

THE NEW STAR

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Happy Nooruz!



cr: @atatar_izi

EXCHANGE
SEMESTER
IN NY



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NGA TALENT
SHOW 2025



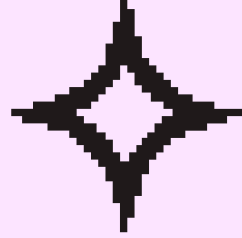
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TSAUCA
CHARITY
CLUB



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FROM SHADOWS TO SUNSHINE:



How AUCA's Diversity Week Ignited My Journey as a Change Maker

Growing up in Afghanistan, I never imagined that one day I would break free from the limitations imposed on me and countless other Afghan girls. Under the current regime, girls are deprived of education, social activities, and the chance to contribute to their communities. These restrictions left me feeling isolated, disconnected, and powerless. However, my life took a transformative turn when I arrived in Kyrgyzstan to study at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). Here, I discovered a world of possibilities, where social programs, campus activities, and cultural events like Diversity Week became the foundation of my personal and professional growth.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban's restrictions on girls' education and social participation left me feeling trapped. I was denied the opportunity to attend school, engage in outdoor activities, or volunteer in my community. These bans not only deprived me of personal growth but also cut me off from the world, leaving me disconnected from global connections and opportunities. When I arrived at AUCA, I was amazed by the freedom and support I found here. The university's commitment to inclusivity and its vibrant campus life opened doors I never thought possible.

One of the most impactful experiences for me was participating in Diversity Week, a four-day event that brings together students from different cultures to celebrate their traditions, heritage, and identity. This event was a turning point in my life. During rehearsals and preparations, I met students from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and other countries. Interacting with them broadened my perspective and made me more optimistic about life. Through these multicultural connections, I found a supportive community that helped me grow emotionally, socially, and professionally. I learned the importance of confidence, communication, and cultural awareness. These interactions reduced my stress, made me feel supported, and gave me a sense of belonging. I realized that personal growth and social connections depend on building networks and embracing diversity.

My time at AUCA has taught me invaluable lessons that have shaped my vision for the future. Participating in events like Diversity Week helped me overcome my shyness and express myself confidently. Interacting with people from different backgrounds taught me how to manage my emotions and handle stress effectively. Learning about other cultures made me more open-minded and empathetic. Working with diverse teams during events honed my leadership and teamwork skills. Organizing and participating in events encouraged me to think creatively and solve problems. Building connections with international students and faculty opened doors to new opportunities. Most importantly, I realized the importance of giving back to society and being an active member of my community. These lessons have not only transformed me as an individual but also inspired me to become a leader who can address the challenges faced by Afghan girls. My journey at AUCA has given me a clear vision for the future. I want to be a part of the changemakers who work to empower Afghan girls and women. The limitations imposed on them—denying them education, social participation, and professional growth—are not just personal tragedies but also a loss for our society. I believe that education and social engagement are the keys to breaking these barriers.

In the near future, I plan to establish programs that provide Afghan girls with access to education, mentorship, and skill-building opportunities. I want to create safe spaces where they can express themselves, build networks, and develop the confidence to pursue their dreams. My experiences at AUCA have shown me that change is possible, and I am determined to be a leader who contributes to this transformation.

Looking back at my journey, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunities I have had at AUCA. From being a girl confined by societal restrictions to becoming a confident and ambitious individual, I have come a long way. Diversity Week and other campus activities have played a crucial role in my growth, teaching me the importance of confidence, communication, cultural awareness, and leadership. As I move forward, I am committed to using these lessons to make a difference in my community. I want to be a voice for Afghan girls, advocating for their rights and creating opportunities for them to thrive. My time at AUCA has shown me that change begins with individuals who are willing to take action. I am ready to be that individual—a leader, a changemaker, and a source of hope for my community and beyond.



THE STORY OF A CHANGE

“Rise and Thrive Project”



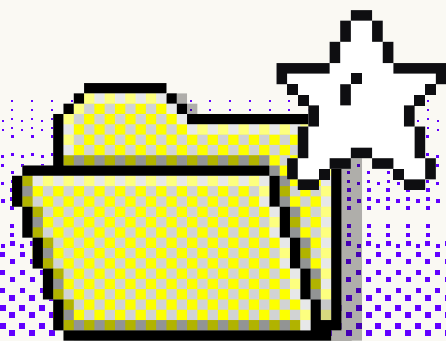
It was a sunny day in the month of October 2024. After reading for hours in the AUCA library, I decided to leave campus for my room in the third microdistrict. As I was walking along the pathway, I noticed one of my friends outside the AUCA coffee shop sitting with a group of young students. I joined them and as they warmly greeted me, I found the pleasure of talking with these young students who were newly enrolled at AUCA and newly moved to Kyrgyzstan. It was joyful to hear their stories, learning about the recent situation back in Afghanistan and their future prospects. In the midst of our warm conversation, I figured out that these brave youths went through a long journey to get here and as they conversed longer, I noticed a vibe of disappointment as some of them hoped to get scholarships or jobs to continue their education, but still they were struggling to adapt in the new environment.

For me, “Hope” is the most powerful word that opens up horizons of opportunities and creates a space to tolerate difficulties in life. Moreover, the hope gives me the courage to go ahead and support others, as I believe life is not about getting but more about giving. Deeply feeling the situation of these youths, my mind was engaged in the question of “how to support them?”. I know that humans are afraid of the unknown and darkness; when something becomes clear, it no longer horrifies us. I wanted to help these youths to see the available and applicable opportunities vividly and find the confidence to look for opportunities themselves. I wanted to help but did not know how. It is clear that if you have a question, you will find the answer. More than a month had passed since our meeting when I noticed the announcement of the Afghan Civic Engagement Program by the Center of Civic Engagement, AUCA, signaling the availability of funding for student initiatives. I had an idea and a community, so I came up with the Rise and Thrive Project and secured funding.

In the scope of the Rise and Thrive project, I brought together career development professionals and educational advisors to provide focused workshops on crafting professional CVs and cover letters, project proposal writing, preparing scholarship applications, networking, and communication skills. Moreover, in the context of this project, we created an atmosphere where everyone shared their stories, asked their questions, and networked with each other.

At the end of this project, it was a joyful moment for me to see a sense of confidence in the youths once disappointed with the situation, and I am sure with hope and confidence they will rise and thrive. This project made a change, and this change was creating hope and confidence, along with developing knowledge and skills. With this in mind, let's always keep the mindset of supporting each other and believing that it will return double revenue for us.

Farhad Ehsani
MA-ANTH





"AUCA IS A CHANCE TO REALIZE YOUR DREAMS AND DO WHAT YOU REALLY LIKE."

Leah Johnson and her trip to Kyrgyzstan.

Leah Johnson is from the United States, from the state of Delaware, which is two hours south of New York and north of Washington, D.C. She got her bachelor's degree in History and Economics from Minnesota. In Estonia and Scotland, she got her Master's degree in Central and Eastern European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies from the Universities of Glasgow and Tartu. During this period, she studied Estonian and Russian.

After completing her Master's degree, Leah applied through the Princeton in Asia program [this program allows her to teach and work in Asian countries]. This application became crucial in her life because it changed her life completely. Among the many possible destinations, Leah chose Kyrgyzstan, since many of her friends lived and still live in Bishkek. All her friends are delighted with Kyrgyzstan; they love the country very much. Thanks to them, Leah also wanted to see the country and try to live in it. That's how Leah's journey in Kyrgyzstan began.

Upon arrival in Bishkek, Leah faced a number of everyday difficulties, including adapting to the city's transport system. But thanks to the support of her friends, she was able to overcome them with ease. They helped me with everything from work issues to daily life in the city. *"For the first week, I literally ran after the buses, trying to figure out where they were going, because I couldn't download 2GIS!"* laughs Leah.

When Leah first saw AUCA University, she was amazed by its unique architecture, smallness, and beauty. She really liked this place, and especially the staff who greeted her with great friendliness. At AUCA, in the NGA program, Leah trains students in academic writing, research, presentation skills, and English for academic purposes. However, Leah is not only a teacher but also an Academic Advisor for one of the groups. She provides them with advice about their studies, time management, and adaptation to NGA. Together with Mason Cannon [teacher of Mathematics and English in NGA], they founded a writing club. This club is very useful and necessary for their students, as students can develop academic writing and conversational skills during meetings.

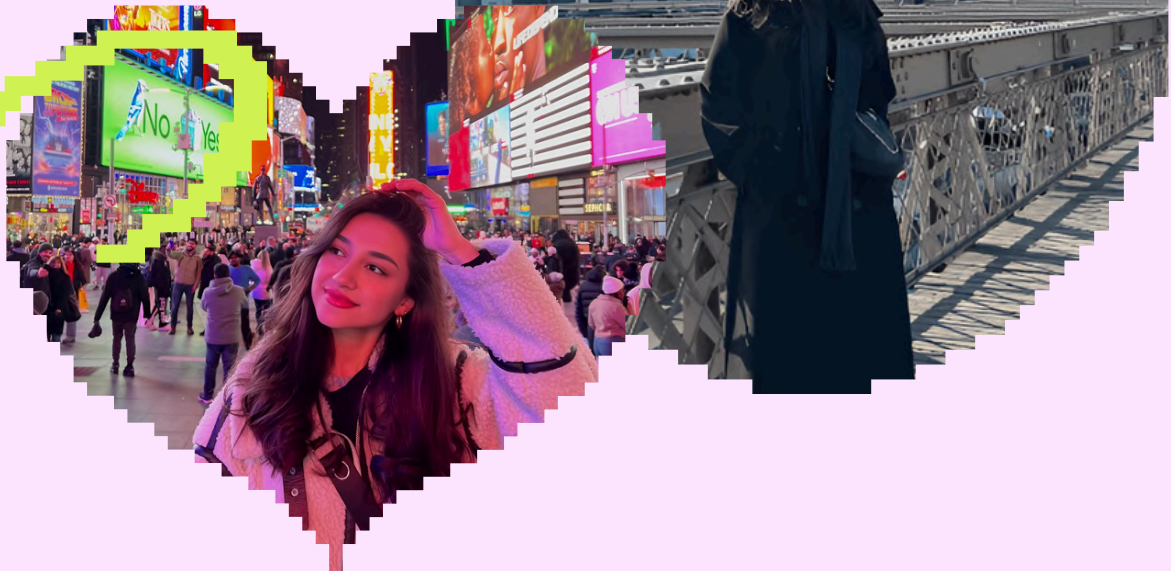
Leah really loves her students, and she kindly shared with us one of the memorable moments from the fall semester. In honor of Teacher's Day, her students invited her to dinner, where they had a great time. They talked about everything—about hobbies, about personal stories, about work, etc. *"After that dinner, I got to know them not just as students but as people with their own dreams, hobbies, and talents. It made our relationship more warm and trusting,"* she shares.

The advice that Leah gave her students is that they need not only to prepare for exams but also to understand their interests and hobbies. *"AUCA is a chance to realize your dreams and do what you really like. It's important to know what inspires you and work on it,"* she says. Leah is sure that education is not only knowledge but also an opportunity to discover yourself and your talents.

Leah plans to stay in Kyrgyzstan until the end of June to visit mountainous areas during the warmer months. As Leah says, *"I will most likely return home to the United States, since I have not been home for 3 years."* She misses her home and family very much and is looking forward to meeting them. However, despite this, she still hopes to return to Kyrgyzstan, as she enjoyed being here.



MY EXCHANGE JOURNEY TO NEW YORK



Those were the times when the cult of posters was at its peak, and as a true teenager of that era, I didn't fall behind. I remember having posters hanging on the wall next to my bed as a child. Of course, if we ignore the fact that they featured One Direction, the Jonas Brothers, Lana Del Rey, and others, there was one poster that has stayed in my memory to this day—it was of the Empire State Building. Back then, the dream of visiting New York seemed just as tall and unattainable as that building and all the skyscrapers of the city.

October 2024—I finally received that long-awaited letter:

“Dear Aziza, On behalf of OSUN, I am pleased to confirm your nomination for an OSUN exchange semester at Bard College in Annandale for the Spring 2024 semester.”

To say that I was happy would be an understatement. And with that email, a new chapter and new adventures began—my journey to New York, the city of dreams and desires. What impressed me the most about studying in the U.S. was the interactive and engaging learning environment. Students were encouraged to voice their opinions, challenge ideas, and actively participate in discussions. It was a refreshing experience that pushed me to think critically and express myself more confidently. I also loved the hands-on approach to learning—classes weren't just about theory but about applying concepts to real-life scenarios.

One of my most memorable moments was my first group discussion in class. Back home, students tend to be more reserved, but here, everyone spoke up freely. At first, it was intimidating, but I soon realized that it wasn't about competition—it was about learning together. That realization was truly inspiring!

For anyone considering an exchange program, my advice is to embrace the experience with an open mind. Step out of your comfort zone, engage with people from different cultures, and don't be afraid to speak up, even if your language skills aren't perfect. The best way to improve is by practicing! Participate in discussions, ask questions, and take advantage of the opportunities around you. Also, explore beyond your campus—visit new places, try different foods, and immerse yourself in the local culture. Most importantly, enjoy every moment because this experience will shape you in ways you never expected.

Dustmamadova Aziza
PSY-121



NGA TALENT SHOW 2025:

A NIGHT TO REMEMBER!



On February 26, 2025, NGA students, alumni, and faculty lit up the stage of CH with their talents at the much-awaited NGA Talent Show 2025!

This year's event was held under the inspiring slogan "*Light Your Fire*," a call to ignite passion, creativity, and courage within each of us. The theme encouraged participants to step out of their comfort zones, embrace their unique talents, and share their inner spark with the world. And that's exactly what they did!

The night was filled with breathtaking performances—from mesmerizing dance routines and soulful singing to powerful poetry, instrumental mastery, and jaw-dropping acts that left the audience in awe. Each performance was a testament to the hard work, dedication, and fearless spirit of our NGA community.



A highlight of the evening was the incredible energy in the room. Students, faculty, and guests cheered on every act, creating an atmosphere of encouragement and celebration. It was a night that not only showcased talent but also strengthened the bonds within our community.

A heartfelt thank you to all the participants who bravely took the stage, to the organizers who made the event seamless, and to everyone who came to support and share in the excitement. Your passion truly made this night unforgettable.

Ruslan Musalimov
NGA Outreach and Student Coordinator



TSI AUCA CHARITY CLUB "JALGYZ EMESSIN"

"Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see."
Mark Twain

Club story

The Technical School of Innovation is not just an educational institution, but a place where responsible, active, and caring members of society are formed. In 2020, the students founded the *Volunteers Club of TSI*, which, after a year of active work, underwent a rebranding and received a new name—*Ishenim Bulagi* (from Kyrgyz—"Source of Hope"). This name perfectly reflected its main mission. Over the years, the club continued to develop, and its leadership was passed down from generation to generation—the seniors entrusted the management to the younger students, preserving the continuity of ideas and values. In 2023, the club changed its name and concept again, becoming *Jalgyz Emessin* (from Kyrgyz—"You are not alone"), emphasizing the power of unity and support within society.

My story

My name is Dalida Atakhanova; I am a third-year college student, and I have been one of the leaders of the *Jalgyz Emessin* volunteer club for the second year. Even as an applicant, I didn't know much about volunteering—it seemed to me something far away and, perhaps, not particularly important. However, it was this feeling of uncertainty that fueled my curiosity. At the beginning of my freshman year, I passed the selection process at *Ishenim Bulagi*, not even suspecting how much this would change my life. Over time, the older students noticed my activity and invited me to become the head of the club. Since then, my life and the life of the club have changed. In 2023, our team breathed new life into the club. We have not only changed the name but also expanded the scope of our activities. Today, *Jalgyz Emessin* is a real force uniting college students who are ready to change the world for the better.

The activities of our club

Jalgyz Emessin is a fusion of creativity, initiative, and the desire to help those who need it. We have brought together more than 100 volunteers under the roof of our college, who not only participate in good deeds but also make new friends develop leadership skills, and become part of a large family. In addition to having fun preparing treats for charity fairs with friends or organizing various events. Together, volunteers really bring the best changes to the world and society around them. During my time at the club, we have succeeded:

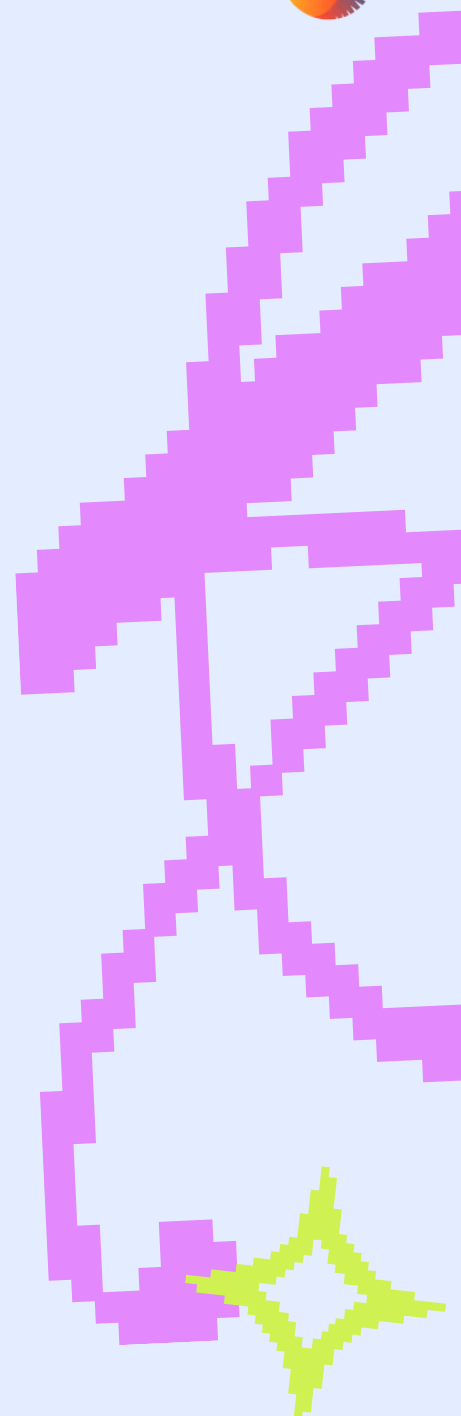
- Provide financial and physical support to the rehabilitation zoo, the *Kainar* for homeless animals;
- Organize environmental initiatives, including clean-up days;
- Collaborate with the *Asia* store chain and the *Second Chance* charity organization;
- Regularly hold charity fairs and social events.

Why is this important?

Jalgyz Emessin is not just about helping others, but also about developing yourself. Our volunteers are becoming responsible, selfless, and active citizens, and good deeds are gradually becoming a part of their daily lives. The inspiring and supportive atmosphere of the club helps everyone feel that doing good is easy and enjoyable. We prove that volunteering is not only about giving back, but also about making new friends, unforgettable experiences, and understanding that even one person can change the world for the better.

P.S. I would like to express my gratitude to the heads of the club: Aselia, Aaly, and Daniel (2023-2024) and Aselia, Aliya, and Simin (2024-2025). Guys, together we can do anything!

Dalida Atakhanova





AUCA CHESS TOURNAMENT

I recently took part in a chess tournament organized by AUCA, and I am happy to share my experience and impressions. It was an unforgettable event that made me experience a lot of impressions—from excitement and worries to joy and pride. I took third place among the students and seniors of the university and college, and I feel that this result is just the beginning.

From the very first minutes of the tournament, it was clear that real chess fans had gathered there. It was very interesting to compete with the students of the American University; everyone had their own style of play and tactical thinking. The atmosphere was like at a world championship—players from different countries took part in the tournament.

I would like to express my special gratitude to my Kyrgyz teacher, Daniyar Agai. He was the one who told me about the tournament, as well as took over the organization of the event itself. He did a lot of work to make the tournament more exciting and well-coordinated.

My career in chess began when I was 6 years old. Since then, I have won gold more than once among the Primorsky Territory and Novosibirsk Region in the Russian Federation. This game has become not only my hobby but also a part of my life, developing critical, tactical, and strategic thinking, concentration, and the ability to make decisions under pressure.

My goal for next year is to become the new AUCA champion. I am sure that my experience and perseverance will help to achieve this.

Baialiev Daniel
ES-1-24

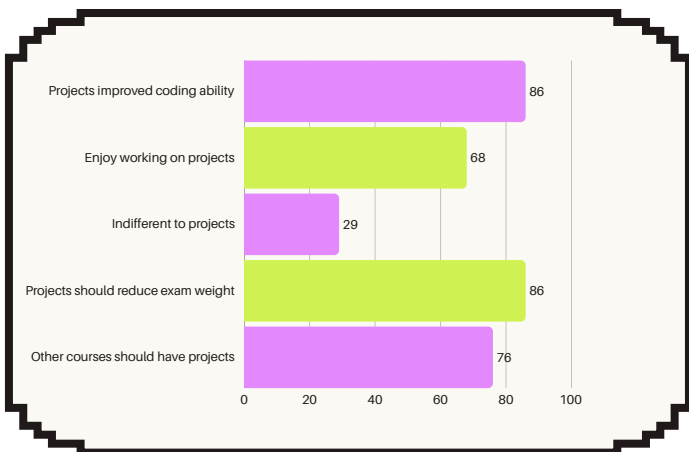


BEYOND THE BOOKS:

Project-Based Learning at AUCA

Part of my devoir as a Teaching Assistant for the Software Engineering department is to design [programming projects](#) for students. The purpose of these projects is to acquaint students with what they will later face in the workplace—like dealing with large pre-existing codebases—as well as serve as a training ground for everything they have learned throughout the course. If the concept of projects seems nouveau, it needn't be. I maintain that such projects provide the best medium for learning; in spite of that, only a select few professors at AUCA nurture this practice. I believe that wide adoption of this practice will enhance students' learning outcomes, and I will explore this hypothesis over a series of articles. This article in particular will present and analyze opinions circulating around projects among those who have either gone through or have implemented them, capture the history of project-based learning at AUCA, and answer why having projects in courses matters.

Though projects may focus on a number of topics, one aspect remains central: the spirit of “*exploration*.” The addition of projects to the Introduction to Programming and Object-Oriented Programming courses was not purposeful—it came about as a result of Dmitrii Shostak's hobby of replicating simple games like 2048. He would then demand that his students did the same, and it was his students who would then suffer the joy of “*exploration*”—being given an objective with no clues of how to reach it. We have since become more humane and began providing initial steps and well-defined concrete goals—with my introduction, we have even introduced implementation tips. Nevertheless, this sense of being lost and having to circumnavigate real-world problems on your own is what yields incredible learning outcomes. As a testimony to that: Based on their reports, students have a mostly very positive outlook toward project-based learning. An anonymous survey distributed among students (sample size of 37) taking the Object-Oriented Programming course reveals the following: 86% believe that projects improved their ability to code (57% do so strongly); 68% enjoy working on projects (24% strongly), while 29% are indifferent. 86% believe projects should be introduced to reduce the point weight of exams (37% strongly); 76% believe other courses should also have projects (when they are applicable). Besides these data points, some students have commented that “[these] projects introduce you to what programming is actually like,” and “projects give a tie to what is taught in the course, strengthening [your knowledge of] it.” On the whole, among students, the perception of projects is positive.



The advent of these projects needn't be accidental. Among the faculty members I have interviewed, some reported that they adopted projects into their syllabi based on workshops they have attended or they have borrowed the practice from a fellow faculty member. This suggests that projects are akin to an evolutionary pinnacle, like crabs, to which every taught course naturally strives. Courses needn't stumble into this discovery: project incorporation can be fostered; as such, the “*gospel of projects*” should be spread, especially considering the positive reception of it among students. However, the position of faculty also needs to be considered in this:

Faculty who have integrated projects into their courses likewise have a positive stance towards projects. The following sentiment has been universal: while projects require additional effort to create, that cost withers away the moment the projects are presented. Indeed, there is nothing more personally rewarding than witnessing your students grow by means of a project you have designed—speaking from experience. Yet the implications of these projects reach beyond their respective courses: they can be combined with doing civil service in coalition with intra-university offices and clubs (primarily, the Center for Civic Engagement, &c). This work inevitably contributes to a student's portfolio, regardless of whether it gets published on the university's webpage (and some projects have!) or not. Naturally, work of such a caliber might be too tumultuous for individual implementation, so courses could also explore the possibility of group projects—endorsing connections between students and contributing to their interpersonal skills.

Despite everything mentioned, therefore projects could have potential drawbacks. For one, projects are a serious test of an individual's time management skills. This concerns not only students with tendencies to procrastinate but also top-performing students, who may overfocus on these projects and hurt their academic performance on other courses—stripping themselves of opportunities. That, however, is a concern that is easily addressable by fostering better time management skills. Second, projects should not be plastered onto every single course. If there are too many projects, they lose their uniqueness, students lose interest in them, and projects lose their effectiveness. However, not every course is compatible with project-based learning, which, in turn, addresses this concern. In spite of these concerns, faculty do maintain a very positive outlook towards project-based learning.

In light of all this, it is time to return to the main question: why does having projects in courses even matter? It is a well-known fact that only 10% of the material received during a lecture or through reading is retained, and about 30% is retained with homework added. Projects are needed because they are a panacea for courses taught in the oh-so-typical lecture/seminar+readings format, which not only enhances learning outcomes but engages students in society, helps them build a portfolio, deepens their interest in the subject, improves their autonomy, and decreases their stress during the exam period by [reducing the point weight of exams](#). Our university is the leading hub for ideas and development in the region, and further ingraining project-based learning into our courses will further foster this among both our faculty and students. There is still much I need to research on this topic, such as: what is the sentiment towards projects among students and faculty who have had no exposure to project-based learning, and how feasible the implementation of such projects is at our university—if my hypothesis about the benefits of project-based learning proves right, the next time senate elections come around at our university, you will doubtlessly see me campaigning to advance project-based learning at AUCA.

Luna Maltseva, SFW-123

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

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