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**WORKING PAPER**

**A MODEL FOR TURKMENISTAN**

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## **FOREWORD:**

This is a working preliminary draft of a chapter for my upcoming dissertation. As it is not yet fully complete, I welcome thoughts and suggestions for improvement.

## **IN THANKS:**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

After the fall of the Soviet Union, many newly independent countries of the former nation took initiatives to foster higher education based on Soviet, western,<sup>1</sup> and new local systems. Kyrgyzstan, a former Soviet Central Asian Republic, allowed a U.S. educational model into its system. In 1993, Kyrgyz locals created the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) dedicated to a western approach to education. Located in the capital of Bishkek, AUCA attracts students from across the globe, provides a new type of education, and promotes democratic thought. AUCA has opened up Central Asia to the outside world.

No study has yet identified AUCA's effects on Kyrgyzstan, on its youth, or on Central Asia. Two other studies have looked at student populations specific to other American universities abroad.<sup>2</sup> However, there is little to no research on AUCA in Kyrgyzstan.

This paper has two main goals. First, it will look at the causes of AUCA's successful development in Kyrgyzstan, and second, it will determine whether a similar American-type university can be created in Turkmenistan. To do this, the following sections will be included. First, this paper will look at why AUCA succeeded in Kyrgyzstan, listing such factors as local initiative, timing, funding, financial responsibility, good reputation, innovative curriculum, publicity, a board of trustees, and student involvement.

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<sup>1</sup> Even though western education can include Soviet or Russian styles of education in some contexts, here western education will refer to education based on American or European models.

<sup>2</sup> Helen S. Müller conducted a quantitative investigation concerning alumni from the American University of Beirut. (*See* Müller, H. S. (2004). "The Contribution of Organizational Identification and Induced Reciprocity to Institutional Support and Philanthropy by Expatriate Alumni of an American University Abroad: An Exploratory Theoretical Model." Steinhardt School of Education: New York University, New York.) Müller's study focused on alumni giving as it related to the American University experience in Beirut. Her questions and sampling methodology were very thorough and useful to any similar type research, including this current project. Jeffrey W. Lash led a more qualitative study at the American University in Cairo. (*See* Lash, J.W. (2001). "Exporting Education: The Case of the American University in Cairo." Southwest Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas.)

In a separate section, a brief analysis of the legal structure in place during AUCA's founding will explain how AUCA has worked with the Kyrgyz government and requirements of law. This paper will also briefly mention recent problems faced by AUCA's law department. Finally, the first section of the paper will look at the future of AUCA in Kyrgyzstan and cursory ways in which it can be improved.

In the second section, this paper will explore the need for AUCA in Central Asia with particular focus on students from Turkmenistan. This paper will explain AUCA's current programs specifically targeted at Turkmen<sup>3</sup> students. It will also look at the perceptions of educational progress and opportunity as seen by Turkmen students at AUCA. It will offer suggestions for how an AUCA-type institution could grow in other countries of Central Asia, and it will finish by arguing that an AUCA-type institution will not currently work in Turkmenistan.

## **2. WHY AUCA WORKS**

### **a. LOCAL INITIATIVE/ CAMILLA SHARSHEKEEVA**

To understand AUCA, one must understand the founder – Camilla Sharshekeeva. On interview, Ms. Sharshekeeva gave a very vivid account of AUCA's beginning. “The idea belongs to me... I wanted to have (an education) with positive changes – to increase educational opportunity.”<sup>4</sup> Previously working as an English professor at a Kyrgyz State University, Sharshekeeva's first foreign trip was in 1989 as part of a Soviet delegation to London. “I was shocked to see the level of life Western Europe had. I understood that there's something wrong with what we're doing...”<sup>5</sup> Ms. Sharshekeeva began talking with

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<sup>3</sup> References to “Turkmen” students do not refer to students of only the titular ethnicity. In this paper, “Turkmen” refers to students of Turkmen nationality.

<sup>4</sup> Sharshekeeva, Camilla. Founder of AUCA. Personal Interview. (June 2007) Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

others about her dream and recruiting students. As the first rector John Clark<sup>6</sup> notes, “The way she behaved, she made such an impression (referring to Sharshekeeva).”<sup>7</sup> As AUCA faculty member Chynara Ryskulova states, “Camilla’s personality played a big role. She said, ‘I want to have something different. I will hire the best graduates from St. Petersburg and Moscow.’ She also wrote articles saying that her university would admit only smart students.”<sup>8</sup>

Sharshekeeva’s confidence and strong beliefs attracted students. Clark commented that her previous state university students followed her. “Many of her students had been her English students at the Kyrgyz University.”<sup>9</sup> Ryskulova seconded Clark’s perception. “She (Sharshekeeva) had been working at a Kyrgyz university, and her students followed her and trusted her.”<sup>10</sup>

Much of AUCA’s creation developed out of Ms. Sharshekeeva’s charisma, hard work, and determination to no longer be a part of the corrupt educational system she had known. Ms. Sharshekeeva acknowledged, “You have to struggle a lot and to shed a lot of tears, but we never gave money for anything – it ultimately affects you.”<sup>11</sup> As Rector Clark remarked, the “[e]ssential ingredient was to have a really strong local who knew the society and society knew her. She had a very strong ethical commitment. Once it was known, she found customers.”<sup>12</sup> Ms. Sharshekeeva’s ethical commitment was founded on a belief in academic honesty.<sup>13</sup> As Ryskulova stated, Ms. Sharshekeeva proved her commitment by example. “Camilla showed how to be honest, how to work without bribes, and how to use

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<sup>6</sup> Clark also worked at the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Research (KIMEP) for five years and is now anticipating working with Aga Khan and the new University of Central Asia.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Clark, John. First Rector of AUCA. Personal Interview in June 2007 at AUCA in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>8</sup> Ryskulova, Chynara. Assistant to Vice President for Academic Affairs and Acting Chair of European Studies Program at AUCA. Personal interview. (May 22, 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, John. First Rector of AUCA. Personal Interview. (June 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>10</sup> Ryskulova, *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

TOEFL.”<sup>14</sup> Ms. Sharshekeeva’s employees believed in her fundamental basis of honesty and integrity.

Ms. Sharshekeeva credits some of AUCA’s developmental success to her naïve perceptions. “The institution was also possible due to my naivety and attitude to the US at the time.”<sup>15</sup> This naivety allowed for collaboration between locals and Americans. For example, she and Rector Clark shared an office. “By working together, we could determine what best to do.”<sup>16</sup> Clark stated that their combined spirit of entrepreneurship allowed AUCA to begin and continue. “We’re both (referring to Sharshekeeva and Clark) entrepreneurs.”<sup>17</sup> These entrepreneurial spirits, together with some naivety allowed for AUCA’s development.

AUCA’s staff are proud of the university’s local development. Ryskulova defends AUCA as being a local rather than international initiative and credits that key component as allowing it to work in Central Asia. “We created this university... It wasn’t an American idea – it was Camilla’s idea.”<sup>18</sup> AUCA’s creation was based on the local initiative of Camilla Sharshekeeva.

AUCA’s development is originally Kyrgyz. Begun in 1993, the predecessor of current-day AUCA was the Kyrgyz-American School (KAS) of the Kyrgyz State National University (KSNU).<sup>19</sup> In 1997, the American University in Kyrgyzstan (AUK) was officially founded.<sup>20</sup> The name was changed from American University of Kyrgyzstan to American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in 2002 to reflect the University’s role in the

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<sup>14</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Studio, N. “American University of Central Asia: History of AUCA.” Available at [http://www.auca.kg/search/word/cms\\_page/37.html](http://www.auca.kg/search/word/cms_page/37.html) Last Accessed Sept. 30, 2006.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

development of all of Central Asia.<sup>21</sup> This short time-frame, less than ten years to go from a local initiative to a world-renowned international university, had much to do with the timing of the fall of the Soviet Union and the birth of nationalized Central Asia.

### **b. TIMING**

The old saying goes that timing is everything,<sup>22</sup> and that is none the more appropriate than in the case of AUCA.

*With the independence of the Central Asia countries, it became obvious that to advance into the world of free markets and democracy, Central Asia needed a new generation with a novel understanding of how economic resources, information, and personal freedoms are held and used in an open society.*<sup>23</sup>

As Chynara Ryskulova, faculty at AUCA believes: “The time was a very difficult time, and people were kind of lost.”<sup>24</sup> The creation of AUCA came right at this critical juncture.

Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz public and government were open to new institutions like AUCA.

### **c. FUNDING**

The end of the Soviet Union marked a time of substantial investment in former Soviet states by the Western world. AUCA began as a three-way partnership between Kyrgyzstan, the United States Department of State, and the Open Society Institute which signed a memorandum of understanding, agreeing to provide support for the young university.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Quote attributed to American musician Tommy Shaw. Available at: [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/tommy\\_shaw.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/t/tommy_shaw.html) Last accessed July 14, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Studio, N. *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Studio, N. *Ibid.*



Since then, AUCA also received support from the Eurasia Foundation and the local business community.<sup>26</sup> Rushed by the fall of the Soviet Union, those initial granting institutions were all very interested in the development of civil society, the rule of law, and increased cooperation in Central Asia. AUCA offered a venue for that type of investment.

Outside donors were impressed with AUCA's lack of bribery and corruption. Some of that is due to the first rector, Rector Clark's initial financial model which was, "Charge a healthy tuition and give scholarships." All students had to invest themselves in their education. "All students had to pay something however. Nobody ever went completely free (expect for maybe the first year.)"<sup>27</sup> Yearly tuition prices were charged in a country that had previously only known public, free education. "Students were charged \$500 the first year, \$725 the second and third years, \$900 the next, and \$1,200 by 1996. \$100 more added every future year."<sup>28</sup> By this method, students were invested in their education.

Clark thought that financial responsibility was key to developing AUCA. He believed that "[w]e should always be able to cover our basic expenses." Clark made AUCA self-sustainable. "The subsidies help, but you have to be able to cover for a couple years if a donor pulls the rug out from under you."<sup>29</sup> While the financial model has not stayed exactly the same, the initial investment made both by outside donors and locals interested in an AUCA education allowed for the university's financial stability. The tuition charges allowed AUCA to be self-sustainable.

AUCA is sponsored by the Aga Khan Development Network, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, the Eurasian University, the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and

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<sup>26</sup> Studio, N. *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

Strategic Research and many others.<sup>30</sup> At least up to the year 2000, the Soros Foundation provided the most significant funding.<sup>31</sup> Major technical support contributions of more than \$20 million each were given by Germany (21% of total), the Soros Foundation (12%), Turkey (11%) and the UN system (10%).<sup>32</sup> Recent investment includes the Soros Foundation's creation of the future AUCA Dormitory and Conference Center.<sup>33</sup>

Today, many students receive financial aid, specifically from outside donors. For example, the Open Society Institute provides Higher Education Support Program (HESP) scholarships for Turkmen students to AUCA and the US Embassy provides Turkmen students with the Turkmenistan AUCA Scholarship Program (TASP). Beshimov, Vice President for Academic Affairs at AUCA, noted that 71% of students at AUCA get financial aid. The university, along with HESP, TASP, and German initiatives provide this sponsorship.<sup>34</sup> While the scholarship programs continue, development projects still require outside investment.<sup>35</sup> In the beginning however, AUCA succeeded because its leadership wanted the university to be as financially independent as possible. This determination to achieve financial security allowed AUCA to become self-sustainable.

#### **d. FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

Financial responsibility also allowed AUCA to succeed. One of the ways to guarantee financial responsibility was to look to an outside, established, and accountable location for management. For Clark and Sharshekeeva, that outside manager was Indiana

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<sup>30</sup> Programme, U.N.D. (2005). Central Asia Human Development Report: Bringing Down Barriers: Regional Cooperation for Human Development and Human Security. Pg. 152. Bratislava, Slovak Republic. UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

<sup>31</sup> Browne, S. (2003). Developing Capacity Through Technical Cooperation: Country Experiences. Pg. 106. New York, NY: Earthscan Publications, Ltd.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Studio, N. *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Beshimov, Bakyt. Vice President for Academic Affairs at AUCA. Personal Interview. (June 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, *Ibid.*

University. Sharshekeeva noted that she felt more comfortable having AUCA's funds in a safe location, and the decision was made to have AUCA's funds managed at Indiana University rather than locally. "Where money is out of hands, in Indiana, it makes everyone more comfortable." This move coincided with Sharshekeeva's general belief in transparency. For example, SOROS sent an auditor at one point, and Sharshekeeva was pleased to report that the auditor was satisfied with AUCA's accounting.<sup>36</sup> Sharshekeeva prides the institution in its commitment to financial responsibility, and this commitment has served AUCA successfully.

The Indiana- AUCA financial management connection has continued. "In 2002, USAID approached IU with a request to manage an endowment for AUCA."<sup>37</sup> On April 13, 2005, Indiana University continued its commitment by accepting a \$15 million grant for an AUCA endowment fund to be supported by USAID and the Open Society Institute.<sup>38</sup> In this way, AUCA's worries for financial accountability are satisfied.

#### **e. GOOD REPUTATION**

Financial accountability connected to a general notion that AUCA should not permit bribery or corruption within its walls. During Soviet times, corruption practices existed in higher education. As Ryskulova contended, "This university is different. (In other universities) if you fail a course, you can retake the exam. If you come with your relative, you can even get a diploma with honors. Here, students are not allowed to re-take the exam – you can only re-take the course."<sup>39</sup> AUCA soon stood out to the public. "People (were)

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<sup>36</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> "Indiana University News Release: IU to use \$15 million grant to establish endowment for American University of Central Asia." Available at <http://newsinfo.iu.edu/news/page/print/2079.html> Last accessed July 14, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

shocked when students were dismissed for copying and plagiarism.”<sup>40</sup> By setting these standards early and by sticking to them, the university devoted itself to an academic standard different from the Soviet standard, and in the process, created a good reputation.

Transparency and honesty were also key mandates for Rector Clark. “(For me) I always tried to be truthful and up-front with people as to what I was doing and why. It allowed people to understand – total transparency.”<sup>41</sup> As Clark noted, complete academic honesty was key to building AUCA. “It wouldn’t work if everybody didn’t try to keep this university free of corruption. For example, if a faculty’s child was involved, that faculty couldn’t participate. Somehow we managed to start this academic freedom and honesty.”<sup>42</sup>

A good reputation increased students’ interest. John Clark reminisced on the incredulity of potential students to AUCA. “People would ask if it’s true that there was no bribery. I said, ‘Don’t ask me. Grab one of our students and ask them when I’m not around.’ Then people would say, ‘Okay, then I’m coming.’ Other people would go away for a half hour and then come back.”<sup>43</sup> AUCA’s commitment to academic honesty instilled an incentive for students to work hard rather than finding a way around the system. “Here, school is connected with academic achievement of the student. If you study well, you could get less to pay – this encourages parents to encourage their students.”<sup>44</sup> In this way, a good reputation not only helped AUCA but also helped to create more devoted student applicants.

To AUCA’s administration, academic honesty was not enough. A good reputation also meant that the university have a good physical appearance. As Ryskulova noted, “...AUCA doesn’t smell like other universities...(referring to having bathrooms and a clean building) She (Camilla) encouraged us to pay attention in everything.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Clark, *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Good reputation connected to having good faculty. From the beginning, AUCA did its best to attract and keep good faculty. Ryskulova commented, “It was a good team – people encouraged us to work by a good salary... I realized this was a good place for professional development research and publication. It encouraged and still encourages development.”<sup>46</sup>

Compared to local competitors such as the Russian Slavonic University or the Turkish Manas University, Ryskulova believed that AUCA has the best reputation of any university in Kyrgyzstan. “We hear AUCA is the best.”<sup>47</sup> Ryskulova cited technology as one reason for the public perception of excellence. “AUCA has 400 computers for 1,000 students – proportionally better.”<sup>48</sup> It is these facts which have enhanced AUCA’s good reputation.

#### **f. INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM**

AUCA grew due to its innovative curriculum. New thoughts and new teaching methods created a desire to learn in new ways which AUCA could provide. Ms. Sharshekeeva wanted content to be re-focused away from the government’s influence and into developing thinking in people.<sup>49</sup> To do this, Sharshekeeva looked to the US for developing course content, an example being a syllabi workshop put on by the Nebraska-Lincoln University Fulbright professors.<sup>50</sup> By looking to outside models for curricular innovation, Sharshekeeva encouraged faculty innovation.

Other universities in Central Asia have looked to AUCA as a model of educational innovation. For example, AUCA’s Student Affairs program has proven helpful to other universities in Kyrgyzstan. Nikolay Shulgin, Dean of Students at AUCA remarked, “Two

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Sharshekeeva. *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

students from Slavonic university were asked how they resolved conflicts between students and teachers. They used the AUCA code I had distributed to other universities.” Shulgin has also encouraged other universities to engage in orientation activities as a yearly practice. For a conference in May of 2007, Shulgin said, “I encouraged other universities (in Kyrgyzstan) to have orientation as well. I hope other universities take our experience.”<sup>51</sup> By creating these innovative avenues for academic growth and university enhancement, AUCA outdistanced other Kyrgyz universities, and in the process, provided a forum for improvement to the other competing universities in Kyrgyzstan.

**g. PUBLICITY**

Clark said that AUCA succeeded due to good, strategic publicity. “We (Clark and Sharshekeeva) both instinctively new, as entrepreneurs, that we need publicity. We were publicity-hounds. We’d say something nice about the President whenever we got any press... It worked.”<sup>52</sup> Positive publicity furthered AUCA’s development.

**h. BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Another key success of the American University was divorcing higher education from government control through creating a Board of Trustees to oversee the university. During Soviet times, the government controlled higher education.<sup>53</sup> At AUCA, a twelve-member board of directors is charged with oversight.<sup>54</sup> Sharshekeeva labored endlessly to achieve this task. “It took one and a half years to convince the President to create the Board of Trustees – independent from the government.” This independence separated the university both from government interference and from typical perceptions of how universities function

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<sup>51</sup> Shulgin, Nikolay. Dean of Students at AUCA. Personal Interview. (May 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>52</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Sharshekeeva. *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> “American University of Central Asia: Board of Trustees.” Available at: [http://www.auca.kg/about/trustees\\_board](http://www.auca.kg/about/trustees_board) Last accessed July 14, 2007.

in Kyrgyzstan. Sharshekeeva noted that the Board of Trustees was a “big accomplishment.”<sup>55</sup>

### **i. STUDENT INVOLVEMENT**

The greatest marker for AUCA’s achievements is its students. Employment is key. “Students here are encouraged to get out in the workforce – our students have to compete with other university students.”<sup>56</sup> As an overall perception, AUCA’s students compete well, and most find employment quickly.

Generally, AUCA offers a great means for student-professor interaction. Ryskulova notes the general atmosphere where “students have access to all of their professors. Where lectures are Soviet-style, you don’t have access to the professors. Students have access to student resources.”<sup>57</sup>

Nikolay Shulgin is Dean of Students at AUCA. After 11 years of work at AUCA, Shulgin commented on AUCA’s peculiar brand of teacher-student interaction. “Methods are different in this office compared to other universities. Distance between me and students is shorter than between my position and students in Slavonic University.”<sup>58</sup> AUCA has put considerable investment into making sure students feel connected. As Shulgin continued, “Eight years ago, student affairs office was only one person; now it’s seven people.”<sup>59</sup> Shulgin noted the growing popularity of activities such as American football, theater, literature club, and the student newspaper “Star” which is slated to increase from two issues per year to an issue every two weeks in the 2007-2008 school year.<sup>60</sup> As Ryskulova noted,

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<sup>55</sup> Sharshekeeva. *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Clark, *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Shulgin. *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

“Students are also kind of proud – they struggle to support it (AUCA). It’s a different spirit.”<sup>61</sup> Encouraging student involvement at AUCA makes the university succeed.

### **3. WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT**

AUCA’s leadership worked well with governments. One of the reasons AUCA could succeed was due to positive interest and support coming from the highest levels of both Kyrgyz and American government. John Clark noted that one of the key moments at AUCA was a visit from then-US vice-president Al Gore. “Al Gore came through in December 1993 for the KAF grand opening, even though classes had started in September. Gore found about half a million dollars (for KAF).”<sup>62</sup> When KAF became AUK, more politicians found occasion for attendance. AUK’s official 1997 opening included then-President Akaev and the First Lady of the United States, Hillary Clinton, who addressed the students and public.<sup>63</sup>

AUCA worked to get all of the necessary Kyrgyz government paperwork to function in Kyrgyzstan. Ryskulova noted that AUCA has passed all of the government requirements to be an institution in Kyrgyzstan including a registered charter, an executive decree, a license, and attestation from the Ministry of Education which each have to be renewed every five years.<sup>64</sup> Ryskulova also commented that AUCA is planning to get US accreditation in the future.<sup>65</sup>

Government support has not always been so easy for AUCA to attain. At AUCA’s beginning in 1993, the Kyrgyz government had virtually no laws on education and initiatives could be taken willy-nilly. Clark noted that instead of having laws or legal structure as enablers for AUCA, the lack of laws or legal structure actually allowed AUCA to begin.

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<sup>61</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Studio, N. *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Ryskulova, *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*



“Fortunately, we took advantage of the chaos – if you said ‘We’re doing this,’ ... (then you could do it)”<sup>66</sup>

As things settled down however, AUCA did face some problems with the government. Clark recalled, “In 1996, faculty said that they were going to leave KAF and become AUK. Rector got furious at national university, and he became Minister of Education. He cancelled all licenses from 1997-1999, but he never came to shut us down.”<sup>67</sup> In this bizarre incident based more on personal emotions than reasons, the Minister of Education would not give AUCA a license to operate. Personal suavity rather than law seemed to help the situation calm. As Clark reminisced, “Until 1999, we didn’t have licenses. We couldn’t get state diplomas, so Camilla just called up Akayev (then Kyrgyzstan’s president) and asked him for diplomas. We got them.”<sup>68</sup> Again, the lack of laws or legal structure worked to AUCA’s advantage.

Sharshekeeva also noted that working with the local government was critical, but bribery was never involved. It was simply important to communicate. “Quarreling with the government won’t work. We were on good terms with the government and tried to be rather diplomatic.”<sup>69</sup> To this end, Sharshekeeva noted that relations with President Akayev were good, and Akayev did much to forward higher education policy. “Akayev – he agreed to some revolutionary things – he worked within the Communist Party (in the past), and he still agreed.”<sup>70</sup>

Bakyt Beshimov, the Vice President for Academic Affairs at AUCA spoke candidly about AUCA’s relationship with the Kyrgyz government in more recent years. Beshimov noted that AUCA’s relationship with the government is “mostly positive... However, (b)y inertia, they (the ministry of education) are thinking that the government should control

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<sup>66</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Sharshekeeva, *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

everything.”<sup>71</sup> This type of system harkens back to the Soviet top-down understanding of how government should interact with the people. Nonetheless, Beshimov thought Kyrgyzstan’s previous government allowed AUCA to grow. “(Akayev’s) government diversified approach, so we can get different models of higher education.”<sup>72</sup> It remains to be seen what the new leadership of Bakiyev will do.

**a. RECENT PROBLEMS FACED BY AUCA’S LAW DEPARTMENT**

Although AUCA has retained an overall good relationship with Kyrgyzstan’s government, it has not avoided all problems. For example, AUCA’s law department has faced some difficulties in working with the government. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education recalled the license of AUCA’s law department.”<sup>73</sup> Elida Nogoibaeva has worked as a law professor at AUCA since 1999. She commented on her perception as to the origin of the problem. “In 2004 a new curriculum was approved. 1 ½ years later, a commission... (said that AUCA’s law program) wasn’t following state standards, so it might lose its license.”<sup>74</sup> The commission believed government course requirements were not being adhered to. For example, the Ministry of Education insisted on criminalistics, a course of study not offered at AUCA.<sup>75</sup> The law department vigorously defended itself claiming that the commission’s membership was illegal and that the commission did not have any legal basis for recalling the AUCA law department’s license.<sup>76</sup> Nogoibaeva recalled, “We started to analyze legislation and found that it was not necessary to follow 100% -- only 60% correlation was required to be followed.”<sup>77</sup> As state legal standards were not violated,

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<sup>71</sup> Beshimov, *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> “Information Letter About the Recalling of the License From the Law Department of AUCA.” Available from Elida Nogoibaeva, Law Professor at the American University of Central Asia.

<sup>74</sup> Nogoibaeva, Elida. Law Professor at AUCA. Personal interview. (May 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> “Information Letter About the Recalling of the License From the Law Department of AUCA.” *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Nogoibaeva. *Ibid.*

AUCA's law department eventually won back its licensed status. However, this incident is important as a pertinent example showing that Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Education still retains some hold over AUCA.

#### **4. FUTURE OF AUCA AND BASIC IMPROVEMENT**

Based on its success, AUCA is posing itself to develop into the next decade. First, AUCA's president, Ellen Hurwitz, has set out six strategic issues for planning AUCA's development over the next five to ten years: "(1) academic excellence; (2) research; (3) internationalization; (4) civic responsibility; (5) core values; (6) financial planning."<sup>78</sup> AUCA has also created a strategic plan for international development up to 2012 including providing equal and broad access for AUCA students "to international academic, educational and research projects and programs as well as broadening opportunities for their study in including lading foreign universities."<sup>79</sup> Part of that goal is "[t]o support actual contacts with Universities, International Organizations, and etc, and to develop new ones on making Contracts on mutual co-ordination on students (sic) exchange programs."<sup>80</sup> In other words, extensive contact will be made in connecting AUCA to the outside world.

Ellen Hurwitz said that the university is discussing the creation of a "new core curriculum with a MA in Economics. The university is also hoping to build a dorm and enhance space."<sup>81</sup> Enrollment might slightly increase as well. Currently, total enrollment is about 1200, with estimates of maybe 100 or so more in the future.<sup>82</sup>

To understand AUCA's future in Kyrgyzstan, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Bakyt Beshimov noted an emphasis on relations with governments and international donors.

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<sup>78</sup> "President's Address." March 28, 2007. Available at: <http://www.auca.kg/forum/index.php?showtopic=13> Last Accessed May 18, 2007.

<sup>79</sup> "Strategic Plan of AUCA Internationalization Development up to 2012." Available at <http://www.auca.kg/forum/index.php?showtopic=16> Last Accessed May 18, 2007.

<sup>80</sup> "Strategic Plan of AUCA Internationalization Development up to 2012." *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Hurwitz, Ellen. President of AUCA. Personal Interview. (May 18, 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>82</sup> Hurwitz. *Ibid.*

AUCA currently maintains good relations with the U.S. and SOROS. “(The) US embassy has a good approach. It’s started mentoring programs. Also, SOROS has a very constructive relationship – positive. SOROS is strengthening the preparatory program with \$1 million.”<sup>83</sup> In regards to the Kyrgyz government: “We have to be flexible, patient, and yet consistent with explaining. The American University is a guest of Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>84</sup>

AUCA is currently not accredited, but Beshimov hopes it will be soon. “We have to do many things – we still have the best reputation, but we have to improve teaching – not yet ready.”<sup>85</sup> In that vein, AUCA’s faculty will receive attention. Hurwitz clearly stated that the goal is not to bring only American faculty to Central Asia. Instead, the goal is “to build capacity among Western-trained indigenous faculty.”<sup>86</sup> If indigenous faculty can help to attain accreditation for AUCA, AUCA’s administration will have achieved its goals.

Asked for her opinion on the future of AUCA, Ryskulova noted: “It (AUCA) will be dependent (on outside donors) now, but eventually alumni and business donors will help. In the future, it will be the best university of all Central Asia.”<sup>87</sup> While not perhaps yet the premier institution in all of Central Asia, the general perception is that AUCA is ahead of other universities in Kyrgyzstan. “None compete. (AUCA) is far ahead in terms of the system with the Bologna accreditation process. We’re on the right track. Other universities are struggling with how to do the credit system.”<sup>88</sup>

There are still areas in which AUCA can improve. Myrza Karimov of USAID in Kyrgyzstan offered his thoughts. Karimov thought AUCA should have more joint conferences and seminars.<sup>89</sup> “This university should be more open to the whole country and be a model for the region... AUCA should do more to foster exchange between other

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<sup>83</sup> Beshimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Hurwitz. *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Ryskulova. *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Karimov, Myrza. USAID Employee. Personal Interview. (June 6, 2007.) Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

universities outside of the capital.”<sup>90</sup> In addition, Karimov also pointed out that in a society used to public education, private costs still do not always make sense. “AUCA is not always accountable – the \$2,000 tuition isn’t understood.”<sup>91</sup> Karimov believed that AUCA should be more creative with its class offerings and faculty . “(AUCA) [s]hould offer part-time possibilities, and AUCA should offer summer and evening classes to allow other locals to teach here. Put people in the class who have experience – such as local bankers and businessmen.”<sup>92</sup> Karimov’s perceptions show development areas AUCA’s administration could explore.

Samat Azibayev is a fourth year law student at the Slavonic University of Kyrgyz nationality and originally from Kyrgyzstan.<sup>93</sup> Azibayev commented on perceptions of the American University. “Some people are afraid of it. Some don’t know anything about it. As an observer, I can see that people are afraid of America; there’s some people saying let them (the American University) go.”<sup>94</sup> If Azibayev is correct, AUCA is not necessarily perceived as highly by the Kyrgyz public as AUCA’s faculty believe.

## **5. CAN AN AUCA BE CREATED IN TURKMENISTAN?**

### **a. THE NEED FOR AUCA WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON TURKMEN STUDENTS**

Education was one of the most positive outcomes of the Soviet system. The Soviets provided a centralized educational policy, unified curricula, and an integrated tertiary system previously unavailable to citizens.<sup>95</sup> This collapsed with the fall of the Soviet Union. “Since independence, each nation has started developing its own model of education, with a

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<sup>90</sup> Karimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Karimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Karimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Azibayev, Samat. Fourth year law student at Slavonic University in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Personal Interview. (May 2007) Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>94</sup> Azibayev. *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Programme, U.N.D. (2005). *Ibid.* p. 149.

widening divergence in education reforms attributable to differences in social openness and progress on the transformation to a market economy.”<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, most of those changes have been for the worse, specifically for Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan’s government, led by Saparmurat Niyazov from 1991 to December of 2006, has destroyed education. Niyazov reduced primary and secondary education from eleven to nine years. He also limited university education from a system requiring four or five years of education to include only two years of study and two years of practical experience. Finally, his university admission policy virtually only admitted students of Turkmen ethnicity. With these reforms, Niyazov’s educational system has potentially lost a generation of students. However, in December of 2006, Niyazov passed away. His successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, has promised to create significant and far-reaching educational reforms. However, these reforms will take time, and the effects will be unknown for quite a few years.

During Niyazov’s reign and to the present, many students from Turkmenistan went outside of the country to attain a higher education. Many of the most determined students from Turkmenistan looked and are looking at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA).<sup>97</sup> AUCA is recognized as an alternative to Turkmenistan’s deteriorating educational system for many reasons. At AUCA, graduates obtain both an American diploma and a diploma from the Kyrgyz Education Ministry. In addition, students have opportunities outside Turkmenistan they might not otherwise have had. “Today AUCA graduates from Turkmenistan continue their studies at universities abroad and work in prestigious positions in the CIS states.”<sup>98</sup> Most importantly, Turkmenistan’s minority students who do not speak the titular language of Turkmen can gain access to AUCA as an

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* p. 149.

<sup>97</sup> Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative. Issue 56 / September 10, 2004. “Kyrgyz Universities Attract Turkmen Youth; Employment back in Turkmenistan Uncertain.” Original Title: “Kyrgyz are Willing to Go to Kyrgyzstan; So are Turkmen” Last Accessed Oct. 1, 2006.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

English and Russian speaking institution whereas, in Turkmenistan, they are effectively cut off from university education.

It is difficult for Turkmen students to gain admission to AUCA. As Niyazov reduced primary and secondary education to nine years, it effectively ensured that no students would be accepted outside of Turkmenistan. Since 2004, Kyrgyzstan has not accepted “certificates proving the completion of nine-years of secondary education in Turkmenistan; thus refusing Turkmen school graduates entry to Kyrgyz universities.”<sup>99</sup> AUCA has dealt with this problem by encouraging students to pursue an additional year of alternative schooling. AUCA has also created a one-year college preparatory program at Bishkek. If accepted, students from Turkmenistan are ensured of proper preparation for university. Despite these programs, even the most determined Turkmen student must be slightly dismayed at the inter-country obstacles placed in front of his or her higher education goals.

Niyazov’s government did nothing to encourage better educational relations with Kyrgyzstan as it adopted a policy of educational non-reciprocity. “Kyrgyz diplomas, gained after 1993, are considered invalid on Turkmen territory.”<sup>100</sup> Therefore, trying to attain a superior education in Kyrgyzstan may leave Turkmen students unemployable in their home country.

#### **b. AUCA’S PROGRAMS TARGETED AT TURKMEN STUDENTS**

The U.S. State Department, SOROS, and AUCA are active in trying to provide Turkmenistan’s students an opportunity at higher education. Two of the main sponsorship programs are called HESP (Higher Education Support Program), sponsored by the Open Society Institute and TASP (Turkmenistan AUCA Scholarship Program), sponsored by the U.S. State Department.

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Kimberly Verkuilen is ACCELS director in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and oversees administration of many exchange programs, specifically to America or sponsored by the U.S. embassy at AUCA. Verkuilen noted that there are 60 total students on TASP from Turkmenistan at AUCA.<sup>101</sup> She also noted that “HESP is administered by OSI. HESP used to be just for Turkmenistan. Now, it’s available to all students which gives students from Turkmenistan more competition.”<sup>102</sup>

Verkuillen noted that the 2007 graduating class is very important. “This is the first year of a full graduating class for TASP. Only two graduates before this (graduated on different schedules from AUCA). Both of those two went on for graduate work.”<sup>103</sup> So far, Verkuillen is impressed with the TASP students. She stated that their cumulative AUCA GPA is 3.75. “One student of this year’s class is valedictorian, and another Turkmenistan student is President of the Student Senate.”<sup>104</sup> Turkmenistan’s sponsored students are doing well at AUCA.

In addition to the general four-year TASP and HESP programs, preparatory programming at AUCA is also available for students from Turkmenistan. Stemming from a SOROS idea,<sup>105</sup> the U.S. State Department also provides preparatory programs for high school students from Turkmenistan who want to attend AUCA. This extra year of learning is required by Kyrgyzstan where Turkmenistan’s nine years of general education is not acceptable. The preparatory programs accepts students between the ages of 17 and 24 years old from Turkmenistan.<sup>106</sup> Soltanat Baisalova works with the preparatory students. She said that in the 2006-2007 school year, 14 students from Turkmenistan attended a private school

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<sup>101</sup> Verkuillen, Kimberly. ACCELS Director for Kyrgyzstan. Personal Interview. (May 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> Baisalova, Soltanat. AUCA Preparatory Year Teacher. Personal Interview. (May 20, 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*



giving one more year of education in Kyrgyzstan. Next year those students will go on to preparatory, so they have a total of two years more of general education. An additional six students from Turkmenistan are on a one year preparatory program.<sup>107</sup>

Baisalova noted that within AUCA's preparatory program, there are also Chinese, Afghanis, Uzbeks, and Koreans.<sup>108</sup> She stated that 108 students graduated from the preparatory program in 2007.<sup>109</sup> Despite having approximately 100 students in the preparatory program, Turkmenistan usually has a higher number of applications. Therefore, the chances for Turkmen students to be accepted is lower percentage-wise. For this fall, from 100 Turkmen applicants, only 10 students will be chosen.<sup>110</sup><sup>111</sup> Baisalova compared success of the students from Turkmenistan to other populations. "Maybe 80% to 90% of preparatory program students enter AUCA. Maybe 95% of Turkmenistan students enter. They are good students because we choose the best applicants."<sup>112</sup> Therefore, while competition for a seat in the preparatory program is fierce, Turkmen students show an excellent percentage rate of moving on to AUCA as full students.

## **6. PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TURKMENISTAN'S EDUCATIONAL CHANGES FROM AUCA STUDENTS**

Following the loss of President Niyazov, AUCA students from Turkmenistan are hopeful for the possibilities of educational reform under Berdymukhammedov. Talking with Turkmen students at AUCA,<sup>113</sup> most conveyed a sense of optimism concerning what reforms Berdymukhammedov is making. However, a given student's perception of the situation

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Support for the preparatory programs is increasing. Baisalova said that next year's total class will be about the same size, but in the next two years, maybe about 500 total students will be in the preparatory program. The program might even be expanded to include a new preparatory program. (Baisalova, Baisalova. AUCA Preparatory Year Teacher. Personal Interview. (May 20, 2007). Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>112</sup> Baisalova. *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Based on perceptions from speaking with students from Turkmenistan at AUCA from May-June 2007.

varied widely dependent on his or her ethnicity. For example, students of Turkmen ethnicity were likely to find the changes encouraging. They were more likely to think about pursuing employment back in Turkmenistan than they were even a few years ago.<sup>114</sup>

While students of non-Turkmen ethnicity also welcome Berdymukhammedov's changes, only some think they will return to Turkmenistan for employment. That is, many students from Turkmenistan of Russian or other ethnic backgrounds recognize that Turkmenistan still does not offer them much of a future.<sup>115</sup>

Nikolay Shulgin, Dean of Students at AUCA seconded the perception that only some of Turkmenistan's students are choosing to go back to Turkmenistan. Shulgin noted that "[f]or Turkmenistan students, half of them are going to go back to Turkmenistan, and half try to find another way – to work here, etc. They taste the air of independence here. If they are going to go back, I don't know what they are going to do there..."<sup>116</sup>

When asked as to where TASP graduates go, Verkuillen of ACCELS stated, "As TASP stands, students need to go back to do a summer program. However, there is no clause for after graduation. We just asked around a little bit, and it sounded like none (of this year's graduating class) are going back to Turkmenistan."<sup>117</sup> Ideally, Turkmen students will use what they learned back in their home country. As Verkuillen commented, "My impression is that the US Embassy expects that the kids come back for two years as under a J-1 visa. The Embassy of Turkmenistan might have a different perspective. The idea is that they'll come back someday."<sup>118</sup> As Verkuillen mentioned, instead of returning to Turkmenistan, many TASP and other AUCA graduates go on for graduate study.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Shulgin. *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Verkuillen. *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

Overall, Turkmenistan's students at AUCA believe in Berdymukhammedov's reforms and have a new-found pride in their country. Turkmen who find Berdymukhammedov's changes inspiring enough to return home to are mainly those of Turkmen ethnicity. It will take more time and reforms to encourage those not of Turkmen ethnicity that their motherland can offer than new opportunity.

## **7. TIME FOR AN AUCA-TYPE UNIVERSITY IN TURKMENISTAN?**

Turkmenistan's students need education. Within the first few months of his tenure, Berdymukhammedov welcomed the addition of faculties from Russian universities in Ashgabat.<sup>120</sup> With Berdymukhammedov's new leadership, there might be an opening to create a Western-style institution of higher learning in Turkmenistan. Some wonder whether AUCA could be that model.

### **a. STEPS TO RE-CREATE ANOTHER AUCA**

Ms. Sharshekeeva believes that reproducing an American University somewhere else requires a very special mix. For example, to have a similar university in Turkmenistan – “It's important that a Turkmenistan citizen has to become obsessed with it. Most importantly, (you) need someone who understands that it needs to be improved and that person needs to have a lot of patience and tolerance.”<sup>121</sup>

Clark said that certain things would have to be in place for an American University to work in Turkmenistan. “If you can locate such a person, then maybe you can make it work. The Ministry must also let it free. Also, you need someone from the foreign side who is willing to come in and try to understand.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Khanekov, Rahman. Peace Corps Turkmenistan. E-mailed Answers. (May 24, 2007.)

<sup>121</sup> Sharshekeeva. *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Clark. *Ibid.*

If it is possible to create another American University in Turkmenistan or elsewhere in Central Asia, Sharshekeeva noted three primary steps which must be taken.

1<sup>st</sup> Step – Person with vision from among Turkmenistan’s people. It must be a leader who can communicate the vision.<sup>123</sup>

2<sup>nd</sup> Step – Talk with the local government. I didn’t know that the government should work for you. In my case, I very often would not act with the US embassy. Find someone in the government who understands.<sup>124</sup>

3<sup>rd</sup> Step – Exposure to what you’re looking at. Exposure to ideas. When I saw that students would get bad marks in Western schools, I asked why? Also, try to understand your own system. It’s important that this local person has patience and tolerance to look at those things and make arguments on how to do it.<sup>125</sup>

#### **b. WHY IT WON’T WORK**

Despite advice from Sharshekeeva and Clark, At this time, an American University cannot work in Turkmenistan. Here, I will give the reasons for what it is about the American University that works in Kyrgyzstan which cannot currently be replicated in Turkmenistan.

First, and most important, is local initiative. Kyrgyzstan had a local, Camilla Sharshekeeva, who, backed by her friends and students, had a dream and took the initiative herself to make it happen.

Second, the Kyrgyz government reaction did not stop new initiatives. The government did not stop the fledgling university either and instead allowed a local to push for something new.

Third, culture. Kyrgyzstan has more leeway in its hierarchical structure than Turkmenistan. Kyrgyzstan exhibits a somewhat less formal culture in terms of dress, dating, and life in general. As Beshimov compares, “Kyrgyzstan is more open with freedom of

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<sup>123</sup> Sharshekeeva. *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

liberty. We have a ‘Don’t Touch Me’ motto in Kyrgyzstan.”<sup>126</sup> Cultural differences are especially noticeable in politics and understandings of power division.

Fourth, timing. Sharshkeeva’s initiative came right at the fall of the Soviet Union. People were open to new ideas, and the West was open to working on new initiatives.

Fifth, donor support. Kyrgyzstan could accept funds from donors like SOROS.

Sixth, donor fatigue. At the fall of the Soviet Union, the West showed very little, if any, donor fatigue in its push to open up the East. Westerners were excited and willing to invest in the former Soviet Union.

These six reasons all helped AUCA to begin in Kyrgyzstan. However, none of these six critical elements are evident in Turkmenistan, save for the opportunity of good timing.<sup>127</sup>

First, in Turkmenistan, there is no local person with the same influence and drive in Turkmenistan, who would be willing to risk everything for the sake of an American University. It might happen that someone surprising arises or that Turkmenistan’s education minister, Hydry Saparlyyev, will show increased initiative, but it is unlikely as a local has not yet risen to the occasion.

Second, Turkmenistan’s government reaction is likely to stop new initiatives out of habit and fear. This is directly tied to the third variable, culture. Turkmenistan’s culture exhibits extreme bureaucratic tendencies. In this top-down, totalitarian-type system, all levels of government will be unwilling to give their “stamps” of approval or permission for anything unless it comes from the very top. This will inhibit everything from acquiring land, to obtaining electricity, to hiring teachers, to getting foreigners into the country, to setting admissions, and even to enrolling students.

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<sup>126</sup> Beshimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> The previous factors listed in “Section 2: Why AUCA Works,” such as innovative curriculum, student involvement, and good reputation are not pertinent until an institution has basic backing to begin. Therefore, they will not be covered in this section.

Fourth, timing. AUCA grew out of the fall of the Soviet Union. Niyazov's death might indicate a similar period closure and the opening to new ideas in Turkmenistan. There is a small flicker of hope with Berdymukhammedov's recent educational reforms that now is the key moment for Western involvement in Turkmenistan's educational system. However, there is still one critical problem with timing. AUCA started with the fall of the Soviet Union, when many people were looking west for the answers. This changing of the guard is the direct opposite. This time, Berdymukhammedov is looking back to Russia for the answers in the form of opening a Russian university.<sup>128</sup> While Berdymukhammedov is opening Turkmenistan, he is not opening to the west.

Related to Turkmenistan's timing dilemma is the problem of what types of education are needed. AUCA wanted to create thinkers. Perhaps Berdymukhammedov wants to create workers. Beshimov of AUCA noted, "Turkmenistan... can't jump forward too quickly. We need to fill the gap with qualified manpower – (Turkmenistan) needs capable and talented manpower..."<sup>129</sup> Therefore, AUCA's liberal arts model might not be correctly timed for Turkmenistan's educational needs. A more technically-based education might best suit the population's needs in the immediate future.

Fifth, donor support. One of the critical donors to Kyrgyzstan's AUCA was the SOROS foundation. It continues to be a large funder and will be foreseeably into the future. However, Niyazov's government prohibited Turkmenistan from having anything to do with SOROS.<sup>130</sup> This policy is unlikely to change as Turkmenistan's Berdymukhammedov has yet to announce any modifications to the current policy on NGOs in Turkmenistan. Therefore, an AUCA in Turkmenistan would have to scramble to find other sources of funding.

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<sup>128</sup> Khanekov. *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Beshimov. *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> Based on personal knowledge.

Sixth, donor fatigue. The initial push to invest in Central Asia has ceased. While military initiatives might draw support from the U.S., the current administration is unlikely to invest in another university in Central Asia. It is unlikely that international donors will want to fund a new American University when the first still needs support.

Therefore, the dream of an American University in Central Asia is unlikely to become a reality.

The leaders of AUCA are not optimistic for the immediate opening of Turkmenistan to higher education institutions like AUCA. In regards to Turkmenistan's higher education, Hurwitz believes: "It's going to take 5 to 10 years to fix what's been broken. (Turkmenistan) needs to fix its high schools first."<sup>131</sup> If Hurwitz is correct, Western influences need to push their influence at general education reform before looking to higher educational reform in Turkmenistan. Beshimov said, "Regarding Turkmenistan, (I am) not optimistic for the next two decades. Turkmenistan was like this during Soviet times as well – (very hierarchical)."<sup>132</sup>

Even though it is unlikely that an American University will arise in Turkmenistan, Western embassies and NGOs can lobby for some fundamental changes in Turkmenistan's higher education system. Change can occur administratively (allowing university governance by boards of trustees) and programmatically (in the choices of study and classes). Also, foreign influences can encourage Turkmenistan to engage in extracurricular development, and international exchanges.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

AUCA succeeded in Kyrgyzstan. Due to many factors including local initiative, academic honesty, donor aid, and government support, AUCA is a testament to what can be

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<sup>131</sup> Hurwitz. *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> Beshimov. *Ibid.*

achieved in education. One of AUCA's greatest achievements has been its reach to help students from Turkmenistan. Now, with Turkmenistan's new government and hoped for educational reforms, change might allow for a Western model of education to grow in Turkmenistan. However, it is unlikely.



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