

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA



QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

**American University of Central Asia
Quality Assurance Policy**

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I. CONTEXT, PURPOSE, AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

1.1. The American University of Central Asia (AUCA) is committed to providing the highest quality education, advancing sustainable academic excellence and innovation as well as continuous institutional improvement. This policy describes the general framework for quality assurance in AUCA and forms part of the strategic management of the university. Its purpose is to set out the University quality assurance system, mechanisms, and procedures in accordance with the University mission, values, and principles. AUCA quality assurance policy is in line with the national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic and is informed by the European Standards and Guidelines as well as the Standards of Middle States Commission for Higher Education in the U.S.

1.2. The successful implementation and management of this policy will result in outcomes that enhance:

- the fulfillment of the university mission;
- the quality of education;
- continuous professional development of faculty leading to improved student educational experience;
- satisfaction and trust of society and stakeholders in the university;
- the capacity to compete with other higher educational institutions regionally and globally;
- an ethos of continuous quality improvement in the university.

II. MISSION, VALUES, AND PRINCIPLES

2.1. AUCA is an international, multi-disciplinary learning community in the American liberal arts tradition that develops enlightened and impassioned leaders for the transformation of Central Asia. To fulfill its mission, AUCA aims to have the best local and international professors teaching the best students from the region and offer high quality study programs to serve the needs of the new generation of learners in the 21st century. AUCA is also committed to providing advanced technology and library resources as well as excellent opportunities for faculty and student research, integrating community engagement as part of the curriculum and extracurricular activities and increasing the academic and cultural synergy in its distinctive international community to serve the dynamic development of Central Asia.

2.2. AUCA values responsible freedom in the search for truth and justice, academic honesty, respectfulness, freedom of expression, open-mindedness, intellectual freedom, and diversity. The university cherishes free, critical inquiry and investigative learning both for their own sake and for the development of an open, diverse, and just society that suits the Central Asian region. AUCA is committed to developing the skills and the attitude of mind

that foster sensitivity to the region's rich traditions and adaptability for its democratic development. The university is dedicated to inclusive education. AUCA campus is designed for accessibility, and technological and pedagogical means are used to make all students actively involved in the learning process.

2.3. AUCA is a small but powerful engine of intellectual freedom and critical thinking that fuels education in a caring, transparent, and student-centered environment. AUCA is dedicated to educating students with a broad perspective on the world and to developing students' critical and creative thinking skills so that they can become responsible citizens. It is committed to democratic values, individual freedoms, and the spirit of innovation. It is committed to transparency as well as to openness and collaboration among the university administration, students, faculty, and staff.

2.4. AUCA is welcoming and open to society and is devoted to civic engagement. Civic engagement is deeply rooted within the values of AUCA as it strives to prepare future leaders of the Central Asian region. AUCA students, faculty, staff, and alumni are among active participants in their communities. Serving the community, knowledge sharing, giving back to society are instilled through the spirit of our academic institution.

2.5. The principles which guide AUCA in its decision-making, and are at the base of the development of the present quality assurance policy, are the following:

- **Fundamental importance of the University's mission and values.** AUCA quality assurance system, mechanisms, and procedures are based on the University mission and values. The university mission is central and permeates through the programs and curricular as well as extracurricular activities that the university offers. Our students, faculty, and staff know and share AUCA mission and values.
- **Engagement by students, faculty, and staff.** The quality assurance system, mechanisms, and procedures are designed and implemented with the active involvement of AUCA faculty, students, and staff who understand that they are responsible for quality, know how to contribute to quality, and participate in quality assurance in all parts of the university.
- **Centrality of quality culture.** Recognizing that quality is primarily the result of the interaction between teachers, students and all relevant stakeholders, the university is fully dedicated to ensuring that the content of all of its programs, its facilities and resources are all fit for purpose of preparing students for work and for helping them become competitive on the international and national educational and labor markets. AUCA administration, students, faculty, and staff view quality as a core value, assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the university, thereby ensuring that there is a culture of mutual trust, openness, and participation.
- **Full support of student-centered education and meaningful, high-quality learning experience for students.** AUCA is devoted to a student-centered approach

to learning and teaching and to fostering of a culture of lifetime learning. AUCA is constantly dedicated to ensuring that the qualifications achieved by students and their experience of higher education remain at the forefront of the university mission. AUCA is committed to taking into account the needs of its diverse student population in order to ensure that from admission to graduation students are provided with the knowledge, skills, and overall support that can help them become successful. AUCA is focused on continuous improvement of the student experience through curriculum update, regular involvement of stakeholders, diverse course offerings, faculty and student engagement with research, exchange opportunities, students' projects, grants, civic engagement, extracurricular activities, and other opportunities.

- **Commitment to continuous institutional and departmental improvement as well as quality enhancement.** Quality assurance system, mechanisms, and procedures are part of the overall planning and assessment cycles. AUCA is committed to sustainable continuous improvement of all of its existing practices and processes with each cycle. It is dedicated to systematic internal self-evaluation and cyclical external quality assurance.
- **Multi-level, systematic, multi-stakeholder approach.** The quality assurance system and procedures are developed and implemented both at the level of each program and unit as well as at the institutional level. The system allows for ensuring quality via joint work and collaboration among the different units and programs as well as between them and the university administration as well as internal and external stakeholders.

III. ORGANIZATION

This section describes the role of different stakeholders within the university in the maintenance, oversight, and improvement of quality assurance at AUCA.

3.1. The Board of Trustees as the main governing body is responsible for AUCA development strategy that is aimed at ensuring the most efficient functioning of the university and at improving the quality of educational services. Every office submits an annual report of its activities to the Board and may be called for reporting at the Board review meetings. Programs' strategic reports are provided to the Board. The Board of Trustees is the final decision making body when new programs are being implemented at the university. Any new service offered by the university must be approved by the Board of Trustees, which ensures that the offering aligns with the mission and needs of the institution to continue providing quality education and services.

3.2. The quality assurance at AUCA is led by the President who is the chief academic and executive officer. The President is advised and supported by Vice-Presidents who oversee quality assurance in their respective areas.

3.3. The Faculty Senate plays an important role in overseeing quality assurance at AUCA. The Faculty Senate can advise on university and academic policies, including but not limited to curricular innovation, research, promotions, and student intellectual life as well as on opening and closing of academic programs. The Faculty Senate Executive Committee, in consultation with the President and the Vice-President for Academic Affairs (VPAA), is responsible for academic programs' strategic review and for providing recommendations on the academic quality assurance of respective programs. The Executive Committee may also initiate amendments to the Quality Assurance Policy.

3.4. Heads of Divisions, Department Chairs, and Directors of graduate programs are responsible for quality assurance within their units.

3.5. Academic support offices and non-academic units (Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, Development Office, Alumni Relations Office, Career Development Office, Registrar Office, HR Office, Admissions Office, PR Office, Administrative Services Center, Library, Academic Advising Center, etc.) collect and provide relevant information to heads of academic programs who share it with their faculty as part of preparation for strategic or extraordinary review of their programs. Heads of these units are responsible for quality assurance within their units.

3.6. The Dean of Student Affairs collects, processes, and reports on student related data (student survey in their first year of studies, exit survey, etc.).

3.7. The AUCA Student Senate provides for the welfare of the whole student body, ensures student participation in general governance of the AUCA, and represents students' interests in the administrative, academic and extracurricular spheres, thereby ensuring student engagement in quality assurance. In addition, there is a student representative in the Faculty Senate.

IV. QUALITY ASSURANCE TOOLS AND PROCESSES

4.1. Institutional Level Quality Assurance

Quality assurance processes at the institutional level are designed to support the preparation, implementation, monitoring, and periodic review of AUCA's strategic development as well as AUCA-wide goals and plans. They include collecting information on key aspects of AUCA operation, AUCA-wide assessments in the form of the student survey upon admission (entry survey), student survey upon graduation (exit survey), alumni surveys, and conducting of self-evaluation on a periodic basis. The collected information is used for the preparation and implementation of the university's strategic development plan.

4.2. Academic Program Level Quality Assurance

The quality at the program level is assured via the following tools and processes.

A. Quality Assurance Mechanisms at the Program Level

AUCA academic programs provide for appropriate planning, assessment, and review elements compatible with this Policy, other AUCA policies and the requirements of accrediting bodies. AUCA programs are committed to a cycle of evaluation and improvement as part of the academic planning process. Within this cycle faculty are required to review the content and focus of their courses in line with the program goals, tasks, and learning outcomes; evaluate and reflect on student learning resulting from their teaching practice, curriculum design and approaches to assessment; and make appropriate revisions as required.

Each academic program recognizes the need for a continuous evaluation of the relevance and viability of its programs to ensure that available resources are used to maximum effect. Programs use multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data in the evaluation of their courses, programs and teaching, including feedback from students, graduates, employers, and other stakeholders.

An evaluation of full-time faculty members with respect to their teaching, professional and research activity as well as service is carried out regularly and includes:

- course evaluation by students;
- faculty self-evaluation;
- peer-observation;
- evaluation of faculty by the Chair of the Department.

The performance of part-time faculty is evaluated based on course evaluation by students and peer-observation of their teaching.

The course evaluation by students is under the oversight of the VPAA and is organized every semester by the Head of AUCA Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, who provides the overall reports for each course after the submission of grades. Course evaluations form the basis for faculty members' continuous work on developing their teaching skills. Course evaluations are reviewed by department chairs and the VPAA. Department chairs discuss course evaluation results with each faculty member to improve the teaching and learning process in their respective programs.

Peer-observation is initiated by a program chair and includes, but is not limited to evaluating of a teacher's interaction with students, students' involvement in class activities, and quality of the course syllabus. After peer-observation feedback is provided to instructors to improve the quality of their teaching.

Periodic meetings with stakeholders are organized in order to ensure that there is a continuous dialogue between the program and external stakeholders, such as employers of program graduates. The purpose of such meetings is to ensure that the program curriculum and activities are in line with the demands of the labor market.

B. Strategic and Extraordinary Reviews of Academic Programs

The quality of academic programs is reviewed on a periodic basis one year before program accreditation or at shorter intervals upon program request. The timeline of the strategic reviews is defined by the VPAA.

The purpose of the strategic review is to evaluate the performance of the academic program in relation to its mission and program learning outcomes. This review includes the assessment of the program curriculum, quality of teaching, program activities, and overall performance.

Academic programs undergoing a strategic review set up an ad hoc committee consisting of the program chair and faculty members. The ad hoc committee members also meet with student representatives to ensure that their views are included in the final report. In addition, programs may include external stakeholders in the strategic program review.

Academic support offices and non-academic units collect and provide relevant information, including but not limited to results of student and alumni surveys, to academic programs to assist them in the process of preparation for strategic review. The final report is based on the information collected within the academic program and within the University.

The Faculty Senate Executive Committee reviews academic programs' strategic reports and provides feedback to each respective program on the basis of the report. The Executive Committee may involve external experts in preparing feedback and recommendations to academic programs.

The extraordinary review of programs may be initiated by the Board, the President, the VPAA and/or the academic program. The extraordinary review may take place in case of a significant curriculum change, initiation of joint programs, and other cases. In case of an extraordinary program review the review timeline is to be adjusted accordingly. Rules related to strategic program review apply in case of extraordinary program review.

4.3. Academic Units

Academic support units (Registrar office, Academic advising, WARC, CTLT, etc.), centers, and institutes are reviewed annually by the VPAA.

4.4. Non-Academic Units

Non-academic units prepare their annual reports and submit these to the VP/COO for review and approval.

V. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY REVIEW

The Quality Assurance Policy is subject to review by the Academic Senate every five years. It may be amended as needed.