

# THE NEW STAR

independent student newspaper

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## ONE COMMUNITY,

## Many Hearts

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# MASON CANNON AND HIS FIRST EXPERIENCE AS AN INSTRUCTOR.

*"Reading teaches you to reflect and helps to develop critical thinking."*

Mason Cannon, a teacher from Albuquerque, New Mexico, U.S. After graduating from college, Mason went to Kyrgyzstan in search of new experience, where he works as a teacher. Mason is an instructor in English and Mathematics in the New Generation Academy (NGA) at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). In the U.S., Mason Cannon received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Computer Science from Columbia University and joined the NGA team in August 2024.

## Why did Mason Cannon choose Kyrgyzstan?

According to Mason himself, his journey to Kyrgyzstan began with his passion for bike riding. He learned about our country thanks to the famous long-distance bike races that are held in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. "I saw a lot of videos about bike riding, so I knew a lot about Kyrgyzstan," Mason says. When Mason had the opportunity to go to Kyrgyzstan, he did not miss this chance. He applied for a fellowship program, and thanks to it, Mason was able to become part of the NGA program. Mason's NGA program prepares students for university. He teaches mathematics and has been teaching English since this spring semester, which includes listening and speaking. During his teaching, Mason faced the difficulty that not all students understand mathematics. "In my class, the students are from different countries, with different experiences. Each student has their own vocabulary and spaces. It takes time for all students to understand each other," Mason says. However, despite this, Mason believes that NGA students can overcome any difficulties due to their motivation. "Each of the students is ready to study and learn something new," Mason says.

Although Mason has been in Kyrgyzstan for a short time, he has been able to make many friends and acquaintances. He even has one of his memorable moments with the students, which he willingly shared. In the fall semester, they went to karaoke with the group, where they had a great time. "We had dinner at karaoke, and it was a lot of fun. I've never done this before, so it was fun to come and eat lagman and then go to karaoke and sing with my students, and we really had a great time," recalls Mason with a smile on his face.

Mason loves his students very much and therefore tries to help them with their future studies at the university. He gives his students very important advice—to read as much as possible. "Reading teaches you to reflect and helps to develop critical thinking. That's why students start reading in advance to be ready for their future studies," Mason shares. Mason Cannon plans to finish teaching in May but will remain in Kyrgyzstan until June. He wants to spend more time here to explore the country. In the future, Mason will return to the U.S., but his future is still a mystery to him. He is still thinking about what he wants to do in the future.



*My  
forward  
to take, I  
eventually  
on*

# CULTURAL SHOCK EXPERIENCE

*An exchange journey from Magdeburg to Bishkek*



So here I am, writing this article, after I got asked if I had any culture shock stories in Kyrgyzstan. To get to the point fast ... yes, I had some. Small ones and a big one. But to understand them more, I will first introduce myself shortly. My name is Manuel, and I'm an exchange student from Germany for two semesters. I had never been outside Europe before August 22nd, when I took the flight from Berlin towards Bishkek.

The first small culture shock was on the taxi ride from the airport to the AUCA dormitory. In these 45 minutes I couldn't understand a single word from the taxi driver. But thanks to Google Translator, which makes communication in two different languages possible. Since that day, it has become my loyal companion.

Two other ones happened in the dormitory. I had to use the bathroom for a long time. I found myself in a restroom in which you have to squat, which was something new for me. Later, I went to my room, in which I met my roommate Lincoln and later Andrej. I was not aware and used to sharing the sleeping room with someone. But over time we became friends, and I'm thankful for this new experience and constellation. I think the biggest culture shock was, next to the lack of available German beer ;), the different environment. I was not able to read boards of shops that are written in Russian, and I did not understand the language of the people.

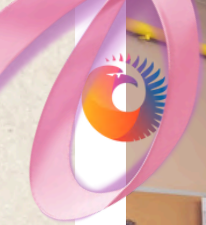


After some days, during my walk from the AUCA to the dormitory, my smartphone battery ran out. The problem was, I did not know the exact way to my home, and it was already dark. So I was stranded clueless at a restaurant called Sarya. To not just ask for charging the smartphone, I ordered a Kebab. It turned out that the food, especially the meat, was really amazing. The place is now my favorite location for Turkish food. Not always do cultural shocks, or in other words, differences, surprisingly and immediately turn into something positive. In other cases, you have to give yourself time to find out how to handle, adopt or just accept the differences between Kyrgyzstan and your home country. The last culture shock I want to share with you is a positive one.

As already mentioned, it's the first time that I live in another country. The friendliness, openness, and curiosity of Kyrgyz people towards foreigners makes it easier to settle down. I'm thankful to God for being here in this wonderful country and wish you a great spring semester!



Manuel Scherer  
Exchange SOC



# VALENTINE'S DAY AT TSI

At TSI, Valentine's Day is more than just a holiday—it's a special tradition that brings students together in a vibrant celebration of love, friendship, and community. This year, the college will come alive with a festive fair and an exciting show program to mark the occasion. On February 14, students will have the chance to visit the Valentine's Day fair, where they can find unique gifts, handmade souvenirs, and sweet treats to surprise their loved ones. Whether you're looking for a heartfelt card, delicious chocolates, or a small token of appreciation for a friend, the fair offers plenty of options to make the day memorable. The highlight of the celebration will be the show program, featuring performances by talented students. Expect live music, dance acts, and fun interactive activities that will fill the college with an atmosphere of joy and warmth. Whether you're cheering for your friends or participating in the festivities yourself, the event promises to be an unforgettable experience.

At TSI, Valentine's Day is not just about romantic love—it's about celebrating the connections that make student life special. It's a day to appreciate friendships, share positive emotions, and create lasting memories. So, whether you're planning a surprise for someone special or simply looking to enjoy the festive atmosphere, be sure to join the celebration and make this Valentine's Day one to remember!

Rufina Osmondalieva  
DMDT-I-23

# WORDS FROM THE SENATOR

"Being the president at school" is a dream that probably every second elementary school student has had. The image of a strong, inspiring person who can bring about change and lead others seemed like something ideal and unattainable to me. But as time passed, school turned into college, and the president became a senator, I realized that this position still felt distant and unclear. I remember in September, during my first year, when applications for the role of senator were being accepted, I sat in class, trying to push away the thought of applying. "Why do I need this? What will I do there? Will I be able to balance this with my studies?"—these questions kept swirling in my head. And what do you think? At that moment, I didn't dare take the step toward my childhood dream. However, this year changed me. College became the place where I overcame all doubts and learned to confidently take on responsibility and play the role of a leader. September, second year—I, with complete confidence and determination, submit my application for the role of senator, already knowing that this position will be mine. And in November, proud and inspired, I stood at the ceremony of induction into the new student senate. Now, this position feels like a blank canvas, where I can implement any idea and create change. Being a senator gives me the chance to contribute to the college and the students, as well as to become the driving force behind new initiatives that can impact the lives and futures of many. It's an opportunity to be part of history, not just observing it but creating it.

Adiya Kydyralieva  
EHI-I-23

# MAKERSPACE PROJECT

## Makeathon Experience

I am the captain of the Thumb Trio team. We recently took part in a Makeathon and came in second. It was an unforgettable event full of hard work, teamwork, and vivid emotions. In this article, I want to share my experience, the preparation process, the challenges our team faced, and what I took away from the competition.

At first we didn't have a specific topic. The project was a vague sketch that simply combined several functions of simulators and devices designed for people with impaired hand-motor skills. But everything changed with the arrival of Kanat Ruslanovich, a person with a hand motor impairment, who offered us his finger extension machine. And it was like it hit me. A stormy brainstorm with our comrades inspired us to create the Type Gloves project, which was originally conceived as a finger expander but with a joystick function from games, so it was intended for a narrow audience of people, children. However, it did not suit us, and after thinking about how it would work, we came to a simple but ingenious solution, namely a glove-keyboard.

It was not without its difficulties.

One of the main difficulties was teamwork. One of the participants practically showed no enthusiasm and was often absent, which forced me to make a difficult decision, not to kick him out but to persuade him to leave the project on his own initiative, which gave me a new experience of communication as a leader with my subordinate. Another serious problem was the lack of experience in programming. Our programmer, Toktobekov Melis, was faced with tasks that were difficult for him, which had a bad effect on his motivation. Fortunately, the Internet and available resources helped us realize the project, albeit with difficulty. In the process, we learned how to effectively search for useful information, work under tight deadlines, and cope with negative emotions caused by deadlines.

A separate challenge was presenting the project. As one person said, "It is not important what you sell, but how you present it." It was important not only to show the technical side of the development but also to convey the value of our idea to the jury. This turned out to be the most difficult stage because neither I nor my fellow programmer were distinguished by public speaking skills. And then Kanat Ruslanovich came to the rescue again. He not only inspired us to create the project, but also became a valuable member of the team who helped us to convey the idea to the audience. Perhaps it was thanks to his participation that we won second place.



When the results were announced, I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, I considered myself a person who usually stood on the sidelines at awards ceremonies, so I didn't feel overwhelming excitement. But on the other hand, the realization that the idea was valuable, as well as the simple desire to be recognized, did not let me just sit still. How surprised I was when we won second place!

However, the most valuable thing was not the place on the podium or the winnings, but the fact of our participation. I was already glad that I had tried my hand at such an event and gained important experience. But, of course, the silver medal was a special motivator for further development of the project.

This Makeathon showed me that teamwork is a source of inspiration and achievement. Only by acting coherently, trusting your comrades, and showing enthusiasm can you achieve significant results. Now I understand in what direction to move forward and what aspects should be improved in the future. The next steps are to finalize our project, take into account the jury's comments, and perhaps take part in new competitions. After all, the main thing is not to stop at what has been achieved but to continue to grow and develop.

This experience was another step forward for me, and I am looking forward to new challenges and opportunities!



# WORDS FROM THE HEAD OF STUDENT SENATE

I'm excited to share our recent plans and progress. We recently had a meeting with our team, and based on our discussion, we have created a plan for upcoming events. We decided to organize a Spirit Week, similar to last year's, which will likely take place in the second half of February or in March. Additionally, we are planning a series of trainings on useful daily life skills, including First Aid training. These and other events will be further discussed after Diversity Week, when most of our members will be more available. In terms of completed work, we have planned to create a shared calendar for all events and trainings, which will be accessible to students, faculty, and staff—most likely through Google Calendar. We have also been sharing information about various meetings featuring guest speakers, an event organized by NGA, initiated by our Student Senate member representing NGA. We look forward to bringing these plans to life and keeping everyone engaged in campus activities!

Artur Kim  
Chair of Student Senate

## HER JOURNEY BEYOND THE BORDERS

Mahdia Yari is a political science major at the University of Mississippi. Mixed experience and goals.

When she steps beyond her home, chasing new opportunities, a new life. She learned that living is more than studying; it is adapting, growing, and finding her place. She never thought fortune would bring her here—to a land so far, so different.

Some days shine like a golden sunrise, while others are as dark as the endless nights. But light does not only come from the sky. It shines from within, from the fire in her heart

She prepared for this life—for the lessons, the papers, the long nights.

It is easy to dream of a future, but harder to step forward and gain it. Still, she walks through the humdrum of life, through moments of struggle and quiet strength.

Now, she stands at the edge of achievement, ready to throw her cap to the sky. Years of hard work, sleepless nights, tears, doubts, and quiet victories all led to this moment. But this is not the end. The journey continues, for she is not just reaching a destination she is becoming.

Mahdia Yari  
Alumna



believe  
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Позиция авторов статей не всегда совпадает с позицией ред. коллегии в целом.

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