Launching University Partnerships in Central Asia in the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Ksenia Ivanenko, American Councils for International Education
- Khanjan Mehta, Lehigh University
- Doug Hartman, Michigan State University
AGENDA

• UNICEN PROGRAM OVERVIEW

• WHY CENTRAL ASIA?

• CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

• PIVOTS THAT WORKED SUCCESSFULLY: CASE STUDIES FROM LEHIGH UNIVERSITY AND MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

• OPPORTUNITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA

• Q&A
Funded by the Department of State Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs

A dedicated platform of U.S. and Central Asian higher education institutions that:
• Increases sustainable collaborations
• Builds expertise in
  • strategic planning
  • faculty and administrative policy
  • curriculum development
  • (virtual) student and faculty exchanges
  • joint research
• Advances mutually beneficial partnerships with economic-based outcomes.

https://unicen.americancouncils.org
UNICEN KEY NUMBERS

69 UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS GRANTS

9,000+ U.S. AND CENTRAL ASIAN PARTICIPANTS

52 PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO FUNDING AGENCIES

39 CONFERENCE PROPOSALS

34 PAPERS IN PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS

100+ HEIS IN CENTRAL ASIA INVOLVED

24 MoU SIGNED

100+ HEIS IN CENTRAL ASIA INVOLVED
WHY CENTRAL ASIA?

• 72 million people
• Ancient traditions and science legacy from USSR
• Recent political and educational reforms
• Poverty reduction shaping middle class
• Growing young population hungry for new knowledge and connections
• Entrepreneurial spirit from Silk Road
• Important geopolitical location
• Climate change, water disputes, insecurity
• Amazing culture and hospitality:
  “We were treated as Hollywood stars” ©
DISPARITIES AND INEQUALITIES

- Innovation-based economy
- Broadband infrastructure
- High technology and equipment
- A lot of autonomy
- Academic freedom and integrity
- English is lingua franca
- Internationalization is priority

- Commodities and agriculture economies
- Unstable connectivity, especially in regions
- Lack of know-how
- Centralized higher education systems
- High levels of plagiarism
- Russian is lingua franca
- Limited level of internationalization
WHAT ARE THE MAIN FACTORS DRIVING INTERNATIONALIZATION AT YOUR INSTITUTION?

*ACE Mapping Internationalization on Campus Survey; AC UniCEN survey of 99 HEIs in Central Asia

- Improve national institutional accreditation:
  - Central Asia: 0%
  - US: 6%

- Generate new revenue for the institution:
  - Central Asia: 3%
  - US: 32%

- Improve international institutional accreditation:
  - Central Asia: 5%
  - US: 71%

- Diversify students, faculty, administration:
  - Central Asia: 7%
  - US: 56%

- Contribute to international development initiatives:
  - Central Asia: 5%
  - US: 12%

- Attract international faculty and researchers:
  - Central Asia: 5%
  - US: 17%

- Raise international rankings and reputation:
  - Central Asia: 9%
  - US: 23%

- Improve student preparedness on the global level:
  - Central Asia: 20%
  - US: 71%

- Become more attractive to prospective students at home and abroad:
  - Central Asia: 17%
  - US: 38%
WHAT HAVE BEEN THE HIGHEST PRIORITY INTERNATIONALIZATION ACTIVITIES AT YOUR INSTITUTIONS?

- Increasing study abroad for students: 54% (US), 17% (Central Asia)
- Recruiting international students: 51% (US), 14% (Central Asia)
- Partnerships with institutions and organizations abroad: 42% (US), 28% (Central Asia)
- Internationalization of the curriculum or co-curriculum: 37% (US), 10% (Central Asia)
- Increase the qualifications for faculty: 21% (US), 21% (Central Asia)
- International scientific research collaborations: 10% (US), 6% (Central Asia)
WHICH BEST DESCRIBES INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP GROWTH?

- We have no partnerships: 23%
- We have moved toward fewer partnerships: 1%
- We have begun international partnerships for the first time: 13%
- The number of partnerships has remained about the same: 23%
- We have expanded the number of partnerships: 98%
U.S.-CENTRAL ASIA COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

- Systems of higher education are still highly centralized
- High hierarchy and power distance
- Huge degree of uncertainty, high turnover of staff
- Lack of confidence and decision-making power
- MoUs are often requested to start activity
- Some universities want everything right away: double-degree programs, faculty and student exchanges, etc.
- Resources: time and money
- Time dimension and time management
- Asynchronous sessions due to time difference and internet connectivity
- “Tell us what we need to do” approach
HOW DID AMERICAN COUNCILS ADJUST?

• A series of UniCEN Webinars to engage Central Asian university representatives

• Online Conference “COVID-19. What Do We Know and How to Act” in Central Asia

• International Virtual University Partnerships Fair to matchmake U.S. and Central Asian HEIs

• Online meetups for U.S. grantees and Central Asian institutional partners for peer-learning

• COIL Training Program – matchmaking and ongoing faculty mentorship to launch virtual exchanges
UNICEN CASE STUDIES

https://unicen.americancouncils.org/case-studies/
https://unicen.americancouncils.org/current-partnerships/
Global Social Impact Fellowship: Learning, Research, and Entrepreneurship for Impact

Khanjan Mehta + Dinissa Duvanova

Lehigh University
Air Quality in Almaty

Faculty Mentor: Dinissa Duwanova

Alma U Faculty Mentor: Aurora Díaz Soloaga

Nicholas Jones  Kate Lyden  Hannah Moss

Tess McGinley  Alua Bekbossynova  Kate Miller
We are working to mitigate exposure to air pollution in Almaty, Kazakhstan, through recommending healthier and safer actions via a mobile application.
Clarify the causal contribution of fossil-fuel related air pollution on childhood illnesses, including adverse birth outcomes, asthma, obesity, and intellectual impairments.

- **Objective 1**: Calculate the asthma risk resulting from early-life exposures to PM2.5, NO2, and ozone.

- **Objective 2**: Build multiscale geospatial database by integrating environmental (e.g., satellite remote sensing, ground-level air monitoring, and meteorological) and health outcome data (e.g., birth outcomes, maternal health, and infant mortality and morbidity).

- **Objective 3**: Expand and strengthen the web of collaborators.
COVID Pivots

- Virtual Teaming
  - Universities, Non-profits, Schools
  - Government Agencies
  - Weekly WhatsApp Call: Extreme Specificity

- Research & Proposal Development
  - Primary Data Collection
  - Sec. Data, Lit Reviews, Case Studies
Pivoting a Professional Development Project
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Yuliya Novitskaya  Douglas K. Hartman  Farkhat Yesenbayev  Peter De Costa
Rebekah Gordon  Curtis Green-Eneix  D. Philip Montgomery  David Landis
Kazakhstan

- **Transforming higher education**  
  (Ahn et al., 2018; Aitzhanova et al., 2014)

- **Enacting a trilingual education policy**  
  (MoES, 2010, 2015)

- **Reimagining STEM education**  
  (Tompieva, Azhigenova, Mayasarova & Zhantuganova, 2019)
How do you reimagine STEM curricula in HE given the language policy ... while pivoting online?
Doug Hartman  
Professor  
Michigan State University

Yuliya Novitskaya  
Professor & Dept. Head  
Kazakh-Amer. Free Univ.

Peter De Costa  
Associate Professor  
Michigan State University

David Landis  
Literacy Education Consultant

Rebekah Gordon  
Graduate Student  
Michigan State University

Curtis Green-Eneix  
Graduate Student  
Michigan State University

Farkhat Yesenbayev  
Graduate Student  
Kazakh-Amer. Free Univ.

Philip Montgomery  
Graduate Student  
Michigan State University
### Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Region</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh American Free University</td>
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<td>Eastern</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Yessenov University</td>
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<td>Shakarim University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kostanay State Pedagogical University</td>
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<td>South Kazakhstan State University</td>
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<td>Zhetysu State University</td>
<td>Taldykorgan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pavlodar State Pedagogical University</td>
<td>Pavlodar</td>
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Content & Language Integrated Learning (fCLIL)
Good evening! It's good to see you.

Are you ready to share information from your Gantt chart?
A. Orientation to education
B. Key constructs in education
C. Enhanced professional learning
D. Professional inquiry
The title of my dream STEM course is ...

- Biology
- New technologies for teachers
- Jurisprudence
- Biology in English
- Physics
- Environmental Economics
- Foreign literature

Join at slido.com #Z210
Pivoting

- Forward
- Reverse
- Chaine
- Round-About
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How likely will you continue cooperation with your current Central Asian university partner(s) after the project ends?</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despite COVID-19 travel restrictions, how satisfied are you in meeting the outcomes of your partnership project?</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How significant was your project in advancing your professional goals?</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How significant was your project in advancing your department or institution's internationalization agenda?</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied were you with the support provided by American Councils?</td>
<td>9.7</td>
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LESSONS LEARNED

• Develops several categories – from individual faculty collaborations to institution-wide commitments

• Focus on agriculture, water resources, entrepreneurship, energy, STEM in English, public health, etc.; expand research projects that meet UN SDGs

• Involve international leadership to amplify efforts and the whole team to have a back-up

• Provide the framework giving broader meaning to individual PIs

• Share motivations, priorities and all expectations upfront

• Set, adjust and readjust your partnerships goals, implementation, timeframe, and M&E plans based on how partnership progresses

• Bring students into research activity

• Promote a greater understanding of value of this partnership to your institution

Share information about your project to provide visibility!
LESSONS LEARNED

• Good communication habits make partnerships successful: start monthly or bi-weekly planning invitations: Google calendar, Zoom, Whatsapp, Telegram

• Messaging apps (Telegram, Whatsapp, Facebook) more than email

• Be patient when it comes to different time dimension and time management and persistent with engagement

• Identify and discuss any challenges and issues with your Central Asian partners; even if they say that everything is fine

• Discuss sustainability - plans for future activity or funding beyond project end - early

• And ask about additional opportunities within Central Asia!
ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN CENTRAL ASIA

• Center for International Programs Bolashaq in Kazakhstan
• “El-Yurt Umidi” Foundation in Uzbekistan
• The Initiatives of the Ministries of Education and Science to bring leading foreign university campuses to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
• Ministry of Innovative Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan
• Faculty Enrichment Program
• EducationUSA Virtual Fairs

• USAID/NAS-PEER Program, USDA - Agriculture, Food and Research Initiative, NIH Fogarty, NSF Advanced Technological Education, U.S. Embassies, Fulbright
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• Doug Hartman: dhartman@msu.edu