

THE NEW STAR

independent student newspaper

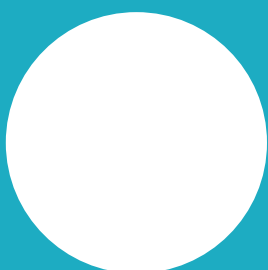
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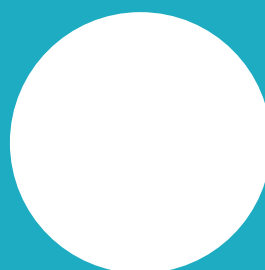
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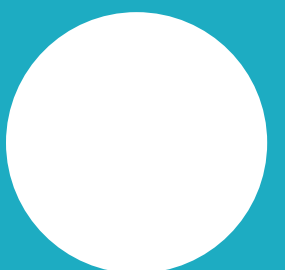
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The History of AWAKE Sociology Club

Due to last year's campus closure, our student life was all about the curriculum only, so many of us felt lost and could not communicate with each other properly. All of us were well aware of the activities that students of AUCA usually have, so the fact that it passed us by was sad and disappointing. Consequently, the faculty of the sociology department suggested that we create a space appropriate for both learning and building friendly relations, and that is how the Sociology Club was created.

During the preparation for our first event, Career Day, we had to actively discuss the details and responsibilities of each member, so we actually interacted more than usual. We discussed the name for our club a lot since we wanted to give it a simple yet an interesting name with deeper meaning behind it. We came up with AWAKE because it is important for every sociologist to "keep their eyes open" in order to see the non-obvious connections between various phenomena. At that very time, we started to open up and get to know each other better. That period was a starting point in the establishment of our friendship.

Later we continued to chat more, gather, and organize different events. Such activities contributed to development of our relationship and to our understanding of sociology as a science. Furthermore, we started to see each other frequently because of the implementation of a hybrid format of study, so having a short walk after classes became a daily ritual of ours.

Finally, a few weeks ago we were able to participate in the Club Fair offline. It was wonderful to meet new people and have fun with friends after not seeing them for a long time. We received a lot of applications to join our club. It encouraged us to work even more and right now we are preparing the next event for our new members. I believe that within our community we will manage to create a comfortable atmosphere for everyone who is interested in sociology and wants to increase their knowledge about society together with us.

Aleksey Pak
Sociology 120



Photos by by Bektemir Momunkulov



Vaccine Hesitancy

As vaccines provide relief from the COVID pandemic to people across the world, some people express differing ideas about and understandings of vaccines.

There are a number of students and staff at the American University of Central Asia who are interested in receiving COVID vaccines. Zandre Reed, an assistant professor in the Television, Cinema, and Media Arts Department, was vaccinated before coming to Kyrgyzstan. He says he did not feel any hesitancy. "A major advantage of the vaccine is that I could travel from South Africa to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, which I could not do without being vaccinated," he said. "I didn't contact people infected with COVID despite living with my little brother, who was positive for two weeks. I am a positive testament and ambassador for the vaccine as a public figure in day-to-day life on campus. I honestly cannot think of any negatives." On the other hand, there are some students at AUCA who experienced vaccine hesitancy at the beginning but are now vaccinated. Lima Habib, a student of international and comparative politics, got vaccinated prior to the start of the fall semester. Before getting the vaccine, she felt unsure about it: "Because there were many vaccines from different countries, I was worried [whether] it would be a good vaccine or [whether] it may cause other problems for me." She kept asking advice from relatives and friends who were vaccinated, and all of them encouraged her to get the vaccine.

With the vaccine, Habib says that she feels safer and more free. "I am not worried that I will be affected by COVID," Habib said. "I live the way that I want." The inspiration of vaccinated people is a powerful force in convincing others to receive vaccines.

Heram Zahra Amiri
ECO 120

A Long but Exciting Journey to New York City!

The Bard Globalization and International Affairs Program (BGIA) is an extraordinary opportunity for junior students at AUCA to take courses in international affairs and US foreign policy, while interning at New York City based civil and foreign policy related organizations. I happened to be one of five students who passed the competitive selection program for fall 2021 semester and flew to NYC, despite the pandemic. We engage in the study of civil society movements around the world; international relations theory; health and epidemiology as well as journalistic writing - all with professionals with outstanding backgrounds. For instance, I learned about US foreign policy with a professor who worked in the State Department. Or I take "Writing on International Affairs" with a New York Times magazine editor. Furthermore, living in the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I am blessed to run in Central Park and walk by the Metropolitan Museum of Art every day. It all could be just dreams, but it is actually happening to me.

Apart from an intensive academic program, I am an intern at Magnum Foundation. It is a nonprofit organization that expands creativity and diversity in documentary photography. Through grant making and mentorship, Magnum Foundation supports a global network of photographers who experiment with new storytelling models and are underrepresented in their countries. My direct responsibilities include work with application selection, grant management, research, and media coverage. The most exciting part of the internship is that I get to visit various photography exhibitions and workshops, which NYC is a blast for.

Lastly, I want to remind AUCA students to develop a long-term goal and lead their activities within that particular scope. Whatever you are doing, make sure to deliberately design your large-scale picture and background. And it will help you as it did to me to pass to BGIA!

Aidin Turganbekov

SOC 119



Education Prevailed

It is a difficult decision to choose between one's loved ones and one's dream, but it was a decision I had to make. The first journey of my life started on the 18th of September, when I said goodbye to my homeland. Saying goodbye to one's family is the most painful feeling a person can ever experience. My father cried to leave his little princess in hands of destiny, and my mother who had cherished me like a diamond was now letting me follow my dreams and build my own castle. As the moment got closer to abandoning my home, my heart beat faster and faster. Who knew what adventure was waiting for me?

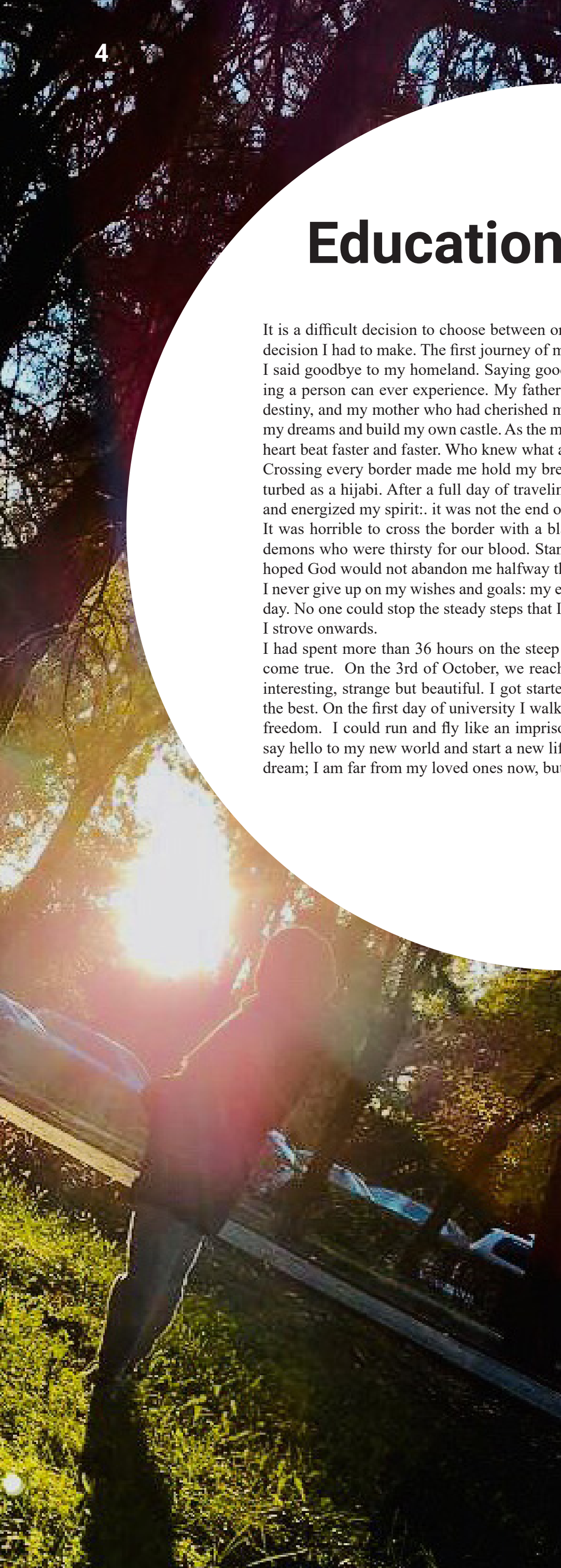
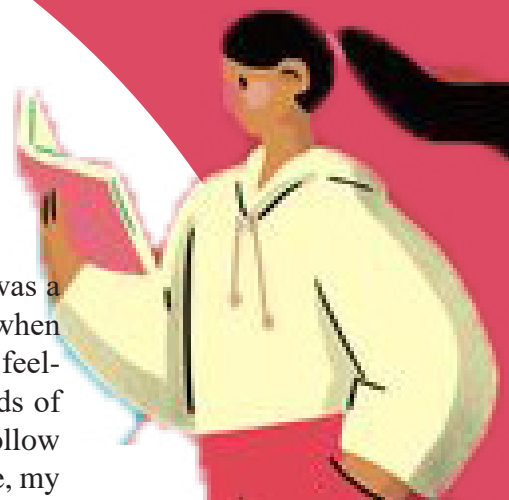
Crossing every border made me hold my breath until I felt safe and sure of not being disturbed as a hijabi. After a full day of traveling, dawn touched my face with a light breeze and energized my spirit: it was not the end of my tale.

It was horrible to cross the border with a black burqa so as not to be identified by those demons who were thirsty for our blood. Standing for hours made me impatient, but I just hoped God would not abandon me halfway through my journey.

I never give up on my wishes and goals: my education, my passion to prevail. I made it that day. No one could stop the steady steps that I put on the ground. Despite hunger and thirst I strove onwards.

I had spent more than 36 hours on the steep mountains and highways to make my dream come true. On the 3rd of October, we reached our destination and our destiny. New but interesting, strange but beautiful. I got started on a new chapter of my life and hoped for the best. On the first day of university I walked through grass and breathed in the smell of freedom. I could run and fly like an imprisoned bird released from a dark cage. I would say hello to my new world and start a new life. I did not let my education remain merely a dream; I am far from my loved ones now, but I believe we will reunite one day.

Bibi Mahdia Yari
ICP 121



Why Should Students Use the Writing and Academic Resource Center?

An Interview with WARC Director

Mariya Antonova

Academic excellence is one of the main goals of most AUCA students, and there are different resources at the university that can help students receive or maintain their excellent grades. Probably one of the most helpful resources of all is the Writing and Academic Resource Center, which offers tutoring to AUCA students in a variety of subjects.. From my personal experience, WARC writing tutors helped me a great deal with my academic essays. I had never written academic essays with citations and references, but WARC tutors taught me how to do it in a proper way.

We spoke to WARC Director Mariya Antonova about what her office does and what students can expect from a visit.

The New Star: What are the three main goals of the WARC?

Mariya Antonova: I will just mention one because the rest really flows from that one goal. The WARC's primary mission is to help AUCA students succeed in their courses across the curriculum. We strongly believe that developing a culture of active and purposeful engagement in one's learning process is one of the most fundamental aims of a liberal arts education, and it is this belief that defines both the WARC's mission and its tutoring practices.

TNS: According to students' feedback after the sessions, does the WARC make a big contribution to their improvement in their academics?

MA: That's a good question, and one we take very seriously. A few years ago, we conducted a fairly extensive study on whether the WARC actually contributes to student success, and if so, then how. In the process, we have discovered that students who come to the WARC 10 times or more per semester tend to have higher grades than average in the courses in which they seek tutoring, and enjoy a higher GPA overall. Those students have also reported lowered stress levels and an increase in self-esteem and confidence. The professors we interviewed as part of the study likewise noted that students who come to the WARC are more relaxed and feel that they have things under control because they continually go to the WARC. Also, those frequent visitors to the WARC reported an increase in their learning capital. They noticed an improvement in their competencies and skills, the fact that they are more capable of attaining their educational goals and engage in educationally purposeful activities. As one student said, "It happens that you have some kind of knowledge, but it's not systematized, and there's this mess in your head. And here they helped with that." It is not surprising, therefore, that those students who come to the WARC on a regular basis are also a great deal less likely to leave AUCA without graduating.

TNS: What kind of activities does the WARC do besides tutoring sessions?

MA: The WARC's peer tutors are of course our best and most effective asset. That said, there are other ways in which we are trying to support the AUCA learning community. One is conducting workshops that assist students with different aspects of writing. Last year, because we felt that the pandemic had left graduating seniors in a particularly vulnerable position, we focused our efforts specifically on thesis writing: how to write a

literature review, how to write a research proposal, how to revise one's thesis, etc. This year, on the other hand, we are designing our workshops in a way that we hope is useful to students of all levels, from freshmen to masters-level students. Those workshops are recorded and posted on our YouTube channel, so anyone can view them.

Our YouTube channel is also home to the Kyrgyz Language Tutorials video series, the content for which is produced in-house, at the WARC, by a team consisting of our Kyrgyz language tutor, Adina Sulumbekova, TCMA student videographer Nursultan Shermambetov, and WARC Coordinator Erica Eisen. We originally started making those videos to assist AUCA's international student community with learning Kyrgyz, as there were very few resources for studying the Kyrgyz language in English, and certainly almost nothing in the video form. This initiative recently received an award from the government of Kyrgyzstan, and we were pretty shocked when we heard the news: we never expected it to go beyond the walls of AUCA. All we had really been hoping for is that it would be helpful to our students.

Finally, we are maintaining a fairly large body of writing-related resources that students can use at any point in their academic career. Those resources can be found on our website, warc.auca.kg, in the "Resources for Students" section.

There's of course a whole other aspect of WARC activities that most students don't get to see, and that is the professional and personal development of our tutor corps: internal workshops, training sessions, mentoring, and so on, to make sure that they keep growing as people and as professionals, and that they serve the AUCA student community in the best way possible.

TNS: What is your advice to AUCA students regarding academic excellence?

MA: Two things, I guess. The first is to decide how much of a priority academic excellence really is for you and direct your time and effort accordingly. If you want to be good, you have to put in a lot of time and effort. If you want to be excellent, then it's even more effort and even more time. Academic excellence is not something that just happens, no matter how gifted you are. I am observing the WARC's tutors, who are some of the best students on campus, and they all put their studies first and work really hard at them.

The second is obvious: come to the WARC, and come regularly. One of the things that have become obvious to us over the years is how stressed out and overwhelmed students often feel, and having that regular support will help you feel more in control of your academic destiny.

Salima Almazbekova

JMC 121

A Once-in-a-Lifetime Experience

“Exchange isn’t a year of your life, it’s a life in a year.”

This quote affirms that an exchange year means something more than we know at the moment. I think that every single university student should get the opportunity to go on at least one exchange year because it allows us to see the world and become a global citizen.

As an exchange student and alumna of the Global Undergraduate Exchange program, I myself had both fruitful experiences to cherish and difficulties to overcome. One of the challenges I faced was a cultural shock. Prior to leaving my home country Tajikistan, I had never thought that I might feel cultural shock during my stay in the United States. But I went through an emotional rollercoaster of honeymoon period, frustration, adjustment, and acceptance during my stay. At the very beginning of my exchange journey, I had abundant energy and courage when experiencing new things. However, I started feeling homesick and thought of returning home soon. Most of the time, I feel that I do not like the exchange year, while remembering home, family and local friends. But eventually I realized that culture shock is experienced by anyone who goes for an exchange to a foreign country.

Upon completion of my studies at the University of Southern Indiana, I had another, more complicated challenge to face: reverse culture shock.. Due to re-adapting back in my home country, the community, and people I used to face difficult moments to communicate.

My exchange programs’ challenges made me resilient, thus giving me one of life’s most important lessons. I truly believe that all that time spent working on exchange program applications is worth it to have the opportunity to live and study abroad at least once. My program used to always remind us that an exchange experience is an everlasting one: once an exchange student, always an exchange student.

Sitora Sufijonova

ES 121



FLEX Volunteering Club at AUCA

What is volunteering and why do we need it? It is important to note that it is not just free work. Volunteering is a selfless act of help towards people in your or other communities. Influenced by volunteering activities in the U.S. during his Future Leaders Exchange Program year, Aidin Turganbekov wanted to create a similar atmosphere at his university. With this goal, he created the FLEX Volunteering Club in 2019. The club's goal is to create a community of people who are ready to help on a voluntary basis. Even though our volunteers do not receive a paycheck, they receive knowledge and experience, which are really important in character development. As our club was established with the help of the FLEX program and American Councils of Kyrgyzstan, we also work on the leadership skills of our volunteers. For November, volunteers are already planning projects for both AUCA and the city at large.

We focus on the areas of children's empowerment, education and development, climate change, and gender equality. One of the biggest projects of our club is Basketball for All. We conduct basketball training for children with autism in order to keep them active and happy. Our volunteers play and communicate with children every Saturday. As this project is already running its second cohort, we can see the progress and improvements of our participants. We will create more projects for people who need our help and support.

Saliya Khurova
BA 120



Ты...

Подобно тёплому лучу
Проникнуть в душу можешь ты
И осветив всю глубину,
В ней вновь появятся цветы...

Ах... Как жить мне без тебя? Не знаю...
Злой рок судьбы решил нас погубить:
Тоска погубит очень скоро, каюсь,
Но лишь один ваш взгляд сможет меня оживить!

Когда духов почую дуновение,
Когда в душе затрепещут мотыльки,
Вы явитесь ко мне на одно мгновение/однажды/в
один момент,
И вновь воскреснут в доме цветники.

Aizada Sulaimankulova

ES 119

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