

American University of Central Asia
Journalism and Mass Communications Department
Departmental Development Plan (2011-2012)

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1. Overview: Situation and Priorities of the Program

In the coming spring the Journalism and Mass Communication Program (JMC) will take steps to go through the attestation procedure at the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education to get five-year license to work under updated curriculum. In July 2010, the JMC received one-year-long license following the attestation procedure carried out by the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education in March 2010.

As most of the faculty have revised and updated their syllabi to comply with the same courses taught in liberal arts colleges in USA, the department will encourage continuing working on updating courses materials providing financial support along with consultations.

The revised curriculum significantly expands the program to make it better fit the idea of liberal arts, which is an important aspect of new cooperation with Bard College, New York, USA (Bard) which started in March 2010. The JMC Program has been accepted, together with other seven AUCA programs, to receive accreditation with Bard, which will give our students an opportunity to obtain US-accredited degrees. This will make them more competitive, not only in Central Asian market but worldwide. This significant positive change was the result of a joint curriculum harmonization effort carried out by JMC, AUCA and Bard College staff.

The current curriculum exposes students to the theory of the field, equips them with academic research skills, and insights into the comparative analysis of the role of the mass media in different socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. 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 are among the required courses that have been designed together with Bard College to strengthen the focus on liberal arts and help students further develop and improve critical thinking and analytical skills.

The other curriculum changes are related to current societal and market demands and focus on training mass communication professionals to work as journalists, communication specialists and researchers in developing countries of the Central Asian region.

Thus in the spring semester the department introduced a new course called New Media following the most up-to-date journalism education trends. This course is unique and based both on teaching people how to frame and receive messages from new media (social media) as well as and labs classes aimed at building students' skills in using social media for journalistic purposes. It also gives important insights on current trends of increasing popularity and importance of New

Media in reporting conflict situations, its relations with traditional media and the changing behavior of consumers of information.

JMC works closely with different media outlets, organizing regular student meetings with media and PR professionals and providing tours of professional news facilities. The intent is to help students understand the conditions local journalists work in today and how the news process works. Such meetings also help students to find and get work placement and internships.

Having received a technical grant consisting of new media production equipment and fully equipped computer lab, students have an opportunity to get professional skills in the university too. A group of JMC students continues working hard for AUCA-TV. Their weekly programs are aired regularly on Fridays' lunch time.

The JMC department has developed a number of new elective courses such as Effective Writing skills in Russian, Communication Research, Photography, Gender and the Media, Development Communication, Media in Conflict, Basics of Camera Skills and Non-linear Video Editing and New Media, which are aimed at helping students choose fields of communication and develop practical skills.

As noted, in the spring semester 2011 students were offered New Media course and Effective Writing Skills course in Russian. In the fall 2011 new elective courses On-line Journalism and Digital PR will be introduced.

All required courses are taught in English.

The JMC department has also conducted a series of public lectures, workshops, seminars with media professionals, PR practitioners and leaders of media NGOs to fill the gap in communication among students and professionals.

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication currently employs four instructors with Western MAs and is in the process of hiring another one (Kyrgyz), and one American faculty with a PhD (Professor). An additional American faculty full-time position is expected to be filled by fall 2011 semester; the recruitment is in process.

AFP partnership renewed in 2010-2011 gave the JMC an opportunity to hire and retain three Returning Scholars (RS) with western MAs. Elina Karakulova, Gulnura Toralieva and Jyldyz Kuvatova in their turn have opportunities to conduct research and present their findings. AFP also contributed to revising and improving the JMC curriculum, along with teachers' syllabi. This became possible with the efforts of Timothy Kenny, AFP International Scholar (IS), who has analyzed the work of JMC and shared his insights with faculty on JMC curriculum improvements. He also helped JMC teachers work out academic practices and ways of interacting with students. Along with that Mr. Kenny edited material and advised faculty members about publishing in western academic journals.

In the time of renewal of partnership with AFP for 2011-2012, JMC is interested in retaining all three RSs and attracting three new scholars: Elena Skochilo, Syinat Sultanalieva, and Dinara Akmatbekova.

2. Vision for the Development of AUCA's Journalism and Mass Communication Department

Joint work with Bard College brought new opportunities for further improvements that can be made to the existing JMC curriculum. Current required theory courses will be complemented by a re-designed system of practical elective courses, which will allow students to choose and pursue their specialization in a chosen field of practice. Current practical specialization fields include public relations, broadcasting and print journalism. The re-designed specialization fields would be broadcast journalism, print and online journalism and public relations. Practice related elective courses will be introduced in accordance with these fields to give students an opportunity to take the total of at least four courses in their chosen field of specialization over the degree period.

Following the results and recommendations of the latest Ministry of Education attestation, the decision was made to work closely together with the Ministry to develop new journalism curriculum state standards. This is chiefly due to two reasons: the fact that JMC curriculum cannot be in full accordance with the current state standard as the latter is rather outdated, and Kyrgyzstan moving onto Bologna process in 2011 and the state standards revision that it will trigger. Participation of JMC department in development of news state standards for Journalism and Mass Communication courses taught at bachelor level will ensure that latest trend in the field are incorporated into new standard, which in its turn will allow JMC curriculum to be fully adherent to the state standard. Last but not least, the way the Journalism and Mass Communications education is shaped in the country will deeply affect governance practices and democratic processes in both Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia.

The JMC department is 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.

The Department continues the research/theory track launched in 2006-2007. Journalism and Mass Communications students are all taking media research classes and doing small scale research works to develop research skills and capacities required from the liberal arts school graduates. Thus, the department has now not only TV and print journalism, but also a theory specialization which includes such theoretical courses as theory of mass media and society, international and political communication, intercultural communication, mass media research, psychology of mass communication and other relevant courses not only from our department but those offered at other departments. It is important to continue in this direction as theoretical knowledge plays a key role not only in improving of practical skills through better understanding of communication processes, but also helps students shape a more critical thinking and analytical approach to various things, both professional and personal, which lies at the core of the liberal arts idea.

Existing within the liberal arts school, the department pursues development 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 is developing other interdisciplinary courses to meet emerging needs of the academia, society and the market.

To successfully pursue these priorities the Department is planning to (objectives):

- Develop new (interdisciplinary elective) courses to offer to other programs of the university.
- Attract at least one international fellow to streamline grading system, check the existing curriculum for possible course updates.
- Organize a workshop on mass media/communication research, possibly in partnership with other Bishkek universities.
- Organize a series of public lectures, workshops and seminars with media and PR professionals to enhance the prestige of the department as well as filling the gap in communications among students and professionals.
- Organize a conference on developments of New Media.
- Unify grade system.
- Develop and Introduce new elective courses on Digital PR, Writing for PR, On-line journalism, Writing for Journalism in Russian.
- Conduct more research projects.
- Participate in discipline group meetings with other specialties to look for opportunities to mainstream communication into other social science disciplines since communication is indeed a cross-cutting issue and requires both insights from other disciplines and can substantively inform them on the developments / innovations in societies happening through evolution of communication means and forms.

3. Objectives, Activities and Their Expected Impact

Attract and retain two new local faculty members to teach required as well as develop new and update existing elective courses:

One returning scholar, Gulnura Toralieva, has joined the Department in August 2010 and currently serves as both the JMC Department Chair and instructor.

Another returning scholar Elina Karakulova became member of faculty in Fall 2010. The expertise and knowledge of these two new department staff is particularly valuable in effective delivering of academic process in accordance with current liberal arts curriculum requirements and new requirements of Bard College. However, the Department has to find ways to retain these highly qualified individuals. The incentives should come in the form of scholarships and other academic perks. The Program will also continue its headhunting efforts for qualified individuals to create a diverse pool of talents and make an issue of high staff turnover history.

Elena Skochilo who is going to obtain her Master's of Science degree in Mass Communication from Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro in 2011 will join the faculty in the fall semester 2011. She is going to teach six courses as well as propose new elective courses.

Syinat Sultanalieva will also start teaching in August 2011. She is committed to lead five courses during the next academic year. Having BA in Journalism and Mass Communications of AUCA and MA in Political Philosophy from University of York (expected in 2011) she can greatly contribute to development of the department too.

Dinara Akmatbekova is another returning scholar invited to teach at JMC in the next academic year. She holds MA in Mass Communication from Grambling State University, Grambling, Louisiana and has journalism background too. Being a faculty member Dinara can share with her reporter's as well as extensive PR experiences.

The JMC will strongly endorse AFP applications of all above mentioned new returning scholars to let them have additional opportunities to self-development and build academic career.

Accreditation:

The department intends to work closely with the Ministry of Education to develop new state standards for the journalism curriculum, which will ensure that AUCA's JMC program -- now regarded in Kyrgyzstan as innovative and experimental and far different than the current state standard -- will become fully compliant with the state standard. At the same time this work will allow the department to update largely outdated state standards, which will potentially be of benefit to other universities teaching journalism in Kyrgyzstan.

Develop new (interdisciplinary elective) courses and update existing ones to offer for other programs of the university:

Such courses will raise the Department's status and profile and facilitate the development of social sciences at the university as a whole. Moreover, updating older elective courses is mandatory to keep up with the developments in the field of humanities, social sciences, media technologies that translate into the substantive part of the profession both in terms of doing business and thinking about communications.

Attract at least one international fellow to streamline grading system, check the existing curriculum for possible course updates:

An AFP international fellow (2010-2011) has been helpful in streamlining and developing the methodology of the grading system of each faculty, as well as reviewing current curriculum and some syllabi to suggest the way in which both can be improved.

AFP Support with Returning and International Fellows

The Department needs AFP support to attract at least one International Fellow. AFP support is also needed in curriculum development and teaching activities of the three Returning Fellows currently working at the department and attract new RSs.

Returning scholars:

1. Jyldyz Kuvatova has an MA in Journalism from the University of Missouri School of Journalism and a PhD in Philosophy from the Kyrgyz Russian Slavonic University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Her teaching load for academic year 2010-2011: *Public Relations and Advertising Skills-I/II, Visual Communication, PR research and Development Communication* courses-**12 credits**.
2. Gulnura Toralieva has a MA in Science Journalism from City University London, UK, and BA in International Journalism from the Kyrgyz Russian Slavonic University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Her teaching load for 2010-2010: *Writing Seminar I/II, Senior seminar I/II, Analysis and Research in Electronic Media I/II, New Media, Mass Media Research Methods*- **18 credits**.

3. Elina Karakulova has Master of Arts in Nationalism Studies from Central European University, Hungary, and a BA in Journalism and Mass Communication from American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan. Her teaching load for 2010-2011: *Intro to Mass Communication; Writing, Research and Evidence, International Political Communication, Newswriting Skills and Cultural Reportage*- **12 credits.**

AFP helped the department stabilize the problem of high turnover among the faculty in 2010-2011. Moreover this partnership attracted many other RS to express their will to teach at JMC. It is hard for JMC, as well as AUCA as a whole, to compete with the remuneration offered to specialists in communication, PR and journalism by the private sector and international organizations. AFP is considered one of the few opportunities for the department to attract and retain faculty.

Currently, the Program continues to seek additional journalism and/or communication graduates with MA from Western universities who would be interested in becoming faculty members. The Program is also currently looking for foreign faculty to replace current full-time foreign faculty members left the country.

Impact after 2011-2012:

In the course of a year-long cooperation with AFP, the Department aims to finalize the changes to the curriculum and a comprehensive set of course guiding materials such as syllabi. It also wants to present the findings of two research projects of RSs supported by AFP in 2010-2011 and continue working on the most topical research projects.

The Department already has well-established connections with international media support organizations and donors. Through these established connections/networks the Program aims to exchange expertise, contribute to the development of the enabling media environment and work on mutually beneficial projects.