

VALEDICTORIAN'S SPEECH

KYZZHIBEK ZHANIBEKOVA

His Highness the Aga Khan, Chancellor of the University of Central Asia, members of the Board of Trustees, senior management, government representatives, UCA faculty, staff, parents, friends, and fellow students, my name is Kyzzhibek Zhanibekova. I am deeply honoured and humbled to stand before you today as the valedictorian of the class of 2024. Please join me in congratulating the class of 2024 on successfully completing their academic studies at the University of Central Asia.

My way to this moment began with a simple yet curious question I asked my mom as a little child: 'Why is the sky blue?' My eagerness for learning, knowledge and growth never waned and eventually led me to pursue my undergraduate degree at UCA. In high school, when everyone was choosing their future paths, my peers were surprised to hear that I am going to study at a new, relatively unknown university in the mountains. The university which I later learned had been affectionately nicknamed the 'yellow spaceship.' The yellow colour which was once my favourite colour, now is associated with the most formative years in my life and will remain so in the years to come.

My mom once visited UCA for a seminar and told me she had found it as one of the best institutions in Kyrgyzstan, offering world-class education with impressive facilities. Listening to her, I could hardly believe such a place existed in Kyrgyzstan. Perhaps along with many, I believed that quality education can only be found abroad. When I learned that UCA offers education in English, vast international networks, a multicultural community, and highly competent faculty members, I didn't hesitate to take the chance. On reflection, that was a big bang moment in my life that opened up an entirely new universe before me.

For the choice I made, for their invaluable advice and tireless efforts in raising and believing in me, I want to thank my mom and dad, who are here today. On behalf of my fellow students and graduates, let me extend a heartfelt appreciation to all the parents for their unwavering support that has brought us to this day.

UCA's importance extends beyond academic studies and papers. Next to the academic block, the dorms are resounding with a whole other life. We all recall the day we arrived on campus. The place that looked too huge at first, where we could even manage to find ourselves lost in its corridors and hallways, now feels as intimate and comfortable as a home. Each corner of our beautiful campuses resonates with great memories that we will continue to ring our conversations with their playful fantasies. At UCA we learned about critical thinking, lab reports, research, creativity, the art of questioning and pursuing the good of the community. Throughout the years we often went through grinding experiences such as many sleepless nights, bouts of self-doubt, depletion of confidence, hectic hours of submissions, exams and deadlines, impatient waits for grades and application results. Despite all the odds we found our way forward to the final station of diploma projects, marking the culmination of our efforts and dreams. Our way wasn't straight, it was full of ups and downs like riding a rollercoaster, but with passion and determination we made it to the end.

Now we are here to celebrate the closing of a momentous chapter in our lives. Not even a fraction of it would have been possible without the hard work, generosity, and support of an amazing community of people whom I would like to recognise here.

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to his Highness the Aga Khan, the Chancellor of the university, and the Board of Trustees for their remarkable vision and support in establishing the University of Central Asia dedicated to the development of mountain communities of Central Asia. We lived your vision, the vision that enabled us to stand here today, to feel prepared and confident for braving and rivalling the competitive and challenging world lying ahead of us.

I would like to thank the Rector and the Dean and our dearest members of faculty for their dedication to our education, to teaching, mentoring and supervising us. Your hard work helped us to gain and master valuable skills and knowledge. You helped us discover the best of ourselves. As Michelangelo said once “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.”

I would like to express my gratitude to senior management, administration, operations teams and all UCA staff who made our education and residence at UCA as comfortable, safe and organised as possible.

Student life team, thank you for always being by our side and working relentlessly to make us feel supported and our campus life exciting and full of good memories.

Last, but not least I would like to thank my friends and classmates for sharing with me this life changing journey through all thick and thin.

UCA taught us to be attentive and thoughtful, to see beyond the challenges, to turn challenges into opportunities, and above all to share. UCA stands for sharing, the value that will continue to infuse our future endeavours with empathy and sympathy and a deep sense of responsibility.

UCA was a place where I felt valued for who I was, for my dreams and personality. UCA played a great role in having my dreams fulfilled. I found the chance to travel outside my country, to meet the President of my country, to work and learn with students from different parts of the region and the world.

As we are once again standing at the crossroads of life, contemplating the next paths, I hope each of us will keep the fire of curiosity within us burning and strong. As we are about to set sail may we endure and overcome the rough and stormy seas of life through resilience and tireless learning. With these words, I conclude my speech. Thank you, and once more, congratulations to the class of 2024.