

## 196 UCA Employees Receive Long Service Awards

UCA celebrated and recognized long-serving employees on 7 February 2023 at a special event held simultaneously at seven UCA campuses in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Afghanistan. 196 employees, representing over 25 percent of the University's workforce, were recognised for 10, 15 and 20 years of service and commitment at the inaugural Long Service Awards ceremony attended by UCA Senior Management, faculty, and staff as well as members of families of staff that have passed away.

Speaking on behalf of the Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, the Board of Trustees (BoT), and Senior Management, Dr. Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, Chairman of UCA's BoT conveyed his felicitations to recipients of the awards on achieving this significant milestone in their career at UCA. "This is a big day for the University which has benefited enormously from the loyalty, dedication, and devotion of its employees. It is also an opportunity to thank your families for their sacrifice and support, without which your journey may have been much more challenging. Your award today is their award as well,".



Hofiz Mirzonobotov receiving his Long Service Award from Dr. Shamsh Kassim-Lakha at Khorog Campus.

In his remarks, Dr. Kassim-Lakha reminded the audience of the Chancellor's guidance that when UCA thinks of priorities, people always come first, and shared a quote from the Chancellor's speech at UCA's First Convocation in June 2021 to underline the im-

portant contributions made by employees towards the establishment and steadfast progress of UCA: "In partnership with the Founding States, we established a type of institution that is new to Central Asia and the larger world. *Continued on page 2*

## IPPA Wins Award for Economic Initiatives in Kyrgyzstan

The University of Central Asia's Institute of Public Policy Administration (IPPA) team won the Economic Fundamentals Initiative (EFI) Country Partner of the Month, thanks to their efforts in promoting economic literacy in Kyrgyzstan. They achieved this by increasing the number of downloads of the book *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Personal and National Prosperity* to 63,000 and by bringing in 5,400 unique visitors and more than 4,000 downloads in December alone.

The economic literacy project Akchasana that is spearheaded in Kyrgyzstan by IPPA is a unique endeavor that utilizes the skills, talents, and creativity of many people from various countries to inspire and generate interest in economics. As part of a network of 10 countries, the IPPA team, led by Sr Research Fellow Dr. Kemel Toktomushev, is working to demystify economics by engag-



Participants at the book launch event in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

ing not only policymakers, but also the general public and high school students directly.

For the first time in Kyrgyzstan's history, IPPA

has translated this key economics textbook into Kyrgyz and made it available for free download.

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# Cold Wind Valley: UCA Film Highlights Impact of Climate Change

The people of the Sary-Jaz River valley have always believed that the Enilchek glacier, one of the largest in Kyrgyzstan, would stay there forever. The newly released film directed by Aibek Baiymbetov, UCA's Graduate School of Development Research Fellow, claims otherwise.

Aibek Baiymbetov's film shows the Sary-Jaz area, a unique place on the map of Kyrgyzstan, fringed by the highest peaks in the Tien Shan range, Peak Pobeda (7439 m) and Khan-Tengri (6995 m). The untouched nature of Khan Tengiri Nature Park is already affected by a host of anthropogenic influences, including air pollution.

Aibek Baiymbetov's camera follows Alexander Vereshagin, the Chief Scientist in the Khan Tengiri Nature Park. In the film, Alexander shares his observations about the dramatic retreat of glaciers in Kyrgyzstan. Viewers join Aibek and Alexander on a



The Enilchek Glacier

horseback journey to Khan Tengiri Nature Park, as they meet the valley's shepherds and survey the profound changes in their landscape.

This film was produced as part of the "Voices from the Roof of the World", a joint initiative of Aga Khan University, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat, Aga Khan Foundation, the Univer-

sity of Central Asia. The series were led by Executive Producer Andrew Tkach.

Aibek Baiymbetov is a research fellow at UCA's Graduate School of Development, Cultural Heritage Humanities Unit. His two recent films have received international awards.

Watch the film here: <https://bit.ly/3Y6lwni>

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## 196 Employees Receive Long Service Awards at UCA

Planning for an original concept, and making it operational, was a complex process that involved purposeful architectural design, construction, detailed academic planning, training, and recruiting faculty. All of this was accomplished in a decade, which is a fast-forward speed for most universities. The many who worked on the UCA project in the past, and the University community today, can take pride in this achievement and have our warmest appreciation."

The staff cheered their colleagues as they were honored with framed certificates of appreciation and special gifts inscribed with their names and adorned with the UCA logo.

Upon receiving his award, Hofiz Mirzonabotov, Director of Construction and Facilities Division who has been with UCA for over 20 years, shared his joy and gratitude: "It has been a true honour and privilege to work at UCA. The university has given me opportunities for growth and supported me in my professional and personal life. I am proud to be part of the University and to have been able to serve it for so many years and see the impact it is having on the quality of life of the mountain communities of Central Asia."

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## IPPA Wins Award for Economic Initiatives in Kyrgyzstan

Additionally, IPPA has brought the International Economics Olympiad to Kyrgyzstan, allowing Kyrgyz pupils to compete and the country's finalists to participate in the finals in Europe. This will give Kyrgyz students the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and skills on a global stage.

To effectively convey the key messages of the book to a larger, mostly younger audience, the IPPA team has decided to engage young people through social media. By watching videos on TikTok or reading posts on Instagram, young people get to learn how the economy works, what can be done to generate wealth, and how to make financial decisions.

As Dr. Toktomushev emphasized, "Our project is not just about raising general awareness of the importance of economics and finance in people's everyday lives, but – most importantly – it is about providing an opportunity and a glimpse of hope for the most talented kids to believe in themselves and the things they can achieve."

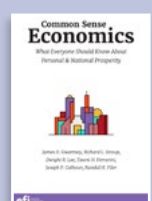
Promotion of economic literacy is particularly important for Kyrgyzstan as it can help people make informed decisions about

their personal finances, but also help them understand and participate in public policy discussions related to the economy, including government spending and taxation.

IPPA researcher Saule Chalbasova added "By interacting with followers and engaging in small quizzes and essay competitions, we try to raise awareness on important social problems such as money management, exchange rates, inflation, food baskets and others. We believe that by providing our audience with more knowledge, we make a direct impact and engage our audience to think more critically about actual issues in the economy."

With the support of the EFI, IPPA has many more plans and ideas on how to explain the basics of economics in a language that is easy for everyone to understand.

To download the book *Common Sense Economics: What Everyone Should Know About Personal and National Prosperity*, please visit [here](#).





## Second Cycle of School for the Advancement of Gender Equality Launched



Participants of the SAGE First Cycle.

In January 2023, the University of Central Asia's (UCA) Civil Society Initiative commenced the second cycle of the School for the Advancement of Gender Equality (SAGE) by holding a regional online workshop. This event brought together 53 participants representing civil society organisations and media promoting gender equality and women empowerment in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

During the workshop the participants engaged in discussions of challenges for gender equality in two countries including legislative gaps, and actors to be involved in the problem-solving process. The limited access to education, poor representation of women in state decision-making bodies, economic hardships, and lack of infrastructure for women's career development have

been identified as key issues.

The purpose of SAGE is to establish a platform for knowledge-sharing, peer-support, innovation, and advocacy on gender issues, strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations, women's groups, and community leaders to advance the public good, especially gender equality in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 2021, 50 participants of the first cycle of SAGE from two countries successfully completed the full course and established the Community of Practice to exchange best practices.

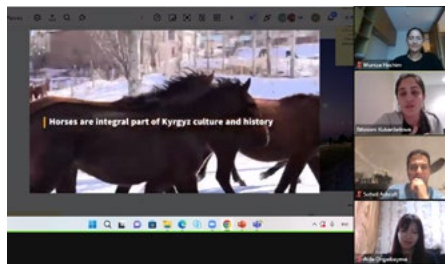
Over 12 months, SAGE participants will gain new knowledge and develop skills through a kickoff workshop, an advanced gender advocacy program, a small grants program, and a final regional forum. Best school grad-

## UCA Extends Partnership with the Glasgow School of Art

Extending international partnerships, undergraduate students from UCA's School of Arts and Sciences were provided with an opportunity to attend the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Winter School in January 2023.

Divided in two parts, the first session commenced in January bringing together online participants from leading institutions across the world for the seasonal event. During the Winter School, participants engaged in collaborative projects that span different cultures, languages and disciplines, gaining an insight into what a career in design as a global activity looks like.

"I am incredibly grateful for the dedication of our faculty at UCA into creating such opportunities for students. I can already feel the difference developed by engaging in creative projects with professionals from different walks of life through the lens with which I observe the uniqueness of my environment



UCA student, Bibisoro Kukanbekova (2nd from top) presenting her work during the GSA Winter School session. In the photo is also Dr. Soheil Ashrafi (3rd from top), Associate Dean at UCA Naryn Campus.

now," shared Muniza Hashim, Computer Science student from UCA's Naryn Campus.

Along with leading industry experts and academics, students explored new ways for design to address contemporary cultural and technological challenges.

To attend the second half of the Winter School in April 2023, UCA students will be visiting the GSA Campus in Forres, Scotland.

uates will be able to secure grants to conduct research activities on gender-responsive and gender-transformative policies in their communities.

SAGE is supported by the Government of Canada, through Advancing Gender Equality through Civil Society (AGECS) under the Foundations for Health and Empowerment (F4HE) program in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

For further information about SAGE: [cis@ucentralasia.org](mailto:cis@ucentralasia.org)

## Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia



The Catalogue of the Exhibition

UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) presented a catalogue of the traveling exhibition "Imagined Futures: Transit Corridors in High Mountain Asia" that took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; Tashkent, Uzbekistan; Dushanbe, Tajikistan and Peshawar, Pakistan in 2022.

The exhibition made it possible to revisit the mountain communities residing alongside new transit corridors to explore their knowledge and imagination of a changing landscape. The catalogue includes stories of engagement, survival, resilience, and perseverance of living in mountain regions, otherwise known as 'remote' yet connected through a network of highways. Works displayed in this volume belong to artisans and artists who have worked with mountain communities to protect and promote their heritage, voice their concerns, and spent time in these geographic regions to better understand their hopes and challenges.

The project was part of the "Resilient Silk Route Heritage Network" funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund, UK and implemented by CHHU of the Graduate School of Development.

## Employee Spotlight

# UCA's Role in Nurturing Talent - Zhazgul's Transformative Journey

Behind every successfully published book at UCA, there are hardworking employees who are passionate about their work and contribute to the mission of the university. Zhazgul Kydykeeva is one such employee. With over 11 years of experience at UCA, she has seen the university grow and evolve, and has been a valuable member of the team.

Zhazgul first came to UCA in 2010, when she was working as a teacher in a rural school near Bishkek. She was then invited to UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) to teach Kyrgyz language courses to SPCE employees, and not long after that, in 2011, she joined UCA as a Publications Specialist, where she translated and edited SPCE-published textbooks and prepared a Kyrgyz-Russian glossary in the field of finance and budgeting.

Zhazgul chose to work at UCA because of its modern approaches to education and its focus on promoting socio-economic development in mountain communities. She says, "I was fascinated by the working conditions, modern facilities, and innovative approaches to education and training."

Zhazgul's time at UCA has been a valuable learning experience. She came to UCA as a young specialist from a rural school, but with the support of the University, she was able to improve her computer skills and English proficiency. She attributes her success in passing two English Cambridge exams to professional development training she received at UCA. Working with a diverse group of people from different backgrounds also allowed Zhazgul to develop her teamwork skills. In her own words, "My experience at UCA was truly remarkable. I have grown both personally and professionally, and I am so grateful for the opportunities I have had here."

Zhazgul's role has evolved over the years, and she has combined the work of a translator, editor and librarian. She also curated the SPCE regional libraries in all countries where UCA operates. As a curator of a library at UCA's Central Administration Office she also supports UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit with its publications and their circulation to various audiences.



When asked about her contribution to UCA's mission, Zhazgul says, "UCA brings knowledge to our people. Knowledge is a wealth that opens doors and provides opportunities, especially for isolated mountain communities. I truly believe that I am contributing to UCA's mission by assisting our employees and researchers. By making our publications accessible to mountain communities, I am helping to bring valuable knowledge to the forefront. Our researchers are conducting groundbreaking work on crucial topics for the development of Central Asia, and I am proud to play a role in making their findings available to a wider audience through our publications. From prominent historians to ethnographers and musicologists, we are spreading knowledge and I feel honored to be a part of this mission".

The library at UCA's Central Administration Office in Bishkek, under Zhazgul's care, holds about 2,000 books, and she has authored a Kyrgyz language textbook and translated numerous educational publications. In addition to her work at UCA, Zhazgul has also pursued her own creative projects, including writing a book of children's stories. She hopes to instill positive values in children through her stories and encourages them to believe in their dreams and always look for the positive in every situation. According to Zhazgul, the diverse and multicultural environment at UCA has been instrumental in shaping her worldview. The interaction with individuals from various backgrounds has helped her gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for different cultures, traditions, and ways of thinking.

## UCA Public Lectures

In January 2023, the University of Central Asia in partnership with the Aga Khan University and Global CIO Forum hosted two public lectures:

Online Public Lecture  
**Skills for Modern Leadership**

Monday, 16 January 2023  
12 PM TJT / PKT | 1 PM KGT  
Language: English

Michelle O'Connor  
President & CEO of Meditech

Moderator  
Shaukat Ali Khan  
Global CIO of Aga Khan University and Hospitals  
in Asia, Africa and United Kingdom

- Skills for Modern Leadership with Michelle O'Connor, President and CEO of Meditech. [Watch full video](#) of lecture.

Online Public Lecture  
**The Future of Digital Education**

Friday, 27 January 2023  
3 PM TJT / PKT | 4 PM KGT  
Language: English

Klara Jelinkova  
Vice President and University CIO  
Harvard University

Moderator  
Shaukat Ali Khan  
Global CIO of Aga Khan University and Hospitals  
in Asia, Africa and United Kingdom

- The Future of Digital Education with Klara Jelinkova, Vice President and University Chief Information Officer, Harvard University. [Watch full video](#) of lecture.



## UCA Shares Innovative Technologies with Naryn Librarians

The UCA library in Naryn hosted a group of 20 employees of Naryn town library for a short presentation on digital library resources and innovative technologies available for UCA faculty and students. Visitors also toured the campus facilities and learned about the UCA academic and research programmes. The event was organised in January 2023 at the request of the Naryn Library Director Nurzat Toktosunova.

“An innovative approach to modernization of our libraries is required to attract readers and visitors. Today we have seen an example of a state-of-the-art library that serves the needs of learners and researchers at UCA. We would like to thank UCA and Naryn Campus library staff for this excellent opportunity



Ahmad Shah, UCA librarian (left) in conversation with a staff from the Naryn Library

to learn about their work and discuss possible areas for collaboration,” – said Nurzat Toktosunova in her concluding remarks following the presentation.

## US Embassy Representatives Visit Naryn Campus



Dr. Aljarbough giving a tour of Campus facilities to Mirands Lupion (left) and Gulzat Kochorova.

Miranda Lupion, Cultural Affairs Officer at the Embassy of United States of America in the Kyrgyz Republic, along with Gulzat Kochorova, the Embassy’s Cultural Affairs Assistant, visited the UCA Naryn Campus in January. The representatives toured the facilities and engaged in discussions with Dr. Ayman Aljarbough, Chair of the Computer Science Department, to learn more about UCA’s academic programmes and explore prospective collaborations.

## UCA Student Spends a Semester Abroad



Adisa Dorobekova, a junior student at UCA’s School of Arts and Sciences, participated in the Global UGRAD Exchange Programme 2022 attending a semester at the Utah Tech University, USA.

“The programme provided me an opportunity to learn more about American society and culture as well as experience its academic life. After spending a semester at a university in the US, it was fulfilling to realise that the curriculum at my university back home (UCA) is equally rigorous and enriching.”

Adisa is currently pursuing an undergraduate degree in Earth and Environmental Sciences at UCA’s Khorog Campus, Tajikistan.

## UCA Shares Lab with Naryn Olympiad Winners



A Naryn school student with his teacher conducting a chemistry experiment at one of the Wet Labs at UCA’s Naryn Campus.

Several school-going students – the winners of the Chemistry and Biology Olympiad in Naryn are now able to enhance their skills and conduct experiments in the wet lab of UCA’s Campus in Naryn. This opportunity was made possible at the request of the Naryn Town Education Department, and

UCA was happy to provide this valuable opportunity to the students and support their growth as future scientists. With guidance from their teachers, these students are taking steps in preparing for the next stage of the Olympiad. UCA wishes them the best of luck in all their future endeavors.



## MSRI Research Promotes Food Security in Tajikistan



Experimental plot in Ishkashim with wheat varieties from Pakistan

UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute (MSRI) and the Pamir Biological Institute (PBI) in Khorog recently conducted a study that revealed local wheat varieties are superior to exotic varieties in terms of weight, height of the main straw, and productive tillering. On the other hand, exotic varieties showed better resistance to lodging and fungal diseases.

Over a period of three years, the study compared 14 winter and spring varieties of wheat

from Lanzhou, China, and Gilgit Baltistan in Northern Pakistan with three local varieties. The results showed that hybridizing local and exotic varieties can enhance the crop's genotype, establish commercially valuable traits such as disease resistance, and provide better opportunities for local farmers.

To share the findings with local farmers and stakeholders, PBI organized a workshop in Ishkashim in July 2022. The findings were explained in detail and the importance of

improving the gene pool of local varieties was emphasized.

MSRI also partnered with the Kulab Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan to conserve and restore unique local wild relatives of plants. The project, which took place in the Shamsuddin Shohin District of Kulab, involved field surveys and scientific expeditions to identify the most endangered wild relatives of fruit trees.

As part of the project, 19 important endangered plant seeds were collected and stored in the gene bank at KBG, and two nurseries were established to preserve and disseminate the plants to wider communities. Local farmers were trained in the technical aspects of raising different wild species of trees in nurseries, and seminars and training sessions were held to transfer knowledge and skills to local farmers.

MSRI and its partners are currently finalizing the research reports and preparing scientific articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals. These studies were carried out as part of the Thrive Tajikistan project, funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the Aga Khan Foundation, USA.

## Preserving Sound Archive of Tajikistan

UCA's Cultural Heritage and Humanities Unit (CHHU) in partnership with the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan's Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography has worked on a unique music archive project to prepare a catalogue and an electronic version of folk music heritage of the Tajiks of Central Asia. The project commenced in June 2022 and aims to prepare and publish a text and electronic catalogue of musical recordings of Tajik folk music collected and recorded in 1950-1980s in almost all regions of Tajikistan and in regions of Uzbekistan where Tajiks traditionally and densely reside. The unique audio collection is held in the archives of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan and this project aims to preserve them and pass them on to future generations.

Many state-owned collections and archives in Tajikistan have deteriorated over recent years due to funding restrictions. Immediate action was required to preserve this collection and to ensure that



Dr. Bahriniso Kabilova, Chief Research Fellow of Tajikistan's National Academy of Sciences catalogues and digitalizes the musical archive.

it remains available for future generations. These recordings are unique in their content and represent one of the largest collections in the archive in terms of their volume and thematic content. They have the highest research value and must be transferred into

digital formats to ensure their future survival. From the start of the project until now over 1347 minute of audio files, which were mostly endangered, were successfully transferred into a digital format to preserve its longevity.

## SPCE Provides Insight into International Scholarships for Tekeli Youth

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Tekeli, Kazakhstan hosted an open-door event in January 2023 to inform high school and college students, as well as their parents, about international scholarship opportunities. The presentation, supported by the Education Department of Tekeli, focused on the Türkiye Burslari Scholarship for international students wishing to pursue a bachelor's degree in Turkey. The event, which was attended by around 50 participants included a presentation by a third-year student of Sakariya University in Turkey, who shared his life and academic experiences in the country. Turkey is known not only as a popular tourist destination but also as a country that offers quality European education.



Participants at the Open-Door Event in Tekeli

Many young Tekeli residents are unaware of the international scholarship opportunities available to them and feel they cannot apply. This event was aimed at addressing this issue and providing valuable information to young and promising students.

"Unfortunately, I can't afford higher education for my children in Astana or Almaty. It is great to know that they have the opportunity to study at a foreign university through an international scholarship," – said Saltanat Omirbekova, who attended the event.

SPCE in Tekeli has held similar events in the past, and it will continue doing so in the future to keep youth informed about educational opportunities.

## SPCE to Launch English Courses for Female Madrasah Students in Naryn



Madrasah students enrolled in SPCE's IT courses in Naryn

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPCE) in Naryn will soon launch the second round of the English Access Microscholarship Program (Access Program) sponsored by the U.S. State Department. Under this two-year program SPCE will offer English language as well as leadership and professional skills to about 30 female students from the Madrasah in Naryn.

The Access Program is a student-centered program run by local educational organisations to provide English language skills to students (primarily 13-20 years old) through after-school classes and extracurricular activities.

In the past, SPCE provided IT courses to 24 female students of Madrasah in Naryn to improve their digital competencies.

## SPCE Provides Free Coding Courses to Youth in Bishkek



SPCE student learn to code in Python

Sixty young learners aged 18-28 received free Python programming courses from the Bishkek Learning Centre of UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education. The courses, which have been available since December 2022 and comprise two levels of Python, are designed for those who have no prior experience with programming languages but are interested in finding jobs in the IT sector. The students also studied English, Basic Accounting, and Robotics in addition to programming.

This education initiative was supported by Local Impact, a partnership between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Aga Khan Foundation.



# SPCE Enhances Social Entrepreneurship in Tajikistan

UCA's School of Professional and Continuing Education in Khorog, Tajikistan conducted a social entrepreneurship course for 16 students from remote areas of Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) as part of the "Thrive Tajikistan-Partnership for Socio-Economic Development" project.

The Thrive project aims to enhance small-scale farmers' and entrepreneurs' performance while strengthening local government institutions' capacity for resource management and efficient social service delivery.

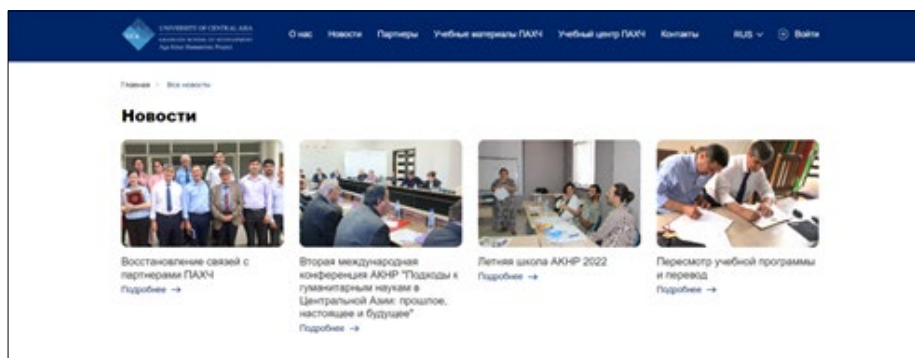
During the course, SPCE offered the students a brief introduction to beekeeping. The Thrive project will continue to mentor the progress of these students in the future with assistance from UCA's Khorog Center for Entrepreneurship.



Participants of the Social Entrepreneurship Course

Additionally, in order to enhance this partnership, the Thrive project also strengthens integrated socioeconomic development for adult and young men and women in Khatlon Oblast and GBAO.

## AKHP Goes Digital



The AKHP digital platform

In February 2023 the University of Central Asia's Aga Khan Humanities Project (AKHP) will launch its first digital platform – a virtual space for exchanging information and ideas as well as for interactions between the AKHP's community of academics, educationists, students and other interested individuals that interact with the platform.

Currently the Project cooperates with 305 scholars and 64 academic institutions in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the AKHP trained instructors teaching courses on various subjects of humanities developed by regional and international scholars. The digital platform hosts the AKHP cur-

riculum materials (eight anthologies and teacher's guides) and other relevant supplementary learning resources including the interactive map of Central Asia developed by AKHP.

This interactive digital platform is also a forum for discussing ideas regarding existing and new courses, which is also a storehouse of relevant research, and provides online professional development opportunities. It enables both teachers and students to share ideas, comments, questions and feedback. The platform is currently in Russian and Kazakh, and AKHP aims to add three more languages (Tajik, Kyrgyz and English) in 2023.

## UCA Publishes Report of 2022 Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference



The 2022 Life in Kyrgyzstan Conference Report

UCA's Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA) has recently published the report of the Eighth Annual "Life in Kyrgyzstan" Conference held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in October 2022.

The Conference was organized to stimulate academic research exchange, promote evidence-based policymaking and dialogue on developmental challenges between academia, government, development, and non-governmental institutions. This year the Conference covered a wide range of topics from climate change, agriculture and biodiversity to gender, demography, nutrition, informality in textile and apparel cluster, civic and community engagement, poverty, places of memory, and macroeconomic developments in Kyrgyzstan and the wider Central Asian region.

Read the report here: <https://bit.ly/3iUptgM>

### UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA

Advancement and Public Affairs  
125/1 Toktogul Street,  
720001, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan  
Tel.: +996 (312) 621 979

[PublicAffairs@ucentralasia.org](mailto:PublicAffairs@ucentralasia.org)  
 [facebook.com/ucentraslasia](https://facebook.com/ucentraslasia)  
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