packages

and provide support as well during these difficult times.”

“Although the Aga Khan Development Network is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in all areas of its operations in Kyrgyzstan, UCA is particularly focusing on the vulnerable population identified by the Mayor’s Office in Naryn,” said Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of UCA. “Because Naryn has a short supply of essential items, we arranged a shipment of food and medical supplies from Bishkek.”

The University has prepared 90 beds on the campus grounds for observation zones as part of the mitigation procedures for COVID-19 spread in Kyrgyzstan. To give a boost to the local economy, UCA has also purchased mattresses, blankets, pillows and linen made by women from the rural areas of Naryn.

UCA Responds to COVID-19: Message from the Rector

Dear Parents, Students, and Friends,

The University of Central Asia has been monitoring the spread of COVID-19 and the response of communities worldwide to this Global Pandemic. We hope that you and your loved ones are healthy and safe, and as a valued member of the UCA community, we would like to inform you of measures taken across all University premises.

Our paramount goal is to protect the health and wellbeing of the entire UCA community, while continuing to ensure the delivery of our programmes to the best degree possible.

In compliance with the directives from the Governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, all schools and universities in these two countries are closed since March 16th for three weeks. Anticipating that this emergency is likely to last more than three weeks, classes at UCA’s Naryn campus have been temporarily suspended, and students have returned home. They are expected to resume classes on June 1st and continue the current semester. The 2020-2021 Academic Year is expected to start on schedule in early September. At this time the Government of Tajikistan has not issued any directives for closing schools or universities, and we are monitoring the situation closely and will keep you posted of any date changes.

On all our campuses, as a preventive measure, entry of guests and visitors have been restricted, and many employees are working remotely from home. We are also exploring distance learning for our students in case the Covid-19 emergency lasts longer than currently anticipated. So far there has been no interruption of work by employees, and technology is being used to its fullest potential to maintain productivity. We recognize that essential staff are still required to ensure that the University continues to operate and fulfill its core mission, and all locations are provided with health screening equipment, sanitizers, masks, and educational posters to inform and protect them from Covid-19.

All University-sponsored events, seminars, and conferences have been cancelled, and international travel suspended unless deemed critical to the operations of the University. Anyone returning from international travel is required to self-isolate for at least 14 days, regardless of whether symptoms are evident.

On behalf of the entire UCA community, I would like to express our deep appreciation for your continued cooperation, patience, and support, as we manage the extraordinary challenges of Covid-19. The measures we have taken will remain in effect until further notice, and we will keep you updated over the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi
Rector
20 March 2020
UCA Builds Partnerships for Undergraduate Student Internships

UCA’s Cooperative Education Programme held an employer information session in March at the Naryn campus in Kyrgyzstan. The event aimed at introducing students to potential employers from private business and IT companies, communication and media organisations, as well as banks and financial service agencies. UCA’s undergraduate students had an opportunity to ask questions, and learn about internship opportunities.

UCA faculty members, Dr. Mukhammadmuso Abduzhabbarov and Dr. Soheil Ashrafi moderated discussions at the event on the “IT Labour Market: Demands and Trends,” and “Communication and Media in Central Asia.”

At the conclusion of the session, guests were complimentary about the initiatives of the UCA students, the qualification of the University’s teaching staff, and expressed their readiness to provide internships to UCA students.

A Magical Weekend with a Gryffindor Win

The Naryn campus of UCA was transformed into the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry from February 28th-March 1st. A group of students, including the UCA Student Association, and the Student Life Team, organised a surprise immersive three-day experience of the wizarding world of Harry Potter. Students were divided into four houses: Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin.

In addition to an opening and closing ceremony, the event included various activities such as pixie and golden snitch hunts daily, the Yule Ball, Harry Potter trivia, movie nights, and the Wizard Cup, which featured games such as Quidditch, Codenames, and Bean Boozled. Congratulations to House Gryffindor for earning the most points and winning the House Cup.

Guest Lectures at UCA Naryn

Elyor Nematov, Visiting Faculty from Tashkent (Uzbekistan), is teaching Photography to UCA’s Communications and Media students this semester.

Nazima Tulanova, Freelance Graphic Designer and PR Manager from Bishkek, delivered guest lectures as part of a Digital and Social Media course at UCA’s Naryn campus.

Naryn State University (NSU) and UCA organised a public lecture on “Ten Misconceptions in Graphic Design” at NSU in Naryn. It was delivered by famous designer Alexey Lysogorov, and attended by over 60 participants.
UCA Conducts Medical Check-ups for Rushan Orphanage

On March 2nd, undergraduate students and staff at the University of Central Asia welcomed children from the Rushan Orphanage to the Khorog campus in Tajikistan.

The children toured the campus facilities, played games with undergraduate students, and also received medical check-ups by health professionals arranged by UCA. This visit was organised as part of an ongoing community service initiative in Khorog.

Student Clubs Build Rapport with Naryn Schools

The student-led Leadership, Empowerment, Ambition, and Development Society (LEADS) at UCA is aimed at improving quality of life by serving the community. On March 11th, the Heads of the LEADS Association met with school principals and representatives of school parliaments in Naryn to discuss ongoing projects and to present new initiatives.

Participants discussed introducing activities for high school students such as building communication and leadership skills, organising training sessions on tolerance, gender equality, human rights, developing environmental awareness, and improving spoken English.

The event was aimed at building collaborative partnerships between members of school parliaments and the LEADS Association team, as well as increasing public awareness about community engagement activities initiated by UCA students. As a result, education authorities and school parliaments’ members expressed their interest and enthusiasm for a long-term cooperation with the LEADS teams.

SPCE Spotlight: Alumni Excel in International Competitions

Elayim Samatbekova (left in photo) is an alumnus of UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Naryn, and attended courses in 2018 and 2019. She studied math, and Conversational German at SPCE, and is also learning English. She became one of two finalists in Kyrgyzstan of a “Robo Mania” competition, following her submission of an essay on “Why are computers important at school?” She will now have an opportunity to travel to Vienna (Austria) to participate in a summer school to learn about basic concepts of programming.

“SPCE helped me to achieve my goals,” said Elayim. “In the future, I want to be a successful programmer in Kyrgyzstan, and help my country in the process of digitisation.”

Adelya Zhanybaeva (centre) and Aidar Zhakypov (right), alumni of SPCE’s Conversational German language programme, also won the “Mein Motto für Deutsch” competition organised by the Goethe Institute, which will give them an opportunity to study in Germany for three weeks this summer.
ICDL Testing Centre Equipment Donated to Schools in Southern Kyrgyzstan

UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) transferred laptops and Microsoft Office software to schools in Southern Kyrgyzstan to create International Computer Driving License (ICDL) testing centres in March 2020.

ICDL is an advanced international computer literacy qualification that has been in use for over 15 years. Schools in the Bazar-Korgon, Suzak districts of the Jalalabad province, as well as the Aravan region and the Osh city will now be able to conduct tests for students to obtain ICDL certificates. This was organised as part of the “Demilgeluu Jashtar” project, and funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Fifty schools in Kyrgyzstan are currently implementing the ICDL programme, and UCA’s School of Professional and Continuing Education has delivered training on the ICDL programme to nearly 100 Information Technology instructors and specialists from the Republican Institute for Retraining and Capacity Building of Teachers at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic. This programme is being implemented with the support of the University of Central Asia, which is the operator of ICDL in Central Asia.

The promotion of computer literacy among schoolchildren is one of the “Demilgeluu Jashtar” project working areas. The project is aimed at increasing economic employment and civic engagement of young people in the Kyrgyz Republic. It is implemented by the Aga Khan Foundation’s Mountain Societies Development Support Programme in Kyrgyzstan, the Association of Social Entrepreneurs, International Educational Debate Association in Central Asia, as well as Accelerate Prosperity, an initiative of the Aga Khan Development Network.

Afghan Staff Celebrate International Women’s Day

The School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Central Asia in Afghanistan has reached over 14,000 SPCE learners since 2014, of which 53% are women. SPCE offers programmes at 14 learning centres across Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, including Faizabad, Shughnan, Ishkashim, and Darwaz.

SPCE in Afghanistan celebrated International Women’s day on March 8th (see photo). Rahman Nazar Farhad, Head of SPCE Afghanistan, also delivered a short lecture on the History of International Women’s Day, and thanked all female staff for their great work in Afghanistan.

First Meeting on Naryn Smart City Development at UCA

At the request of the Governor and Mayor of Naryn, UCA hosted a meeting to discuss the Smart City concept for the city of Naryn. Representatives from UCA, the State Committee for Information and Communication Technology of the Kyrgyz Republic, Digital CASA, the High Tech Park, and the Putintbyte Company participated in the meeting, which was held at UCA’s Central Administration Office in Bishkek.

Participants discussed the Naryn Municipality’s intention to launch a Naryn Smart City project, and the needs and priorities of Naryn. Information was also shared about Smart City projects in other cities of Kyrgyzstan.
Ancient Artefacts Found on UCA Naryn Campus

Since archaeological research began in 2012, the University of Central Asia has facilitated and fully supported the efforts of archaeologists from Kyrgyzstan, Kokushikan University, National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Waseda University in Japan, Indiana University in the United States, and the American University of Central Asia.

The ‘Aigyrzhal-1’ and ‘Aigyrzhal-3’ petroglyph complexes on the Naryn campus are two of five complexes that are being studied today. Excavation results have discovered that the ‘Aigyrzhal-2’ site is key to evaluating the spread of ancient local populations, as well the linkages between communities, and agricultural and livestock farms in the Bronze era in Central Asia. Read more in English or Russian.

Preserving Endangered Languages in Badakhshan Afghanistan

UCA’s Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) conducted a project on the preservation and documentation of Endangered Languages in Badakhshan Afghanistan, in partnership with the Pamirs Eco-Cultural Tourism Association (PECTA), Institute of Humanities of Khorog (IH) and the Aga Khan Foundation Afghanistan. The project focused on preserving the most endangered Pamiri languages spoken in Afghanistan including Rushani, Wakhi, Ishkashimi, and Sangilechi.

Due to ongoing conflict and instability, these languages have not been well studied, and most still lack a written script. In 2017 UNESCO reported that they are now considered to be severely endangered. Sangilechi, for instance, has only 1,500 speakers left. CHHU, together with its partners, launched a project in February 2019 to document and disseminate these ancient languages before they, and the inherent cultural knowledge and unique historical wealth, were lost forever. The project was funded by the British Council and Aga Khan Foundation United Kingdom. Read more in English or Russian. CHHU is part of the UCA’s Graduate School of Development, focusing on advancing the University’s mission by preserving and promoting the rich and diverse cultural heritages of the region through research, documentation, archiving and support of regional scholars.

Participants at the PECTA Tourism and Cultural Masterclass in Shughnan brainstorming ideas for potential tourism activities.

MSRI Develops Country Strategy for Environmental Grants Programme in Kyrgyzstan

“"A key element of this partnership is to develop a strategic document, which will guide the provision of grants to support environmental initiatives of grassroot NGOs, in collaboration with leading national NGOs and government authorities,” said Maksim Kulikov, MSRI Research Fellow and Coordinator of the Strategy Working Group. Read more in English or Russian.
March 22nd was World Water Day. Despite the abundance of water sources in Central Asia, residents in many villages still do not have access to safe drinking water due to a lack of necessary infrastructure. The main use of water in the region is for irrigation, and it plays a crucial role in the livelihoods of rural households, where the discourse concerning water scarcity is often focused on the lack of water.

Water is the focus of considerable research by the University of Central Asia’s Mountain Societies Research Institute, which is intended to inform and support the decision making processes in Central Asia. MSRI has also organised a “Fragile Water” exhibit in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), and developed a manual on “Studying Water Through Experiments.” The manual is aimed at improving access of rural schools in Kyrgyzstan to low-tech methods and experiments for engaging kids in learning and exploring their surroundings and natural environment. Read more in English or Russian.

Prof. Dr. S. Sohail H. Naqvi, Rector of the University of Central Asia, was interviewed by Azattyk TV on March 6th. He spoke about how UCA is committed to providing affordable education to all students, and the recent signing of the historic partnerships with the University of Cambridge and the Cambridge Trust.

Watch this interview in Kyrgyz to learn more: https://youtu.be/FSHXr6nYA3Y

Dr. Bohdan Krawchenko, Dean of UCA’s Graduate School of Development, was interviewed on TV1 Kyrgyzstan channel on March 11th. He spoke about research conducted by UCA’s Institute of Public Policy and Administration, such as the production and export of kidney beans in Talas. “Kidney beans is Kyrgyzstan’s top export, and UCA’s research examines how it is a very good case study of how a free market can work well. IPPA specialists aim at conducting research on topics related to current and emerging issues facing the region.”

Watch this interview in Russian to learn more: https://youtu.be/_W0u8-4XGa4

Chynara Turatbek (right), Head of Student Recruitment at UCA, and Natalia Stavitskaia, UCA Finance Manager, were invited to speak on TV1 Kyrgyzstan’s evening show on March 13 about financial aid opportunities available at UCA. The University guarantees financial assistance to all accepted students, and there are many full and partial donor funded scholarships at the School of Arts and Sciences.

Watch this interview in Russian to learn more: https://youtu.be/3A4KG1a3EvY