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The University of Central Asia: Preparing young people in mountainous regions for an undetermined future

Mountainous people in general and especially those in the high mountains of Central Asia have been largely excluded from development. Cities command more facilities for education and health than mountainous regions. Infrastructure is also much better developed in urban areas than in remote mountainous regions. Therefore, there is migration from mountainous regions to the cities for the better economic and social opportunities they offer. To improve the social and economic development and bring prosperity to the mountainous regions there have been several proposals from innovative economic initiatives, development of infrastructure and communication networks, and quality education. While not denying the importance of quality primary and secondary education; quality post-secondary education and continuing professional development is critical to educating young men and women in the region who might not ordinarily have access to higher education. A quality higher education in the mountainous regions would keep young people in the region, help them acquire a deep understanding of the region, give them the knowledge, skills and ability to foster the social and economic development of the region. Thus the idea for the University of Central Asia evolved.

The academic architecture of the University of Central Asia is designed to provide quality post-secondary education to achieve the purposes mentioned above. It begins with a one year preparatory programme to bridge the gap between school and university with an interdisciplinary curriculum, active-participatory teaching methodology, and application of knowledge and skills to real-life. The undergraduate programme is designed with a core curriculum that takes a liberal arts approach, to provide students with a broad knowledge of the world and a focus on a specific area, develop strong transferable intellectual and practical skills, a sense of social responsibility, and the ability to apply learning to the real world. A Co-op education programme in the summer of each year will give students a year of work experience by their graduation.

The academic activities form the core of a student's experience at UCA, but a residential campus with a robust student life programme supports and builds on the academic program. It provides students the opportunities to learn how to live together in a diverse community, how to deal with conflicts, and how to cooperate to ensure their well-being. In short, the skills necessary to carry forward the shared endeavor of working for the development of their peoples and societies.

Finally, how the academic and student life programme prepares young people in mountainous areas for an undetermined future will be discussed.

