

Alliance of Asian Liberal Arts Universities (AALAU)

Annual Presidents' Forum 2026

What Are Universities For?
Liberal Arts Education, AI, and the Human Question

Host Institution
American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic
October 9-10, 2026

Two-day forum bringing together university leaders, scholars, and practitioners from Central Asia, East Asia, and beyond to examine the purpose of the university in an age of artificial intelligence.

Program at a Glance

Day 1 — Friday, 9 October	Governance, Pedagogy, and Leadership
08:45–09:00	Registration
09:00–09:30	Opening Ceremony & Welcome Remarks
09:30–10:30	Keynote Address — Dr. Chrys Margaritidis
11:00–12:00	Plenary: AALAU University Representatives
13:00–14:30	Academic Session 1: AI Governance & Institutional Policy
14:45–16:00	Academic Session 2: AI in Teaching, Curriculum & Assessment
16:15–17:15	Presidents' Roundtable: Integration of AI into Curriculum
18:00–19:30	Welcome Reception & Cultural Evening
Day 2 — Saturday, 10 October	Actionable Strategies and Closing
09:00–10:30	Academic Session 3: Computation & the Humanistic Disciplines (Parallel Sessions)
10:45–12:00	Academic Session 4: Student Well-Being & Human-Centered Education
12:15–13:15	Workshop: Thinking & Writing Techniques (Tolyq Adam)
14:15–15:30	Academic Session 6: Mobility, Exchange & Regional Geopolitics
15:45–17:00	Academic Session 7: Interdisciplinary & Foundational Perspectives on Learning
17:00–17:15	Closing Ceremony & Keynote Reflections

DAY 1 · Friday, 9 October 2026 — Governance, Pedagogy, and Leadership**08:45 – 09:00 | Registration**

Venue: MakerSpace CH

09:00 – 09:30 | Opening Ceremony and Welcome Remarks

Welcome Remarks: Dr. Timothy O'Connor, President, AUCA · Dr. Assylbek Kozhakhmetov, President, Almaty Management University (ALMAU)

Format: 10-minute (informal) presentation by the institutions · Venue: MakerSpace CH

09:30 – 10:30 | Keynote Address**“What Are Universities For? Liberal Arts Education, Artificial Intelligence, and Ethics”**

Speaker: Dr. Chrys Margaritidis, Bard College — Dean of International Initiatives; Director, Institute for International Liberal Education and Bard Abroad

Moderator: Dr. Timothy O'Connor, President, AUCA · Venue: MakerSpace CH

10:30 – 11:00 | Coffee Break**11:00 – 12:00 | Plenary Session: Opening Remarks from AALAU University Representatives**

Moderator: Dr. Timothy O'Connor, AUCA

Representatives:

- Dr. Wang Subin, Director, Office for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Affairs, **East China Normal University (ECNU)** & Ms. Xu Qingqing, Program Officer, Office for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Affairs, ECNU
- Prof. Jeanne FU Ho-ying, Vice-President (Learning and Student Experience), The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong
- Dr. Zach Fredman, Dean of Faculty Affairs, Duke Kunshan University

Format: 15-minute presentation per institution on their role within the Alliance, with a 15-minute Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

12:00 – 13:00 | Lunch · Venue: Kitchenette**13:00 – 14:30 | Academic Session 1: AI Governance and Institutional Policy***Theme: Frameworks for Responsible AI Adoption in Higher Education and Beyond*

Moderator: Dr. Angelina Popova, Director, Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT), AUCA

Format: 4 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

*Participants will explore macro-level policy design, institutional governance models, and cross-sectoral coordination for responsible AI.***Presentations:**

1. From Digital Transformation to Artificial Intelligence Governance: Designing a Framework for Responsible AI Adoption in Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan — Meerim Razbaeva, Director, Office of Legal Affairs, University of Central Asia (UCA)
2. Institutional Synergy and AI Governance: The CARE Initiative and Policy Development at AUCA — Ekaterina Kombarova & Jyldyz Bekbalaeva, AUCA
3. AI and Immigration Governance — Rogers Rukeba, Master of Arts in Laws, AUCA
4. Anthropomorphization of Artificial Intelligence — Olga Shkonda, Psychology Department, AUCA

14:30 – 14:45 | Coffee Break**14:45 – 16:00 | Academic Session 2: AI in Teaching, Curriculum, and Assessment***Theme: Pedagogical Reform and the Recognition of AI Learning*

Moderator: Ekaterina Kombarova, Deputy Director, CTLT, AUCA

Format: 3 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

*Participants will gain models for system-wide reform, discipline-specific assessment design, and recognition of experiential AI learning.***Presentations:**

1. Education and Teaching Reform in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Explorations and Practices at East China Normal University — Dr. Wang Subin & Ms. Xu Qingqing, ECNU
2. Adapting the AI Assessment Scale for L2 Academic Writing in the NGA Preparatory English Program at AUCA — Izzuddin Izzuddin & Kamilya Kadyrova, AUCA
3. Beyond the Fixed Curriculum: Bootcamps, Hackathons, and the Formal Recognition of Experiential AI Learning — Dr. Angelina Popova, Nurbolot Ruslan uulu, AUCA & Andrey Ermakov, Ala-Too International University

16:00 – 16:15 | Coffee Break**16:15 – 17:15 | Presidents' Roundtable: Leadership in Integrating AI into the Curriculum**

Moderator: Dr. Chynarkul Ryskulova, Vice President of Academic Affairs, AUCA

This roundtable will focus on the practical integration of AI into the curriculum and the institutional experience of leading universities in Central Asia. The Presidents/Rectors will share brief insights from their respective institutions, discussing the extent to which they have successfully promoted AI as an institutional practice and the lessons learned from their implementation journeys.

Panelists:

- Dr. Assylbek Kozhakhmetov, President, Almaty Management University (ALMAU)
- Dr. Timothy O'Connor, President, American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
- Dr. Ruslan Rahimov, Rector, Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic

Venue: MakerSpace CH

18:00 – 19:30 | Welcome Reception & Cultural Evening

Format: Networking, light performances, informal exchanges · Venue: AUCA Campus CH, Room 440

DAY 2 · Saturday, 10 October 2026 — Actionable Strategies and Closing**08:45 – 09:00 | Registration · Venue: MakerSpace CH****09:00 – 10:30 | Academic Session 3: Computation and the Humanistic Disciplines**

Theme: What Computation Preserves and What It Costs — Meaning, Reasoning, and Language in the Algorithmic Age

Parallel Tracks**Session 3a — Algorithmic Reason, Language, and Power: Critical Perspectives on AI**

Moderator: Mariya Antonova, Director, Writing and Academic Resource Center, AUCA

Format: 4 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

1. A Quality-Diversity Paradox: What Fan Fiction Reveals About Algorithmic Homogenization in Creative Writing — Dr. Angelina Popova, AUCA
2. Argument Mining and Human Reasoning: Preserved and Lost Properties in Computational Representation — Renata Balbaeva, AUCA
3. Technology and the Loss of Meaningful Political Language in the 21st Century — Dr. Jana Lozanoska, AUCA
4. Who Frames the Question? Generative AI and the Power to Define What Matters - Dr. Nurken Aubakir, inVision U

Session 3b — Digital Humanities in Kyrgyzstan: Trends and Perspectives in the Age of AI

Moderators: Kamilya Kadyrova, Director, New Generation Academy, AUCA & Jyldyz Bekbalaeva, Director of Library, AUCA

Venue: AUCA Main Building CH, Room 440

Speakers include:

- Dr. Aida Kasieva, Dr. Gulnura Jumalieva, Dr. Nurgul Karybekova (Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University)
- Dr. Aida Abdykanova, Dr. Ayse Cavdar, Baitur Toktosunov, Dr. Natalia Korosteleva, Ekaterina Kombarova, Kamilya Kadyrova, Jyldyz Bekbalaeva (AUCA)

10:30 – 10:45 | Coffee Break**10:45 – 12:00 | Academic Session 4: Student Well-Being and Human-Centered Education**

Theme: Ethical Prevention and Holistic Models of Flourishing

Moderator: Dr. Makhinur Mamatova, Head of Psychology Department, AUCA

Format: 3 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

Participants will explore ethical biometric analytics, indigenous philosophical models, and whole-person educational frameworks.

Presentations:

1. From Reactive Support to Preventive Campus Well-Being: Ethical Multimodal Biometric Analytics for Early Detection of Cognitive Stress — Dr. Nicolas Hamelin & Dr. Urmat Ryskulov, SP Jain School of Global Management (Neuroscience Lab, Sydney Campus) & AUCA
2. What Should Remain Human? The Tolyq Adam Model of Whole-Person Education — Dr. Aizhan Sapargaliyeva, Almaty Management University (AlmaU)
3. Aqyl-Zhyrek-Qayrat: An Indigenous Philosophical Model of Student Well-being in Central Asian Higher Education — Dr. Meruyert Seidumanova, Almaty Management University (AlmaU)

12:00 – 12:15 | Coffee Break**12:15 – 13:15 | Academic Session 5: Workshop****“How to Use Thinking and Writing Techniques While Teaching Tolyq Adam Courses in the AI Era”**

Facilitator: Irina Kruglova, Almaty Management University (AlmaU) · Format: Interactive workshop · Venue: MakerSpace CH

13:14– 14:15 | Lunch · Venue: Kitchenette**14:15 – 15:30 | Academic Session 6: Mobility, Exchange, and Regional Geopolitics**

Theme: Movement, Pedagogy, and the Central Asian Context

Moderator: Dr. Chrys Margaritidis, Bard College

Format: 3 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

Participants will examine virtual exchange, cognitive benefits of mobility, and geopolitical constraints on cross-border academic movement.

Presentations:

1. Connecting Continents Through Virtual Exchange: Bridging Asia and Africa — Ekaterina Galimova, General Education Department, AUCA & Emilienne Akpan, American University in Nigeria
2. Beyond Mobility: A Cognitive Psychology Perspective on How Student Exchange Can Inform Pedagogical Innovation in Asian Liberal Arts Education — ErKayim Zhanybekova, AUCA
3. Navigating Cross-Border Academic Mobility in Central Asia Amidst Shifting Geopolitics — Nabila Ataye, AUCA

15:30 – 15:45 | Coffee Break**15:45 – 17:00 | Academic Session 7: Interdisciplinary and Foundational Perspectives on Learning**

Theme: Materials, Mentorship, and the History of Knowledge

Moderator: Dr. Nurken Aubakir, InVision U

Format: 3 presentations × 15 min + 30 min Q&A · Venue: MakerSpace CH

Participants will reflect on the material, relational, and mathematical foundations of learning.

Presentations:

1. One Material, Many Questions: What “Chiy” Reveals About Interdisciplinary Learning — Cholpon Kuskakbaeva, AUCA
2. Styles and Experience: Senior Theses and Dissertation Supervision in Psychology Departments at Bishkek Universities (Kyrgyzstan) — Dr. Gulnara Kurmanova & Dr. Nina Bagdasarova, AUCA
3. A Critical Look at the Conversation Between Euclid and Ptolemy I — Dr. Kydyraliev S.K., Burova E.S., AUCA, and Dr. Urdaletova A.B., Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University.

17:00 – 17:15 | Closing Ceremony & Keynote Reflections

Closing Address: Dr. Timothy O'Connor, President, AUCA

Venue: MakerSpace CH

17:15 | Optional Network Dinner or Departure

Program Note. These seven sessions trace a deliberate arc — from institutional governance and pedagogical practice, through human cognition and well-being, to regional context and foundational reflection. Together they ask not only what artificial intelligence can do for higher education, but what higher education must decide to remain human.

List of Participants

#	Name	Institution
1	Dr. Timothy O'Connor	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
2	Dr. Assylbek Kozhakhmetov	Almaty Management University (ALMAU)
3	Dr. Chrys Margaritidis	Bard College
4	Dr. Wang Subin	East China Normal University (ECNU)
5	Ms. Xu Qingqing	East China Normal University (ECNU)
6	Prof. Jeanne FU Ho-ying	The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong
7	Dr. Zach Fredman	Duke Kunshan University
8	Dr. Angelina Popova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
9	Meerim Razbaeva	University of Central Asia (UCA)
10	Ekaterina Kombarova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
11	Dr. Jyldyz Bekbalaeva	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
12	Rogers Rukeba	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
13	Olga Shkonda	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
14	Izzuddin Izzuddin	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
15	Kamilya Kadyrova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
16	Dr. Andrey Ermakov	Ala-Too International University
17	Nurbolot Ruslan uulu	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
18	Dr. Chynarkul Ryskulova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
19	Dr. Ruslan Rahimov	Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Kyrgyz Republic
20	Mariya Antonova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
21	Renata Balbaeva	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
22	Dr. Jana Lozanoska	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
23	Dr. Aida Kasieva	Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University
24	Dr. Gulnura Jumalieva	Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University
25	Dr. Nurgul Karybekova	Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University
26	Dr. Aida Abdykanova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
27	Dr. Ayse Cavdar	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
28	Baitur Toktosunov	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
29	Dr. Natalia Korosteleva	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
30	Dr. Makhinur Mamatova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
31	Dr. Nicolas Hamelin	SP Jain School of Global Management
32	Dr. Urmat Ryskulov	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
33	Dr. Meruyert Seidumanova	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)
34	Dr. Aizhan Sapargaliyeva	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)
35	Irina Kruglova	Almaty Management University (AlmaU)
36	Dr. Nurken Aubakir	inVision U
37	Dr. Ekaterina Galimova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
38	Erkayim Zhanybekova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
39	Nabila Ataye	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
40	Cholpon Kuskakbaeva	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
41	Dr. Gulnara Kurmanova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)

42	Dr. Nina Bagdasarova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
43	Dr. Syrgak Kydyraliev	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)
44	Dr. Anarkul Urdaletova	Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University
45	Elena Burova	American University of Central Asia (AUCA)

Organizing Committee

#	Name	Role / Affiliation
1	Aselia Umetalieva	Director of International Student Office, AUCA
2	Dr. Gökem Atsungur	Chair of International and Comparative Politics; Head of the Social Sciences Division, AUCA
3	Diora Kurbanova	Assistant to the President (President's Office), AUCA
4	Giliana Sarangova	Executive Officer to the President, AUCA
5	Katia Nasim	Student Volunteer, Business Administration
6	Chynara Kasymova	Student Volunteer, International and Comparative Politics
7	Nuriza Ulanbekova	Student Volunteer, Business Administration
8	Cholpon Toktogulova	Student Volunteer, Business Administration
9	Ayana Ulanova	Student Volunteer, International and Comparative Politics
10	Aibike Bekbalaeva	Student Volunteer, Anthropology