



International Education After COVID-19

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

May 28, 2020

Introduction

Today, people all over the world are experiencing the unprecedented breakout of COVID-19, which is challenging every aspect of our lives and reshaping the future of higher education. Around the world, higher education institutions have implemented response plans, delivered education online, and cancelled summer and autumn 2020 international academic mobility programs. Despite the enormous challenges, there is significant potential to cultivate U.S. and Central Asian partnerships in the areas of scientific collaboration, educational curriculum, and internationalization strategic planning.

On May 28, 2020 American Councils for International Education in collaboration with the Bukhara State Medical Institute named after Abu Ali ibn Sino organized a *Virtual Conference: International Education after COVID-19* in which academic and administrative staff of Central Asia's leading higher education institutions participated.

The goals of the virtual conference were to gather best practices of international education practitioners across Central Asia in their responses to COVID-19; share approaches and solutions across Central Asian universities to create a vision for international education after COVID-19; and provide a networking opportunity for administrators and faculty in international higher education.

Perspectives



Dr. Amrillo Inoyatov, Rector of Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan)

Dear participants of the *Virtual Conference: International Education after COVID-19* organized in collaboration with American Councils for International Education! It is my immense pleasure to welcome all of you in this online event and my gratitude for everyone who showed interest in sharing their experience and perspectives on COVID-19.

COVID-19 has had a big impact on education in general, including international education. It is still challenging each aspect of our daily activities at higher educational institutions. For all of us, COVID-19 was unexpected, and it required an immediate response plan. Universities started to deliver classes online, and I must admit that it was not easy for most of us. While the World Health Organization warns about a second wave of coronavirus infection, the future of international education is still uncertain. We have many questions that still need to be answered. Taking into account the specific characteristics of medical education, how can we be consistent with online education? To what extent can we carry out international projects, academic mobility and other activities online? How will the admission of international students continue?

Dear colleagues, I think that today's virtual conference will be a good platform to discuss experiences of international education practitioners from Central Asian countries and to find unique solutions for the problems we are facing now.

Around 100 participants from 40 different higher educational institutions of Central Asia are attending today's event. This will surely facilitate diversity of ideas, perspectives and experiences which ultimately be useful to respond challenges of COVID-19 in our daily activities.

I thank American Councils for International Education, especially Mr. Adrian Erlinger, for cooperation to organize this event. Tremendous work is being carried out by American Councils in strengthening international ties in education, science and technologies between U.S. and Central Asian countries. And I am sure that today's event is one next step toward approximation of higher educational institutions in responding challenges posed by COVID-19. Thank you very much for your attention!



Akhatjon Nasullaev, Vice Rector for International Affairs, Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan)

Dear colleagues! It has not been that long since the World Health Organization announced the outbreak of the coronavirus infection as a pandemic. In this short period of time, it has led to a major health crisis in several countries and a major disruption to the global economy. COVID-19 has also disrupted higher education both on the domestic and international level. According to UNESCO, COVID-19 affected 1,190,287,189 learners around the world. Schools and universities in more than 150 countries were closed.

In Uzbekistan, several actions were taken by higher education institutions (HEIs). Beginning April 1, classroom teaching was replaced by distance teaching and learning. HEIs prepared their immediate response plans to implement online education and verified the existence of technical infrastructure and accessibility, distance teaching competencies and pedagogies. Final exams, scientific seminars, degree defenses went online. The Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, the State Inspectorate for Supervision of Quality Education, and other agencies provided their support in delivering online education.

Why did we decide to organize this virtual conference? I have to note that this is due to several reasons. The situation with COVID-19 is still uncertain. No one can predict the future of international education at this moment. Forecasts show a long shadow of implications from COVID-19 from one to five years.

HEIs in Central Asia have many questions in terms of International education during and after COVID-19. How will the global context determine the internationalization of universities? How will international education be affected by this crises and aftermath?

The context specific factors of HEIs still need to be addressed. For example, clinical medicine is one of the areas where you can't replace practice. Online education's limited to theoretical dimensions of the curriculum is one of the other questions. The scope of the problem is wider. When we talk about COVID-19 in higher education, we also have to mention the social and economic aspects of the problem. The impact of COVID-19 on higher education is likely to be significant with several consequences: unemployment of graduates, inability to pay tuition fees, changing behavior of students, etc.

In order to answer the question of "how will international education look like after COVID-19," I would like to highlight following points. In the short run, international education will be different. In academia knowledge exchange is essential. From the local perspective, collaboration is between scholars within national borders. But in the global perspective, knowledge exchange entails partnerships outside borders. International partnerships were facing problems even before COVID-19.

In my point of view, international projects, mobility of professors and students, scientific collaborations will not be same as after crises. HEIs will find ways to cope with the situation:

- Technology will play a key role in delivering education. Teaching and learning, international projects, and scientific collaboration will be carried out online. These are the projects that need minimum international travel. Most of the international agencies already announced a postponement of travel for part of their projects until 2021.
- Mobility of students and professors will be limited to an indefinite period.
- There will be structural changes in the number of international students in HEIs. International students will look for programs in their own countries or at online universities.
- There will be increase and demand for cost-effective educational programs.
- Changes in social and economic systems will lead to changes in curriculum and programs (for example consumer behavior).
- There will be increasing importance on collaborative teaching and learning, co-creation.
- Countries will reconsider their policies in terms of accepting foreign nationals whether it be tourism, education, or anything else. Strict rules for COVID-19 will be introduced for international visitors in countries where tourism or international education is major source of GDP.



Adrian Erlinger, Senior Program Manager, American Councils for International Education (United States of America)

Many of us have been in international education for many years, and we thought we've seen it all. Pick any place on the map, and every single one of us right now is trying to figure out our new reality, which seems to change by the minute. But in the weeks and months, we in international higher education must face the reality of recovery and meeting the challenges of the second decade of the 21st century. This is against the backdrop of the profound shifts in our industry.

No one has a crystal ball, but we in the international education community are looking to assess the present and the future. When taken to logical extremes, we must plan for the future of higher education where either 1) the impact of

COVID-19 will only be temporary, or 2) a crisis that will transform higher education forever. It is easy to acknowledge we face a very uncertain future ahead.

In my personal view, COVID-19 has accelerated the trends that were occurring in international higher education, and locked current dynamics into place. When I attended the Association of International Education Administrators conference in February 2020 (before the first U.S. cases of non-travel related COVID-19), there were major discussions around the high cost of education, access to study abroad for everyone, a rising mistrust of international collaborations, need to solve big global issues, and immigration policies. New international student enrollments have been decreasing already for several years, and international students have originated from a smaller group of countries. In the past decade, state support for higher education in the U.S. has decreased, while tuition from international students filled the revenue gap.

On the other hand, we have seen a shift toward online education around the world. This is driven by necessity, but also to embrace the endless possibilities of a new platform. While the rollout of online education has not been perfect, the speed of adoption has been truly impressive. We have witnessed the

speed of technology, which has challenged traditional ways of connection and collaboration across international education.

Each of us have the knowledge and vision to adapt to the new normal. This is a moment to rethink and reassess the goals and purposes of internationalization. We find ourselves in a position to ask “what if” questions.

- What if simple technology provided a low-cost solution for all students to interact with their peers around the world? The Central Asia University Partnerships Program (UniCEN), funded by the U.S. Embassies in Tashkent and Nur-Sultan, supported online curriculum development between the Pennsylvania State University and S. Seifullin Kazakh AgroTech University.
- What if faculty work internationally and collaboratively to solve problems to address COVID-19 and the next pandemic? In our program, we have seen the beginning of some great collaborations between American scientists and researchers and their colleagues from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to address global issues like water management, food security, plant protection, and air pollution.
- What if our American students could learn from Central Asian colleagues about the deep and rich history and culture of the Silk Road using technology and internet? We know that these technologies are in place. And what if these initiatives can inspire a new young generation to visit your countries, in person, one day, when the crisis has subsided?
- What if after this crisis, we see an explosion of interest in international collaborations? COVID-19 is truly a global event, and we are all in the same storm. Humans long for in-person contact and real-world experience, and this hunger for people-to-people contact may create a new era for collaborations.

We invite all of you today to create some “what if” questions. We invite you to think big – how can we together envision a new future for international higher education?

Recommendations

- Professional development programs in online teaching and learning (workshops and seminars) to support online-class curriculum development and online teaching.
- In-house sessions or institutional subscriptions for online learning platforms such as massive open online courses (MOOCs).
- Strategies to support internationalization at home: integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within the domestic learning environment.
- Address challenges and solutions for internet and technology access in the rural regions.
- Identify researchers and funding opportunities to offer solutions for the global research to cure and fight the novel coronavirus and its impact.
- Action plans for introducing blended learning or flipped classroom.
- Sharing lessons learned and needs with Ministries of Education to attract scientists, experts and professionals to build and expand successful existing projects.

Strategic Planning for Internationalization

PROFOUND CHALLENGES AFTER COVID-19

Financial Stress. On March 18, Moody's Investors Service downgraded its outlook for the higher education sector from "stable" to "negative." In doing so, it cited "unprecedented enrollment uncertainty, risks to multiple revenue streams, and potential material erosion in their balance sheets." The halt of economic activity means the end of thousands of companies and whole industries, which will have an immediate impact on student enrollment numbers. Public universities will face budget cuts.

Uncertainty. There is very little clarity about when higher education will be able to open for in-person instruction for Fall 2020 or even Spring 2021. It is extremely difficult to plan for international students. An April 2020 survey from American Council on Education Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and American Council on Education survey of more than 2,000 current U.S. college students found that 83% intend to enroll in the fall as previously planned. AACRAO survey reports that among 500 U.S. institutions, 16-21% are considering a delayed start to the fall semester.¹

Quality of Online Education. In face of new realities, action took precedence over quality. While institutions around the world have successfully implemented some form of online teaching, new problems have emerged, such as maintaining levels of student retention and adopting best practices in pedagogy. In many parts of the world, internet capabilities are limited, and synchronous online classes are simply not as effective.

Value of Higher Education. Faced with the move to online education, students and parents in the U.S. and other countries question the value of costly in-person higher education versus online options. In the U.S., some parent and students are demanding refunds. Unless HEIs address their revenue models, the trend of costly higher education may take a significant toll.

Inertia and Low Innovation. Despite the enormous steps in contingency planning and shift to online instruction, higher education tends to move slow and resists change. Many within higher education believe "we need to return back to the way we've always done it." Entrepreneurial education technology startups move quickly, and higher education will face competition from educational platforms that can meet the needs of learners more quickly than institutions.

Risk Adverse. International student exchange may be considered a liability in the post-COVID world than before. While many HEIs have prioritized internationalization, many HEIs have low risk tolerance for international exchanges. In March 2020, the U.S. State Department issued a Level 4 travel advisory and university legal departments do not allow students to travel to countries with State Department Level 3 or higher travel advisory.

NEW REALITIES AFTER COVID-19

Funding. Government and international donors seek solutions (both research and action) to combat COVID-19, future pandemics, and residual effects (supply chain, food security, etc.). Now is the time for international offices to take an inventory of faculty research activity to identify funding to solve COVID-19 and connect to international partners.

Adaptability and Flexibility. In the past few months, HEIs have ended in-person classes, moved instruction to virtual settings, closed campus buildings. Administrators have migrated to telework, and many teachers

¹ <https://www.aacrao.org/who-we-are/newsroom/article/2020/04/23/aacrao-ace-survey-finds-uncertainty-about-current-college-student-fall-enrollment-plans-optimism-about-completing-spring-coursework>; https://www.aacrao.org/docs/default-source/research-docs/snapshotsurvey3.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=d8b9c683_8

(many without specific training) have implemented online education for the first time. Some HEIs are launching virtual campus tours, online open houses and recruiting events. We've seen robust communications strategies to plan for Fall 2020 disruptions. Recruiters at HEIs are also being more flexible with admissions requirements: deferred standardized tests after first semester, accepting unofficial transcripts and their submission deadlines, waiving final semester transcript requirements.

Technology sees market demand. In the 2010s, education technology addressed problems within education using new technology tools; however, many school systems and universities did not adopt these innovations. COVID-19 generated demand for education technologies as decision-makers within higher education seek to modernize their content delivery and assessment. The menu is vast, with options of low-tech to high-tech. It is likely that accessible and already-implemented platforms will win (YouTube, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Telegram) while a large-scale rollout of high-tech options like virtual reality is unforeseeable in the near future. Collaborative Online International Learning offers a low-tech model for high-impact virtual international connections between faculty and students. Virtual conferences are much cheaper than expensive conferences and may reduce barriers for costly international networking.

21st Century Skills in the Real World. Higher education is experiencing global, omnipresent shock and we are all affected. For years, educators have talked about developing 21st century skills (cultural competencies, communications, working in teams, adaptability) for students. There is new opportunity to internationalize the classroom by connecting the global causes of COVID-19 with local impact. International educators must focus on discipline-based and skills-based learning over destination-based learning.

Innovation. Short-term exchanges and non-degree certifications have been growing, challenging the high costs of higher education. Virtual exchanges, global gateway campuses, micro-campus networks, international branch campuses and the use of online program management tools represent new innovations that may offer solutions to traditional exchange models in the long term.

Discussion

INTERNATIONALIZATION PLANNING AND STRATEGY

Higher education institutions across Central Asia managed the situation with COVID-19 well. HEIs closed their campuses and switched to online teaching and working, and provided support for both international students and students who were required to stay in dormitories. HEIs trained their faculty, staff, and students to use online platforms and learning management systems (e.g., Zoom, Moodle, Webex, Google Classroom, Bitrix, Univer, Platonus, etc.). Extracurricular activities, conferences, and other events took place online too. Admission and recruitment offices also used social media and online platforms to conduct open doors, campus visits, open talks, and interviews with staff and current students.

Many HEIs remain committed to their internationalization priorities. HEIs continue to apply to grants and work on proposals for funding opportunities that appeared during the pandemic. Administrators and faculty continue to communicate and engage with existing partners. There is new attention on the concept of "internationalization at home," to offer global perspective to students virtually now as students and faculty are not able to travel. Virtual collaborations are seen as cost effective. HEIs also continue to work with respective Ministries of Education to improve the quality of online education.



Aigerim Kozhanbergenova, Head of International Cooperation, International Department, Karaganda State Technical University (Kazakhstan) “We are now focusing on internationalization at home, taking the EU and U.S. as an example. We see the cost-effectiveness of virtual collaborations. The Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan has created the Study in Kazakhstan platform with the goal of attracting future students. Also, there is collaboration between Ministry of Digital Development and the Ministry of Education and Science to improve digital education.”

Serik Abilov, Director, Department for International Cooperation, Kazakh American Free University (Kazakhstan) “Kazakh-American Free University was using and has extended the distance education platform Moodle for all students and for all academic activities. Of course, teaching and instructing from a distance was and is not easy and require more time, power and motivation, especially the main challenge is to keep the students motivated remotely. All students and instructors were provided with technical support in the 24/7 mode, online training sessions for staff and faculty members were organized by department heads and experienced instructors with help of BigBlueButton, Zoom, and WebEx. An annual conference of young researchers was held online as well.

To be honest I am personally pessimistic concerning international education after COVID 19 because the pandemic caused a lot of challenges at campuses around the world: enrollment of intentional students will decrease (parents and students will prefer local education); tuition and fees for international students will increase because of new visa, campus, medical requirements; international activities will be cut; and international organizations and businesses will prefer to hire local staff then to send specialists to other countries. On the other hand, universities in different countries will develop more joint programs. Those programs will of course have online part, and students will be able to obtain a joint or double degree without going abroad. Universities in non-English speaking countries will be required to offer more courses in English even for undergraduates.”



Yulia Novitskaya, Head of Foreign Languages Department and Professor, Kazakh American Free University (Kazakhstan) “Extracurricular activities of the university also went online. We organized multiple online events for the week of Science – presentation contests, a conference which included a plenary session, an open lecture, a round table discussion, a teleconference and several panel discussions. There were several events devoted to COVID, a round table discussion on the aftermath of the pandemic and an essay contest ‘If life gives you lemons, make lemonade: positive sides of coronavirus quarantine’ being among them.

It is very hard to make predictions for the future of the international education with a great degree of confidence, however some of the things seem to be highly possible. Now, when all universities have obtained an experience in providing online training, when all faculty members improved their skills and developed certain competences in developing online courses, when students learned how to manage their time, maintain motivation and keep the pace of learning, it is highly expected that online programs will grow in number and comprise a significant share on the education market. Universities will have to adapt to this new trend and revise their curricula and academic policy. Universities will have to pay more attention to their technological infrastructure and build capacity in this area. The form of academic mobility will also change. On the one hand there will be more possibilities for

international students to study in Europe or the USA, but on the other hand it may lose its attractiveness for many of them since it can't substitute the experience they could get living abroad, communicating and experiencing another culture.”

Fariza Rakhimova, Coordinator on Academic Mobility, Narxoz University (Kazakhstan) “Like the rest of the world, Narxoz university has switched to distance learning and work. I admit, in the beginning we were all in a panic, since no one was mentally prepared for such a situation. But now we understand that distance learning is not such a bad decision. The university quickly reacted and before closing the borders of the city and the country as a whole, we managed to send students home. Those who decided to stay in the country were provided with dormitory rooms and food. Definitely, some time will be distance learning, new education systems, advanced technologies will be required, the population will have to improve computer skills and the ability to work on the Internet. In this connection, the government will face the challenge of having a fairly fast Internet connection to all corners of the country and providing computers to the most remote regions.”

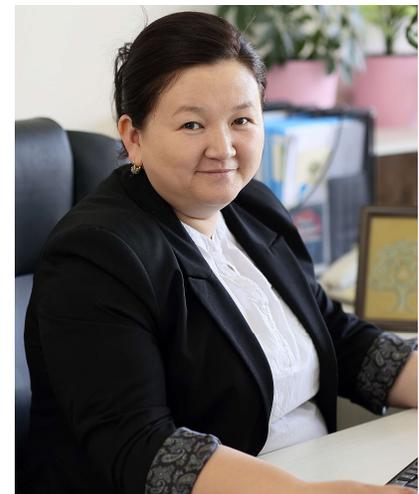


Akmaral Kairbayeva, Head of International Office and Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages, Toraihyrov University (Kazakhstan)

“In my opinion, there will be considerable changes in international education. There will be a very intensive development of distance technologies. Majority of universities will widen the use of blended teaching and learning. As a considerable number of faculty are used to practicing face to face format of teaching, finding online teaching quite challenging, there will be a high demand in professional development programs in the areas of online and distance teaching and learning. More and more universities will shift to providing only or mainly online programs. University partnerships will be realized mainly through conducting joint and interactive events in the forms of video meetings, online conferences, group chats and so on. I think there will be carried out an intensive development of more and more effective and efficient online

communication platforms. Academic and research exchange will shift from mainly physical to virtual one. All the above-mentioned tendencies will make universities work intensively and dynamically on reconsidering their strategic planning, internationalization strategies, their missions and goals. There is a great demand now in the exchange of ideas and sharing best practices both at regional and at national and international levels. International education is undergoing quite intensive reformations now due to COVID-19 and this process will change the profile of every institution and will affect the format of university partnerships.”

Ainazik Omurzakova, Head of Department of International Affairs, International Higher School of Medicine (Kyrgyzstan) “Information and explanatory work were constantly conducted on social pages like Instagram, Facebook and in WhatsApp groups (recommendations for the prevention of COVID-19, updated rules introduced by the government of the Kyrgyz Republic during an emergency, links of webinars and online courses for students to participate). At the request of students, passports were delivered to students at their address, in order to provide students with all the necessary documents so that students can purchase food and medicines in pharmacies. A survey was conducted among students of the IHSM, about the state of health, the adequacy of food, passports and visas. As a result, assistance was provided to students.”



Darya Nelidova, Head of International Cooperation, Almaty Management University (Kazakhstan)

“Almaty Management University (AlmaU), a leading entrepreneurial university in Kazakhstan, launched the transformation to online studies and distance work during global fight against COVID-19 to support students, faculty members, and staff as well as maintain nonstop study process in the environment of threats caused by this atypical virus. IT decisions came together with the needs for psychological support that appear in the atmosphere of uncertainty and quarantine. AlmaU operates within its own AlmaUnion system comprised of all tools needed for corporate communications. Students and faculty members work on Moodle and Platonus platforms, widely used in Kazakhstan, all courses are supported by OpenAlmaU and AlmaU Online Center. The class schedule mostly remains the same, and the university is ready to prolong it up until the end of the spring semester if circumstances dictate so. AlmaU Online Library offers the much-needed database remotely. Webinars, video lectures and online streaming by AlmaU teaching and administrative staff are the most appropriate ways to set remote contacts and discussions between the students, staff and stakeholders. Among the main topics are online study technologies, psychological issues in quarantine and isolation, academic issues, professional growth, entrepreneurial approach to the hardship situations and others.”

Rukhshona Musaeva, Teacher of Internal Diseases, Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan)

“COVID-19 may accelerate the end of the traditional semester-based system for collegiate registration, progression and graduation because Gen Z students are used to being online, all the time. Potential academic scenarios that could be implemented for the next academic semester include: delaying autumn semester in October or November; moving the autumn semester to the spring semester; creating a structured gap year, reducing the number of courses offered on campus and increasing the number of courses taught online; designing separate courses for residential and online students; allowing students to take one course at a time for three or four weeks; offering a modified tutorial model of instruction allowing students to take a common online lecture session; create a yearlong recruitment programs for domestic and international students; and, create new business models and financing options.”

Bayan Sapargaliyeva, PhD Candidate, Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University (Kazakhstan)

“Nowadays, the university is going to use technology to accept and enroll foreign students online and the possibility of switching to distance education. But we need to predict: what will be the result of this online learning? Is a foreign student ready to accept, use the knowledge of distance education? This and many other issues are facing internationalization. It is difficult to plan something for the long term, so serious strategies and interaction plans are still being discussed in a small-time horizon. Despite the fact that our collaboration has to be halted for the time being, we are determined to resume our joint projects once the situation normalizes. Only the friendly unity of all mankind is able to overcome any difficulties, only by joint efforts can a serious illness be defeated.”

ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Technology played a key role in mitigating challenges during the pandemic. Schools and universities switched to online and distance learning and HEIs used many tech tools available, both free and paid. One of the issues that many institutions in Central Asia faced is a lack of or limited access to internet in rural regions. Students in those regions rely on their university to provide reliable internet and many could not access live Zoom calls, or other synchronous activities. As a result, faculty members used asynchronous tools, such as emails, video recording of lectures, and messaging services like WhatsApp and Telegram to deliver content to students.

Faculty members reevaluated and redesigned curriculum to meet new circumstances. Faculty also began to reimagine their teaching methods and approaches, as well as the opportunity to introduce more critical thinking into lectures. Teachers plan flexible frameworks for upcoming semesters, such as allowing one

course at a time for three or four weeks, creating a yearlong recruitment program of both international and domestic students, designing separate courses for residential and online students, and others.

Israil Kurbaniyazov, Associate Lecturer, Westminster International University in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) “It goes without saying that international education is bound to enter new era of teaching and learning. By September 2020, WIUT will launch a teacher training program to adapt to the new online environment. We plan to launch a teacher/ learning symposium within our institution to share best practices. In my view, technology-enhanced learning will be a compulsory part of curriculum/syllabus, blended learning educational delivery models will be gradually introduced, and in-house training activities and professional development opportunities will be offered to support professionalization.

So far, my institution and others have considered the role of digital learning tools in curriculum to be add-on. However, the pandemic has shaken up their beliefs about the potential learning opportunities digital tools can offer. As a result, most institutions have reached or been reaching the conclusion that technology integration should be inseparable part of teaching and learning.”

Matluba Sadullaeva, English for Special Purposes Teacher, Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan) “There are a lot of misinformation regarding Covid-19. Our institute has been informing the community about the virus from reliable resources and has developed comprehensive e-channels that includes information regarding frequently asked questions and support for students and staff. We took great support and encouragement towards the international students who currently reside in the institute's hostel. The institute facilitated necessary activities to protect and develop educators and learners.

Pandemic related breakdown will give educators time to rethink the education sector. The upbringing of the new generation will need to be redefined, and the role of educators need to move towards facilitating young people's development. The situation once more has shown that these experiences of isolation and remote learning will serve as deliberate reminder of importance of our human need face to face social interaction. The demand for medical staff will increase highly. The medical institutes turn to the most prestigious academic institutions. Let's be resilient to overcome the challenges that pandemic had emerged.”



Ainagul Ismagulova, Dean of Faculty of Philology and Pedagogy, Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University (Kazakhstan) “Kokshetau region faces infrastructure challenges as a region and not all students have equal access to high-speed Internet connection and this was also necessary to be taken into account. Many of the students are from rural areas, and so distance learning is hard for them. We introduced WhatsApp and university platforms, participated in MOOCs supported by the U.S. Embassy in Nursultan, and redesigned curriculum for teacher training toward video lectures for subjects with more than 30 students (blended learning). Lecturers started to seek for the means most suitable for them and their students.

There exist a lot of free and paid resources, platforms and apps that can be successfully introduced into the educational process. During the adaptation and transmission period we discovered different platforms which could be applied for online classes, such as Zoom, Cisco Webex, Jitsi, and Skype. For offline classes we used Platonus (our university platform), Google Classroom, Moodle, etc. We also used video lectures; digital materials created by the university teachers for distance learning students.

Teachers and students have already realized the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. They will choose the best and most convenient features of transition to digital education. In our opinion, teachers

must apply the so called blended, both traditional and new technological methods in teaching students if they want to see better academic achievements of their students and prepare them to be competitive in the modern labor market. I think one of the key factors of post COVID education will be the enhancement of internationalization because universities will be able to recruit students from all over the world. But competitiveness will increase and only those universities which will be fast enough to adapt and offer quality education are to survive.”

Aigerim Aliakparova, Lecturer, Kazakh National University (Kazakhstan) “In order to improve distance learning and identify the main problems that might have arisen during education in the quarantine, we conducted a survey among students. As of today we got 203 responses, 33 Russian speaking students, 72 Kazakh and 98 English. As a result, we are planning to identify strengths and weaknesses of distance learning and main problems both students and staff are facing during education.”



Shohida Naimova, Assistant Professor, Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan) “The rector and professors of the institute regularly participated in TV programs and online briefings on the rules and requirements for the use of protective equipment in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic for the population of Bukhara region, and the rules of self-isolation. In Bukhara, professors and teachers were also assigned to monitor the ongoing production facilities in accordance with the rules of virus protection and were informed daily about the sanitary and epidemiological situation in the organizations. A call center has been set up at the institute to provide first aid and basic necessities to the population.

The situation suggests that the educational system no longer has time to rebuild and adapt to the needs of the 21st century. The teaching model where the teacher is the only source of knowledge is outdated. A teacher in the 21st century should be a mediator, an expert who follows the right direction and helps the student find a way to solve the problem, and the

student learns the necessary material. Classes should not be held in the style of writing an abstract, there should be more discussion of opinions aimed at developing critical thinking, interpreting the information received, analyzing cultural and historical phenomena, specific educational situations (case studies). It is important to develop skills, competencies, the ability to express ideas.”

Yessimkulova, Senior Teacher of English, Kazakh Abai National Pedagogical University (Kazakhstan) “The education system is experiencing global changes as well. No matter what we are told about the importance of physical presence at lectures, meetings with teachers and schoolmates, the speed of modern life development together with the rapid development of technology prove the opposite. For instance, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced in February that there are 22 online platforms in the country that provide 24,000 free higher education courses, covering 12 disciplines for bachelors and 18 at the level of higher professional education. Industry experts predict that by 2021 the number of participants in online courses in India will increase to 10 million, with demand for them will be high in both urban and suburban areas, and there is a wealth of examples of successful integration of distance learning in the world. McKinsey predicts that artificial intelligence will replace up to 800 million jobs by 2030. This is a dramatic change in the workforce, and universities can and should help students prepare for it. Entrepreneurship is another area of artificial intelligence, as continuous innovation has become almost the standard in all sectors. For students



to become leaders in the workplace, they must understand the principles of entrepreneurship and how they can synthesize experience and innovation.”

INNOVATIONS IN STUDENT MOBILITY

Academic mobility is the main component of the Central Asian universities’ internationalization strategy. Travel warnings, flight cancellations, visa restrictions, stop of passport issuing services led to the cancellation of summer programs and postponing fall and spring semester programs. The Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan suspended all academic mobility programs for both students and faculty members of all higher education institutions. Furthermore, according to a QS study, only 29% of 11,000 potential international students kept their intention to study abroad, 46% have changed their intentions and 25% have questioned them.²

Central Asian universities are positive of student mobility after the pandemic, predicting future opportunities to recruit, as demand will rise after the crisis subsides. Universities are thinking of new ideas to keep the flow of international students, including the possibility of establishing branch campuses and a shift from destination or travel-based study abroad toward learning abroad in areas that would help them in future. Alumni hold an untapped potential for international student recruitment, and Central Asian institutions are interested in exploring alumni programming in future and international peer mentorship programs that help to ease the adjustment of international students to local environment.



Sabina Nasirova, Assistant of the Pharmacology Department, Bukhara State Medical Institute (Uzbekistan)

“Some summer 2020 education abroad programs are offering virtual internships in which students in the U.S. complete an internship with a host company or organization located abroad. Such practices are expanding the education abroad experience. To be sure, having an online experience differs from an experience in situ. Several years ago, I conducted a study of alumni who studied abroad in which I asked them to recall and describe significant “educational memories” from their time abroad. The most common type of memories were ones that caused anxiety related to confronting difficult, stressful situations of being in a different culture. Alumni reported these types of experiences were still significant in providing meaning to their lives, even decades later. Can virtual education abroad

reproduce these long-lasting effects? We can learn from what we see significantly impacting students and develop ways to replicate it to some degree virtually. While virtual education abroad will never be a substitute for a direct experience abroad, it may be increasingly relied upon to engage students with the structured stresses of effective education abroad programming.

Students could participate in education abroad within the classroom through virtual online experiences that enhance course subject matter. Or a course might be convened jointly with university partners from abroad, offering a global approach and understanding to course topics. Practicing education abroad at home may very well be a new frontier for institutions. Education around the globe should become education about the globe. The drastic reduction in global travel, tourism and education abroad has alerted the world of the adverse environmental footprints that travelers leave. It is also time to take seriously how each student, faculty member and administrator involved in education abroad can offset their environmental footprints. Some institutions and education abroad program providers have developed effective methods for doing this. All programs should adopt these best practices.”

Aigerim Kozhanbergenova, Head of International Cooperation, International Department, Karaganda State Technical University (Kazakhstan) “We have seen the experience in the EU and U.S. about buddy

² <https://www.qs.com/how-is-the-spread-of-the-coronavirus-impacting-prospective-international-students/>

programs that can improve our international student services and provide them virtual resources before they go on campus. We recognize that alumni programs are an essential component for attracting international students.”



Balzhan Amankulova, Head of International Research and Cultural Unit, Kazakh National Pedagogical University (Kazakhstan) “Usually, the first question for future participants of foreign programs is: ‘where, in which country and university, would you like to study?’ It should now be ‘what exactly would you like to study abroad for your successful career?’ Of course, everyone wants to combine the useful with the pleasant – learning with visiting an interesting country. But if a place is ‘pleasant’ and not ‘useful,’ then this is not study, but tourism. According to experts, those providers who focus primarily on organizing training programs, rather than ‘tourist’ student trips, will be least affected by the global crisis. The previous two decades have been a period of explosive growth in international education services. Universities gained access to new educational markets, the best resources

and talents on a global scale, using world rankings to rise higher and beat others. However, according to the British expert Ellen Hazelkorn, relations between active participants in the global higher education space were, rather, transactional in nature and depended on funding from the relevant structures (for example, the European Union), and the income from training foreign students.”

Raya Amirzhanova, Head of International Office, Kazakh National Women’s Teacher Training University “We had a difficult experience bringing home students from Wuhan, France, Poland, and Mississippi. Academic mobility has been a great experience, it led to the development of dual degree programs. Now, we are at home, but we continue with our partnerships as all the higher educational institutions of the world is thinking of its actions in the COVID-19 and after the post-pandemic period. Since March 2020 all the students of the university have been transferred to online and distant forms of education. It was not something new for us, as we had been doing distant education in many programs since 2013. Concerning international education, I believe we shall continue our work with our partners, especially with our strategic partners, with whom we have dual degree programs agreements. Those of our students who are abroad at the moment are taking their classes distantly from their host institutions. In the pandemic period I believe we can continue our cooperation. Moreover, now we are working on our new website to make it attractive to more foreign students from new countries.”



RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Universities across Central Asia supported the distribution of important information about COVID to the communities, including handbooks for disease prevention, regular lectures to the community, faculty and staff participated in international conferences online to gather all up-to-date information. Some even supported their chemistry departments in production of hand sanitizers and other hygienic products for internal use. In additional, charity work has also been performed to help people with COVID-19 and families that suffered from the outcomes of the pandemic. The pandemic situation has in fact allowed researchers to devote more time for their field. Having addressed needs and requirements for blended education already, professors can set aside teaching and pay more attention to research.



Israil Kurbaniyazov, Associate Lecturer, Westminster International University in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) “In the short term, my view regarding research is that more funding and resources will be allocated for research projects that aim to solve problems ranging from educational to institutional. The future of the research will achieve balance between theory and practice as the COVID-19 has shaken up the foundations of many business and policy models that rooted in the previous ages.”

Akhatjon Nasullaev, Vice Rector for International Affairs, Bukhara State Medical Institute “Our immediate task was to provide handbooks for disease prevention, with the goal to inform all in the community. Now, there is lots of demand for special issues focusing on COVID-19 as it provides excellent opportunity for publishing in high-quality journals. There is a challenge in vaccine development in developing countries, so there is an imbalance. We need collaborations with Asian Development Bank and others to identify opportunities and funding.”

Gulrukh Karimova, Doctor, Bukhara State Medical Institute “Our institute publishes preventive work against coronavirus and scientific articles. Regular lectures and explanatory work on this disease are carried out to students and citizens. Employees of our institute, professors and teachers participate online in international conferences and congresses and bring a number of certificates and places. Some individuals are under the control of well-known enterprises, in which the sanitary and epidemiological conditions of the health of employees are studied. In addition, charitable work is regularly carried out for patients with COVID-19 and low-income families who have temporarily stopped working due to this disease. From the first days of coronavirus detection, the team has been discovering new measures, new medical techniques and new methods of every zealous and hard-working employee of our institute is doing everything possible to overcome this harmful catastrophe in the history of mankind.”



Ammar Younas, Senior Lecturer in Commercial Law, Westminster International University in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) “Blended leaning was always been here but underutilized. We need to connect dots to identify the right tools required for successful transition towards online learning. This quarantine period is the best time and opportunity for Social Science scholars to conduct research and to complete their pending projects. Institutions in Uzbekistan are worried about the enrollment of foreign students in Uzbek institutions. Since Uzbekistan has recently started accepting foreign medical students in its medical institutions, I predict that the number of foreign students to study medicine will increase significantly even if the pandemic continues.”



About the Central Asia University Partnerships Program

Funded by the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, the Central Asia University Partnerships Program (UniCEN) is a platform to increase sustainable collaborations between U.S. and Central Asian higher education institutions. UniCEN builds expertise in the areas of strategic planning, administration, faculty policies and practices, student mobility, curriculum development, and alumni relations to advance the development of mutually beneficial partnerships.

Through UniCEN, American Councils for International Education has created a growing network of more than 100 Central Asian universities seeking to improve their knowledge of U.S. higher education practices, increase internationalization, implement action plans for partnerships with U.S. higher education institutions, and collaborate on cross-border projects.

About American Councils for International Education

The world's most successful institutions and determined nations work with American Councils for International Education through cultural exchange, language training, and professional development. Since 1974, our educational portfolio has grown to include 90 countries important to national security, prosperity, and peace. Our programs are backed by thorough research to ensure their quality and integrity. Our participants represent a spectrum of learners, from high school through the postdoctoral and professional level. To date, we have built a community of more than 94,000 alumni, including national leaders, ministers, members of parliament, ambassadors, and CEOs.

American Councils strengthens international ties and mutual understanding through excellence in academic, professional and cultural exchange, language acquisition, educational development, and research. We empower individuals and institutions to address challenges in a diverse and interconnected world.