

**American University of Central Asia
Journalism and Mass Communications Department
Department Work Plan 2011-2012**

This work plan is a result of joint efforts of Journalism and Mass Communication Department (JMC) and AFP International Scholar Richard Shafer.

Curriculum

Being accepted to receive accreditation with Bard College, New York, USA, the JMC worked hard last academic year to improve courses' syllabi to make them better fit the idea of liberal arts to correspond the content of courses provided by Bard College. Designed together with Bard College following courses: Writing Research and Evidence, Analysis and Research in Electronic Media, Newswriting Skills and Cultural Reportage, Communication Theory and Practice I/II, Psychology of Communication and International and Political Communication were revised and closely monitored in terms of strengthening the focus on liberal arts idea and providing more theoretical knowledge where necessary.

The Bard College asked the JMC to discuss the possibilities of changing the curriculum of the programme to give it new name of Media Studies. This proposal will be discussed by the faculty as well as AFP new IS.

However with new faculty employed, the JMC needs to conduct further work on finalising changes to the department's current curriculum and revising syllabi of the new department members. The experience and expertise of the newly came faculty members as well as new AFP IS would absolutely beneficial for the department's curriculum update.

JMC will also continue cooperating with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education to develop the new state standard of journalism curriculum, which will ensure that AUCA's JMC program, which is regarded in Kyrgyzstan as differing from the current state standard and being innovative and experimental, will move into the category of fully compliant with the state standard. At the same time this work will allow to update largely outdated state standard, which will potentially be of benefit for other universities teaching journalism in the country.

The JMC department is also involved in and is planning to continue the revision of a unified Russian language journalism curriculum developed by UNESCO, which will potentially be introduced in the CIS countries.

As part of the curriculum update the new AFP IS will make sure that all the faculty members follow unified grading system introduced by AFP IS Timothy Kenny in the last academic year.

Research

As AFP has renewed its partnership with JMC in 2010-2011 the JMC was encouraged to do more research projects. With the support of AFP Gulnura Toralieva, head of department, had an opportunity to develop three research papers as well as work on her PhD dissertation. The papers covered problems of environmental reporting, parliamentary journalism as well as conflict reporting by the social media during the Revolution of 7th of April were published in the local and international academic journals. Other RS Jyldyz Kuvatova designed her long-term research work on the reforming of the Kyrgyz Public Broadcaster.

The upcoming year the JMC will continue supporting research initiatives of its faculty members. The research topics of all the new RSs have been already discussed with the head of department. All of them are very important and timely.

Two of JMC faculties Jyldyz Kuvatova and Gulnura Toralieva plan to continue working on the research project they started last year.

Elena Skochilo is going to do series of research about national self-identification and nation as a whole through media (interviews within focus groups and cultural studies theories (Appadurai and Stuart Hall theories). How media did help to create an image of nation? What are the problems? How to solve the problems of national self-identifications, and remove stereotype thinking about defined nations – are among the research questions of her interest.

She also wants to do research about visual effects of videoclips on the development of the ethnic conflict in Osh (violent scenes, blood, dead people using Barthes theory and Stuart Hall theories.

Another area of research for one of the new returning scholars (Syinat Sultanalieva) is researching the link between mass communications, power and revolutions from the point of view of Critical Theory. This interdisciplinary research would involve analysis of the uses of media for the production of various “truths” or normative claims by different actors of a socio-political conflict through reinforcement or development of new mythologies and discourses and power relationships in the recent history of Kyrgyzstan. The research tentatively aims to employ deconstruction of the normative claims as one of the main methods of the research project, using the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory as a theoretical background for the research. Furthermore, the project intends to put to use the renewed technical capabilities of the AUCA TV Production studio to produce a documentary based on the results of the academic research, which could be available for wider distribution throughout the country and beyond – both as an academic work and as a socio-political commentary.

Faculty support and professional development

The JMC has recruited three new Returning Scholars: Elena Skochilo, Syinat Sultanalieva and Dinara Akmatbekova for academic year of 2011-2012. For the last several years the JMC firstly managed to make sustainable faculty. Most of RSs including Gulnura Toralieva and Jyldyz Kuvatova have long-term plans of working in the department. However the JMC will do the best to retain those hired by supporting their professional development initiatives and keeping the favourable atmosphere and excellent working conditions in the department. Thus, the department plans to facilitate RSs’ research and professional projects, as well as endorse their participation in the local and international forums and conferences. The JMC will strongly support applications made by faculty members for any funds available both within the AUCA and outside the university to let them strengthen their capacity.

As most of recently employed faculty members have no academic experience, the JMC with the support of AFP IS will raise their professional capacity by regular consultations and thorough advice. AFP IS will revise their newly developed syllabi as well as provide training on teaching methods and audience management.

JMC will organise regular meetings with faculty members and workshops to learn what difficulties they face and what kind of help needed to improve the quality of courses and communications between teachers and students, contribute to better understanding of academic process and inform about opportunities for professional development.

New courses

Existing within the liberal arts school, the department plans to develop of more interdisciplinary courses. Such courses aim at imparting general knowledge and developing intellectual capacities of students of all specializations willing to get a sense of how media landscape is structured and how communications field can benefit them in their future careers (business, government and nonprofit sector).

The Department will develop other interdisciplinary courses to meet emerging needs of the academia, society and the market.

Thus, a new returning scholar (Syinat Sultanalieva) plans to introduce a new course in Spring 2012 which would be focused on critical approaches to mass communication. This course will offer the students an opportunity to critically assess the uses of mass communication means for national and international economic, political and social purposes. The course will teach students the basics of hermeneutics in interpreting texts with specific focus on understanding the prior conditions that influence the texts (such as presuppositions, pre-understanding, historical and socio-political context in which a given text was written). This course will be a higher level course mainly aimed at students interested in pursuing academic line of development within the mass communication studies, but also available to practitioners, who would like to develop or deepen their understanding of philosophical and interdisciplinary foundations of communication. The course's exact syllabus will be developed by Syinat Sultanalieva in the Fall 2011 with support from the AFP IS, as well as from her former dissertation supervisors from the University of York Department of Politics (and Philosophy).

JMC also plans to develop new elective courses to provide a wide range of choice for students with various interests in journalism.

This year JMC will develop new required or elective course on writing for PR. JMC AFP local scholar Jyldyz Kuvatova will start developing it in the spring semester to introduce it in the Fall semester in 2011. The separate class that focus on ethics to be considered to add as well.

Gulnura Toralieva will develop and introduce new elective courses on On-line journalism and Writing for Journalism in Russian.

Dinara Akmatbekova plans to develop new Digital PR course.

The other course on new media which is essential for new journalists covering blogging, content management system, writing for web-editions, multimedia skills for on-line reporting which has been offered for students in the spring semester 2011 will be improved by other new RS Elena Skochilo and offered again the academic year of 2011-2012. The proposed new media course is worthwhile undertaking. Its contemporary content is exactly what students need to more fully understand -- and place in context -- the fast-changing media world they will inherit. It also exemplifies a primary division in the department's current approach to teaching journalism and mass communications: the academic versus the practical. The proposed new media class demands a companion course that looks at online publication practices, teaching the technical basics of Web design, blogging, photo-editing for the Web and animation, using such software as InDesign, Dreamweaver, Flash and Photoshop.

Policies

The JMC plans to update all the existing policies on internships, elective courses, senior projects, admissions and transferring students. Current policies don't respond department's

current realities. Outdated policies hinder a lot of barriers for instructors and students in doing their jobs as well as cause misunderstanding and confusion among students of the senior year.

Internships

This year the JMC organised more than 20 meetings of local and foreign media professionals and PR practitioners with students to fill the gap in communication among students and professionals. It was also made to help students to find work placements.

JMC will continue to work closely with different media outlets to ensure the placement of its students. It will also work on more effective ways of monitoring of students' progress organise more regular meetings with media professionals to learn more about difficulties the students face during their internships. To better prepare the students for "real world" JMC will make sure that they have more guided tours to media outlets and regular meeting with media professionals.

AFP IS role

The JMC set several goals for AFP IS Richard Shafer for next year. First of all, the Department is interested to help three new RSs to develop their courses including syllabi and courses' materials, start working on their research projects, establish effective communication with students as well as introduce good academic practices. Being more experienced teacher, Mr Shafer can support new RSs in starting their academic work.

Secondly, the Department plans to update existing policies on internships, elective courses, senior projects, admissions and transferring students. Presumably, Mr Shafer might be very helpful in sharing with his insights on these too.

Finally, as Mr Shafer is one who had knowledge of Kyrgyz media market, the Department will continue the process of updating curriculum in accordance with market needs with his help. His teaching experience in USA will be also useful to continue working on the curriculum to comply with liberal arts education standards.

It has been already agreed with Mr Shafer that he will visit the department twice during the academic year of 2011-2012. Preliminarily, Mr Shafer is available to come to Bishkek in the third week in November of 2011 and the third week in March of 2012.

Extracurricular activities

New faculty members Syinat Sultanalieva and Elena Skochilo have already expressed their interest to diversify students' social life within the department, thus contribute to increasing their professional knowledge and skills in TV production and photography.

Elena Skochilo plans to create photo-community and photo-club "Saturday Talking" with famous photographers from Kyrgyzstan who will be invited to share their experience with students to improve photo-skills. In terms of photography activities Elena is going to involve students to organize a photo-exhibition. She would also like to hold photography seminars in the regions.

Syinat in her turn will closely work with AUCA TV production crew to set editorial agenda, divide responsibilities, improve the quality of AUCA TV output. Thereby Syinat will also raise the capacity of journalism students interested in TV careers.