



DIPLOMACY OF THE HEART CONFERENCE

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

April 27–29, 2026

The third Diplomacy of the Heart International Conference will take place in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from April 27–29, 2026. Hosted by the Baskerville Institute in partnership with the Youth Union of Uzbekistan, and in collaboration with academic and cultural institutions in Uzbekistan and Utah, the conference will explore the theme, “Language, Literature, and Law as Pathways to Intercultural Dialogue and Peacebuilding.” Bringing together scholars, practitioners, and emerging leaders, the conference seeks to inspire thoughtful exchange, cultivate enduring partnerships, and generate actionable ideas that strengthen mutual understanding and contribute to a more peaceful and interconnected world.



Diplomacy
of the **Heart**

Conference Venue

Palace of Youth Creativity,
Uzbekistan Union of Youth

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DIPLOMACY OF THE HEART CONFERENCE

The 2026 Diplomacy of the Heart conference focuses on the role of language, literature, and law as interconnected pathways for fostering intercultural dialogue and advancing peace building. It highlights how language can serve as a tool for empathy and meaningful communication, literature as a bridge for shared understanding across cultures, and legal frameworks as mechanisms for promoting justice and inclusion in diverse societies. The conference also emphasizes the importance of youth engagement, ethical leadership, and the role of higher education in cultivating responsible global citizens. Through these themes, it seeks to encourage collaboration, deepen mutual respect, and generate practical approaches to addressing cultural and societal divides



CONFERENCE LOCATION

Palace of Youth Creativity -
Uzbekistan Union of Youth



STUDENT WORKSHOP

April 27, 2026

The Diplomacy of the Heart Student Workshop will explore how language, literature, and cultural understanding can foster empathy, dialogue, and peacebuilding. Through student presentations and collaborative discussion, participants will reflect on the role of language in shaping identity, dignity, and intercultural connection. Brigham Young University's student organization Peacemaker Project and Baskerville Institute's interns, students from Utah Universities, Uzbekistan and Central Asia will participate in the workshop.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

MONDAY, APRIL 27 | STUDENT WORKSHOP

The **Diplomacy of the Heart Student Workshop** will explore how language, literature, and cultural understanding can foster **empathy**, **dialogue**, and **peacebuilding**. Through student presentations and collaborative discussion, participants will reflect on the role of language in shaping identity, dignity, and intercultural connection. Brigham Young University's student organization Peacemaker Project and Baskerville Institute's interns, students from Utah Universities, Uzbekistan and Central Asia will participate in the workshop.

8:45–9:15 AM | Registration

9:15–9:30 AM | Welcome Address

Bahman Baktiari - Executive Director, Baskerville Institute

Will Van Hoff - Conference Coordinator, Baskerville Institute

Jessie Moore - President, BYU Peacemaker Project

9:30–9:50 AM | Opening Keynote Address

Akbarkhon Sobirkhonov - Head of the Youth Academy, Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation

10:00–11:30 AM | Session I

Facilitator: Professor Tony Brown - Dept. of German and Russian, Brigham Young University

Presentations:

"Finding a Civic Voice: Language Learning and Youth Engagement from Grassroots Leadership in a Rural Nicaraguan Community"

Sarah Caffrey - Brigham Young University

"The Role of Literature, Poetry, and Storytelling in Peacebuilding"

Nozima Baxtiyorova - Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Breathing Culture: Virtual Reality Stories of Indigenous Groups

Coleton Zimmerman - Weber State University

The Role of Language in the Immigrant Experience

Garrett Wride - Brigham Young University



MONDAY, APRIL 27 | STUDENT WORKSHOP

11:30–12:00 PM | Luncheon Address

Khayrulla Sattarov – Chairman, Youth Union of Uzbekistan
Muslima Abdujalilova – Chief Specialist, Youth Union of Uzbekistan

12:00–1:00 PM | Luncheon

Conference Hall: Light lunch for *guests*
Level 1: Private lunch for *speakers*

1:00–2:00 PM | Interactive Dialogue “Common Ground Bingo”

Jessie Moore - President, The Peacemaker Project

2:00–2:20 PM | Special Training “Effective Planning: From Dialogue to Action”

Brent Bishop - Chairman of the Board, Attitudes Foundation

2:20–3:40 PM | Session 2

Facilitator: TaraLee Cook - Associate Director, BYU Whitmore Global Business Center

Presentations:

“Linguistic Preservation as a Mode of Peacebuilding”

Kirsten Dewberry - Utah State University

“Language, Identity, and Empathy in Multicultural Societies”

Dilnura Istamova - Uzbekistan State World Languages University

“Original Languages as a Means for Transforming a Nation & Building Peace”

Sydney Jezik - Brigham Young University

“Language as a Tool of Empathy and Intercultural Communication”

Laziza Sadullayeva - Uzbekistan State World Languages University

3:45–4:00 PM | Student Selection

Students Elect Workshop Report Presenter

4:00–4:15 PM | Concluding Remarks

Will Van Hoff - The Baskerville Institute
Muslima Abdujalilova - Youth Union of Uzbekistan



TUESDAY, APRIL 28 | CONFERENCE DAY 1

LOCATION: PALACE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY



8:30–9:00 AM | Registration

9:00–9:25 AM | Introduction & Opening Remarks

Bahman Baktiari - Executive Director, Baskerville Institute

David Stirling - Chairman of the Board, the Stirling Foundation & Founding Executive/Chairman, doTERRA.

Khayrulla Sattarov - Chairman, Youth Union of Uzbekistan

9:25–10:00 AM | Opening Keynote

H.E. Dr. Muzaffar Muratovich Kamilov - Head of Department for Religious and Educational Affairs, Presidential Administration of Uzbekistan & Rector of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

10:00–10:20 AM | Coffee Break

10:20–11:00 AM | Special Address: *"Islam and Peace: Ethical Foundations and Diplomacy of the Heart"*

H.E. Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali - Chairman, MUSLIM Institute (Islamabad-London based research institute)

11:00 AM–12:15 PM | Conference Panel 1

"Reframing Narratives Through Language and Literature: Moving from Conflict-centered Narratives to Human-centered Narratives"

Panel Chair: H.E. Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali - Chairman, MUSLIM Institute

Presentations:

"Listening Before Explaining: Why Multilingual Skills Matter for International Relations and Political Science"

Quinn Mecham - Associate Professor of Political Science, Brigham Young University

"Why Primary-Source Language Matters in Interpreting and Analyzing Iran's Political and Religious Institutions"

Mehran Kamrava - Professor of Government, Georgetown University in Qatar (via Zoom)

"Language Learning as the Diplomacy of the Heart: Lessons from Teaching Russian"

Tony Brown - Professor of Russian, Brigham Young University



TUESDAY, APRIL 28 | CONFERENCE DAY 1

LOCATION: PALACE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY

12:15–1:00 PM | Luncheon Address

Student Workshop Report - Student representatives present a summary report from the Student Workshop

Partnership Signing Ceremony

“Language Education as the Diplomacy of the Heart: Preparing Students for Cultural Diplomacy and Dialogue in Uzbekistan”

Rivoddin Karimov - Rector, Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages

1:00–2:00 PM | Luncheon

Conference Hall: Light lunch for *guests*

Level 1: Private lunch for *speakers*

2:00–3:30 PM | Special Roundtable

“Educating the Heart: International Education Partnerships as Bridges of Culture, Heritage, and Trust”

Panel Chair: Tony Brown - Professor of Russian, Brigham Young University

Participants:

Laura Brown - Counselor for Public Diplomacy, U.S. Embassy in Tashkent

Gregory Hill - Chief Administrative Officer & Dean of Faculty, University of Utah Asia Campus

Mary A. Machira - Senior International Officer, Weber State University

Nabijon Holov - Chief Specialist, Ministry of Higher Education, Science & Innovation

3:30–5:00 PM | Conference Panel 2

“Language, Identity, and Global Belonging”

Panel Chair: Paul Picard – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Presentations:

“Genealogies of the Heart: Lineage, Language, and Literature in the Persianate Search for Connection”

Jarrett Anderson - Program Manager, Middle East/Africa North Area, FamilySearch International

“Spiritual Diplomacy in A Fragmented World: The Role of Islamic Higher Education in Building Trust, Dialogue and Ethical Global Engagement”

Olim Astanakulov - Vice-Rector, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan

Faith, Identity, and Belonging: The Role of Theological Education in a Globalized World

Agil Shirinov - Rector, Azerbaijan Institute of Theology



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29 | CONFERENCE DAY 2

LOCATION: PALACE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY



8:30–9:00 AM | Registration

9:00–9:30 AM | Opening Remarks

Bahman Baktiari - Executive Director, Baskerville Institute

Ilkhomjon Madaminovich Tukhtasinov - Rector, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

9:30–9:45 AM | Opening Keynote Address

Islambek Rustambekov - Vice-Rector For Academic Affairs, Tashkent State University of Law

9:45–10:45 AM | Law-Focused Session

“Currents Affecting Legal Cultures in Central Asia”

Panel Chair: Islambek Rustambekov - Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, Professor, Tashkent State University of Law; DSc in Law

Presentations:

“Currents Shaping Legal Culture in Central Asia: Invalidity of Transactions in the Kyrgyz Republic as a Case Study”

Natalia Alenkina - Associate Professor of Law, American University of Central Asia

“Legal Pluralism in Constitutionally Secular, Muslim-Majority Uzbekistan: Persistence and Evolving Dynamics”

Akhadjon Khakimov - Head, Research Center of International Law and Comparative Legislation, Tashkent State University of Law; DSc in Law

10:45–11:00 AM | Coffee Break

11:00 AM–12:00 PM | Law-Focused Session (Continued)

“Currents Affecting Legal Cultures in Central Asia”

Panel Chair: Islambek Rustambekov - Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs & Professor, Tashkent State University of Law

Presentations:

“The evolution of legal culture in Kazakhstan: a case study of the development and transformation of religious freedom”

Yerzhan Nukezhanov - Expert in State-Religious Affairs; Former Chairman, Committee for Religious Affairs of Kazakhstan

“Shaping Justice: How AI is Transforming Legal Culture in Uzbekistan and Central Asia”

Shokhrukhbek Tillaboev - Senior Researcher, Research Center of International Law and Comparative Legislation, Tashkent State University of Law; PhD in Law



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29 | CONFERENCE DAY 2

LOCATION: PALACE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY

12:00–12:30 PM | Luncheon Address

“From the Silk Road to Today: Samarkand as a Living Classroom for the Diplomacy of the Heart”

Bakhodir Kholikov - Rector, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

12:30–1:30 PM | Luncheon

Conference Hall: Light lunch for *guests*

Level 1: Private lunch for *speakers*

1:30 PM–2:45 PM | Conference Panel 3

“Language as a Pathway to Empathy, Humanization, and Peacebuilding”

Panel Chair: Quinn Mecham - Professor, BYU Kennedy Center for International Studies

Presentations:

“Seeing Through Another’s Eyes: CineVR, Empathy, and Human-Centered Diplomacy”

Aaron Atkins - Professor, Weber State University

“Linguistic Empathy as a Pathway to Peace”

Maha Mansour – Ministry of Education, United Arab Emirates

“The Role of Educational Practices in Preserving the Arabic Language: Perspectives of Arabic Language Teachers in International Schools in the UAE”

Mohammad Eid Al-Qaraan - Al Ain University, United Arab Emirates

2:45–3:45 PM | Conference Panel 4

“The Living Legacies of the Silk Roads”

Panel Chair: Dilshod Xudoyberdiyev - Researcher, Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute

Presentations:

“The Modern Silk Road as a Guarantee of Peace and Stability”

Vaxob Kuchkarov - Professor, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

“The New Great Silk Road as an Important Socio-Political Framework for Cooperation in the Region”

Tulqin Akhmedov - Professor, Uzbekistan State World Languages University

“Reflections on the Silk Roads: Networks of Exchange and Cultural Interaction”

Richard Goodall - Uzbekistan State World Languages University



WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29 | CONFERENCE DAY 2

LOCATION: PALACE OF YOUTH CREATIVITY

3:45–4:00 PM | Coffee Break

4:00–5:15 PM | Conference Panel 5

“Rethinking Language Instruction in Higher Education”

Panel Chair: Bahman Baktiari - Executive Director, Baskerville Institute

Presentations:

“Building a Bi-Cultural Academic Environment in Korea: Lessons Learned from Operating an American University Campus within the Korean Higher Education and Cultural Context”

Gregory C. Hill - Chief Administrative Officer & Dean of Faculty, University of Utah Asia Campus

“Academic Diplomacy in Practice: Strengthening Legal Education through International Cooperation and Cultural Exchange”

Fitrat Umirov - Head of the International Cooperation Department, Tashkent State University of Law

“How BYU–Pathway Worldwide Understands Its Curriculum as Diplomacy of the Heart: Fostering Empathy, Dignity, and Human Connection”

Eric Karl - Vice President of Curriculum, BYU-Pathway Worldwide

5:15–5:30 PM | Concluding Remarks

Bahman Baktiari - Executive Director, Baskerville Institute

Tony Brown - Professor, Brigham Young University



End of the 2026 Diplomacy of the Heart Conference



CONFERENCE STAFF

We extend our sincere gratitude to the dedicated staff of the Diplomacy of the Heart conference in Tashkent for their exceptional commitment, professionalism, and thoughtful stewardship of this important initiative. We especially wish to recognize the invaluable contributions of the Baskerville Institute interns, along with the students from the University of Utah, Brigham Young University, and Utah State University, whose diligence and collaborative spirit played a vital role in the success of this conference.

Brigham Young University

Thomas Packham
Will Van Hoff
Spencer Bennett
Garrett Wride
Megan Green
Jessie Moore

University of Utah

James Hancock
Ayden Choate

Utah State University

Kirsten Dewberry

Youth Union of Uzbekistan

Muslima Abdujalilova
Shodiya Murtazaeva

Baskerville Uzbekistan

Doston Saidov

SPECIAL THANKS

We extended our sincere gratitude to all **volunteer interpreters** for their invaluable support in facilitating communication throughout the conference. We offer special thanks to the delegation from **Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Uzbekistan State World Languages University, and others** whose contributions are especially appreciated.

We also extend our sincere appreciation to **Spencer Bennett** who is the Digital Media Intern at the Baskerville Institute and student at Brigham Young University majoring in Geospatial Science and Political Economy for his excellent work in designing and preparing this conference program for publication with the help of other Baskerville Interns.



DIPLOMACY OF THE HEART INITIATIVE

Diplomacy of the Heart is an initiative of the Baskerville Institute that promotes a compassionate and empathetic approach to dialogue and conflict resolution. It emphasizes engaging with others through respect, active listening, and an appreciation for the dignity of differing perspectives, even in times of disagreement.

Rather than viewing conflict as something to win, it encourages individuals to see conversations as opportunities to deepen understanding, build trust, and foster meaningful connections.

Rooted in the principle of empathy, this approach seeks to transform tension into constructive exchange and ultimately into collaborative, peacebuilding action.

CONFERENCE SPONSORS



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THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH



BIOGRAPHIES

Aaron Atkins

Dr. Aaron Atkins is an assistant professor of digital media and journalism at Weber State University. He is the director of Studio 76, the Communication Department's award-winning student media production co-curricular. His research focuses on the study and integration of technology in education, journalism, and media. He is the vice chair for the Broadcast Education Association's (BEA) Interactive Media and Emerging Technologies division, and former chair of Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)'s Community Journalism Interest Group. Aaron earned a PhD in mass communication from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University and a master's degree in communication from Virginia Tech. His research interests include virtual reality and media effects, community journalism, technology and digital media, and journalism history. Can't say no to a good adventure.

Agil Shirinov

Dr. Agil Shirinov received his PhD in social sciences—specifically in Islamic philosophical theology—from Marmara University, Türkiye. His thesis was on the existence and deity according to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Professor Shirinov worked as an assistant professor at the Faculty of Theology of Baku State University from 2008 to 2018. His teaching and research interests cover the history of Islamic denominations, including radical denominations of Islam and relations between Islamic theology (kalām), medieval peripatetic philosophy, and Sufism. Professor Shirinov has authored six books and more than 20 articles on Islamic theology and philosophy as well as on the history of different Islamic denominations. He currently serves as the rector of Azerbaijan Institute of Theology.

Akbarkhon Sobirkhonov

Dr. Akbarkhon Sobirkhonov is the Head of the Youth Academy under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He obtained his Bachelor's degree from Turin Polytechnic University (Italy) and his Master's degree from Tashkent State Technical University. He later defended his Ph.D. dissertation at Tashkent State University of Economics. Since 2017, Dr. Sobirkhonov has held several leadership positions within the Ministry, including serving as Deputy Director General of the National Office for Innovation and Director General of Inno Technopark. He currently leads the Youth Academy, where he focuses on promoting innovation, education, and research opportunities for young scientists and entrepreneurs in Uzbekistan.

Akhadjon Khakimov

Dr. Akhadjon Khakimov is Head of the Research Center for International and Comparative Law at Tashkent State University of Law (TSUL), Uzbekistan. He holds both a Master's degree and a Doctor of Laws from Nagoya University. His research focuses on conflict of laws, comparative law, legal pluralism, and the interaction between state and non-state legal systems. Dr. Khakimov has contributed to several national legal reform initiatives as a member of expert working groups and has served as a legal expert on projects supported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). He has published extensively, with dozens of academic articles addressing topics such as global legal pluralism, Islamic finance disputes, and the dynamics of legal cultures in managing hybridity within secular states.

Ayden Choate

Ayden Choate is a junior at the University of Utah majoring in Middle East Studies, International Studies, and Political Science. While at the University of Utah, Ayden has studied both the Arabic and Persian languages. Ayden has worked on several federally funded research projects as a research assistant. These projects focused primarily on censorship and surveillance around the globe. At the Baskerville Institute, Ayden is an Intern working as a coordinator for the Diplomacy of the Heart Conference. After graduation Ayden is hoping to pursue a career in foreign policy and national security.

Bahman Baktiari

Dr. Bahman Baktiari is a scholar of international affairs and Executive Director of the Baskerville Institute, a nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening intercultural understanding and people-to-people engagement. With more than thirty years of experience in academia and nonprofit leadership, his work focuses on cross-cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, and practical approaches to peacebuilding. He is the founder of the "Diplomacy of the Heart" initiative, which promotes empathy, human dignity, and sustained dialogue as foundations for international cooperation. In recent years, Dr. Baktiari has played a leading role in developing Utah-Uzbekistan initiatives that connect universities, youth organizations, government institutions, and civic leaders. Working closely with higher education partners and national youth organizations in Uzbekistan, he has helped build long-term civil society connections centered on academic collaboration, leadership development, entrepreneurship, and cultural exchange. These initiatives reflect his belief that durable international relationships are built through trust, shared learning, and sustained institutional partnerships. Over the course of his career, Dr. Baktiari has held senior academic positions at the University of Maine, the University of Utah, and the American University in Cairo. He has organized major international conferences in the United States, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, bringing together scholars, policymakers, business leaders, and students to address questions of governance, religion, law, and civil society. He also serves as an advisory member to World Trade Center Utah, supporting responsible global engagement. A specialist in Iranian politics, Islamic law, and U.S.-Iran relations, Dr. Baktiari is the author of *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran* and numerous scholarly articles and book chapters. His work emphasizes the role of education, narrative, and historical understanding in reducing conflict and strengthening civic life. He earned his Ph.D. in Government and M.A. in Foreign Affairs from the University of Virginia, and his B.A. in Philosophy and Political Science from the University of Denver.

Bakhodir Alikulovich Kholikov

Dr. Bakhodir Kholikov currently serves as the Rector of the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages, appointed by decision of the Cabinet of Ministers in June 2024. He earned his degree in linguistics (English language) from the Uzbekistan State University of World Languages in 2011 and holds a Ph.D. in Philological Sciences. An associate professor, Dr. Kholikov has built a distinguished career in higher education and government. He has served as a senior researcher at the Uzbekistan State University of World Languages, taught at the National University of Uzbekistan, and held leadership roles at the Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, including head of international relations, secretary of the University Council, deputy dean, department head, and vice-rector. Prior to his current position, he worked in the State Language Development Department of the Prime Minister's Secretariat under the Cabinet of Ministers. As rector, he leads an institution that has grown into a major center for language education in Uzbekistan, serving over 13,000 students and partnering with universities across more than 20 countries.

Brittney Stirling

Brittney Stirling is the Director of the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Türkiye for The Stirling Foundation. Prior to joining the foundation, Ms. Stirling was employed at doTERRA International where she worked as the Latin America Project Manager responsible for coordinating doTERRA's operations in Central America and the opening of doTERRA in the Mexico market. Ms. Stirling coordinated the international piece of doTERRA's 20,000+ person conventions. She also worked in the doTERRA Australia office as their Executive Account Manager handling top sales accounts and managing the top corporate Account Management Team. She later worked on the Global Account Management Team to develop and roll out a standardized training for 13 of doTERRA's global markets. Ms. Stirling volunteered for an 18-month service mission in Southern California primarily working with the Hispanic population and has a degree in Business from Brigham Young University Idaho.

David Stirling

David Stirling is Chairman of the Board, The Stirling Foundation, and Founding Executive and Chairman, doTERRA. He is a distinguished business leader, philanthropist, and co-founder of The Stirling Foundation, and is recognized for his visionary leadership and his ability to inspire confidence and shared purpose among those he leads. His management philosophy is grounded in trust, respect, and a commitment to developing people, principles that have consistently driven organizational success throughout his career. Prior to his work with doTERRA, he led executive management efforts for a large international company, successfully guiding it from financial difficulty to sustained profitability while significantly increasing revenue.

With a strong background in technology and global operations, Mr. Stirling has overseen engineering initiatives for major multinational enterprises. He holds both a bachelor's degree and an MBA in business, reflecting his solid academic and professional foundation.

In addition to his business accomplishments, Mr. Stirling is deeply committed to philanthropy and humanitarian work. Through The Stirling Foundation, he works alongside his wife, Laurea, to advance initiatives that promote global well-being and opportunity. Together, they are dedicated to the principle that "growing people brings the greatest satisfaction," a philosophy that continues to guide their efforts in business, service, and community engagement.

Brent Bishop

Brent Bishop is a distinguished entrepreneur, executive, and educational leader with over four decades of experience in business innovation and community service. He is most widely recognized as a co-founder of the Franklin Day Planner alongside Lynn G. Robbins, where he played a foundational role in building a global brand that revolutionized personal productivity and time management. Currently, he serves as the Founder and CEO of the Remember App, a digital platform that modernizes the core principles of alignment and fulfillment first introduced through his work with the Franklin Planner. A dedicated advocate for higher education in Utah, Brent is a member of the Board of Trustees at Weber State University—where he was recently reappointed to a second four-year term—and serves as a representative for the university at Ogden-Weber Technical College. His philanthropic impact is equally significant as the Founder and Chairman of the Sharetix Foundation, a nonprofit that facilitates event access for underserved populations, and through his service on the Board of Trustees for American Heritage Schools. A graduate of Brigham Young University with a degree in Business Management and Finance, Brent continues to bridge the gap between legacy business principles and modern digital solutions.

Dilnura Istamova

Dilnura Istamova is an emerging researcher and scholar at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU). Currently a third-year student in the Department of International Relations within the Faculty of International Journalism, her academic work focuses on the complex intersection of geopolitics, education, and digital equity in Central Asia. She has contributed significant research to international scientific journals, including in-depth analyses of the diplomatic and economic relations between Afghanistan and Iran, as well as the systemic barriers facing school education in Afghanistan. Beyond her regional focus, her research also explores the impact of the digital era on educational disparities, highlighting her dedication to understanding how information access affects learning achievements on a global scale.

Dilshodbek Xudoyberdiyev

Dilshodbek Xudoyberdiyev is a prominent researcher and academic administrator currently serving as the Head of the Department for the Organization of Scientific and Research Activities of Gifted Students at the Uzbek-Finnish Pedagogical Institute, which operates as a key branch of the Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute (SamDPI). His research has gained international recognition, most notably through his selection for a prestigious scientific internship at the Ghent Analysis and PDE Center at Ghent University in Belgium. This opportunity was awarded by the Agency for Innovative Development of Uzbekistan, allowing him to collaborate with leading global experts in partial differential equations (PDEs) and mathematical analysis.

Eric Karl

Eric Karl graduated from Brigham Young University with both a bachelor's and master's degree in electrical engineering. He earned a doctorate in instructional design from Idaho State University. He spent 20 years as a faculty member and administrator at BYU-Idaho. Prior to BYU-Idaho, Eric worked in technical leadership positions at Intel Corp, General Electric, and TRW.

Fitrat Umirov

Dr. Fitrat Umirov, D.Sc., currently serves as the Head of the International Cooperation Department at Tashkent State University of Law, a role he transitioned into in September 2023 after a significant tenure in Japan. His professional background includes working within the International Legal Affairs Department at Daiwa House Industry Co., Ltd. in Tokyo and serving as an Assistant Professor at Osaka University, where he also completed his doctoral and master's studies. Earlier in his career, he gained practical legal experience as a specialist for Agrobank in Tashkent, and he remains an active contributor to legal scholarship with publications focusing on asset recovery and anti-corruption regulations.

Garrett Wride

Garrett Wride is a senior at Brigham Young University completing a degree in Bioinformatics. His undergraduate research focuses on international development and migration, with a specific emphasis on his work at Istanbul Aydin University in Türkiye. Garrett has extensive experience in the non-profit sector, having served with the School of Agriculture for Family Independence in Malawi, the No More a Stranger Immigration Law Foundation, WelcomeNST, the Kurdish Refugee Relief Foundation, and Lutheran Services Carolinas. Currently, he is an intern at the Baskerville Institute serving as a coordinator for the Diplomacy of the Heart Conference. Following graduation, Garrett plans to pursue an MD/MPH program with a focus on migrant health. He is a native English speaker and is proficient in Turkish.

Gregory Hill

Dr. Hill serves as Chief Administrative Officer and Dean of Faculty at the University of Utah Asia Campus, where he provides strategic leadership for academic programs and industry engagement. He also leads the campus's Industry Foundation, supporting partnerships and governance initiatives. Under his leadership, the campus has experienced significant growth, expanded collaborations, and strengthened academic-industry ties. Previously, he was an Associate Professor at Boise State University, where he directed the Idaho Policy Institute and led public policy programs. He earned his PhD from Texas A&M University. His research focuses on public management, policy theory, and immigration, with publications in peer-reviewed journals and presentations at major academic conferences.

James Hancock

James Hancock is a senior at the University of Utah studying Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies. At the Baskerville Institute, he serves as project manager, where he helps organize international delegations to Utah, as well as help manage the Baskerville social media presence. His academic interests include Middle Eastern politics and the African diaspora, and he has previously attained fluency in Swahili and working Arabic. Following graduation, James plans to work in the Middle East or Africa in various humanitarian aid projects.

Ilkhomjon Madaminovich Tukhtasinov

Dr. Ilkhomjon Madaminovich Tukhtasinov, a Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences and Professor, serves as the Rector of the Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU), having previously led the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages as its Rector. Born in 1980, he is a prolific academic with a substantial body of work including 138 scientific and methodological publications, 10 textbooks, and six monographs, alongside 19 patents and certificates. A distinguished mentor in higher education, Professor Tukhtasinov has directly supervised the successful defense of 12 PhD and two DSc degrees, and under his recent leadership, over 80 scholars have attained advanced degrees and professorships. He completed his doctoral studies and earned his advanced scientific degrees at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University, the same institution he now leads.

Jarrett Anderson

Jarrett Anderson is a Program Manager on the Middle East/North team at FamilySearch International. In this role, he oversees the collection of family trees and genealogical records throughout the region. He is a graduate of Brigham Young University (B.A. '20) with a degree in Middle East Studies and Arabic and a minor in Ancient Near Eastern Studies and Hebrew. He studied Arabic at the Qasid Arabic Institute in Jordan, Pashto with the Pashto Language Summer Institute at the University of Texas-Austin, and now studies Persian at the University of Utah. His primary research areas of interest include the genealogical claims Sayyids and Sharifs and genealogical literature in the Islamicate and Persianate Spheres. He lives in Utah, United States with his wife and their 3 children.

Jessie Moore

Jessie Moore is a junior at Brigham Young University studying Political Science and Russian. She serves as President of The Peacemaker Project, a student-led youth organization dedicated to addressing polarization by advancing principled, rigorous dialogue across ideological and cultural divides. In this role, she leads initiatives that train students in civil discourse, facilitates cross-partisan engagement, and develops scalable models for bridgebuilding on university campuses. She is particularly interested in the ways that legal and institutional frameworks shape the protection of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, and how they respond to challenges such as democratic backsliding and political polarization. This summer, Jessie will intern in Kazakhstan, where she will contribute to efforts aimed at advancing human rights protections and strengthening legal accountability in Central Asia. Jessie plans to pursue a J.D. with the goal of working at the intersection of international human rights law and public policy.

Kirsten Dewberry

Kirsten Dewberry is a Junior at Utah State University studying International Relations and Political Science. Her undergraduate research focuses on post-conflict reconciliation with a specific emphasis on her work in both Rwanda and throughout the Balkans. Kirsten is currently studying abroad at Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka, Japan as a part of the Asian Studies Program. She is a Boren Scholarship recipient planning to fulfill the service year requirement within the United States' intelligence community upon completion of her undergraduate degree. At the Baskerville Institute, Kirsten serves as assistant project manager supporting the coordination and execution of research focused on promoting Diplomacy of the Heart. She is a native English speaker with basic experience in both Spanish and Japanese.

Laura E. Brown

Laura Brown joined the U.S. Department of State in 2006 as a Foreign Service Officer. Since August 2023, she has served as the Counselor for Public Diplomacy in the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. In this role, she leads a team of 30 to strengthen relationships between the people of Uzbekistan and the United States. She is also the Embassy's lead for communications and public relations. Prior to this assignment, she was a Senior Advisor in the Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, where she advised embassies around the world on strategic planning and leadership. From 2016-19, she served as the Public Diplomacy Chief at the U.S. Embassy in Skopje, North Macedonia. For her efforts to support North Macedonia's NATO membership, Laura won the 2019 Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy, the U.S. Department of State's highest honor for public diplomacy. Previously, Laura led initiatives to expand and deepen the U.S.-India education partnership in the U.S. Department of State's Office of India Affairs. In the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, she managed the world's largest U.S. government exchange and alumni program, sending over 1,200 Pakistanis to the United States every year. Laura has also served in São Paulo, Brazil and Frankfurt, Germany. Originally from Tennessee, Laura has an M.A. in international economic policy from Duke University and a B.A. in political science from Boston College. She speaks Spanish, Portuguese, German, Macedonian, and some Russian.

Laurea Stirling

Laurea Stirling is a passionate humanitarian, global advocate, and co-founder of The Stirling Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to uplifting vulnerable communities around the world. She has played a pivotal role in advancing the foundation's mission, focusing on combating child exploitation, supporting refugee relief, and expanding access to education for underserved students. With her deep commitment to service and advocacy, Laurea has shaped impactful programs that meet urgent humanitarian needs while creating long-term pathways of opportunity for families and communities. Alongside her leadership roles, she is devoted to her family as a mother of nine children.

Laziza Sadullayeva

Laziza Sadullayeva is an emerging scholar and student of International Relations and Affairs at the Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU) in Tashkent. Since beginning her bachelor's degree in 2023, Laziza has demonstrated a strong commitment to academic research, particularly in the realm of global interconnectedness and diplomatic theory. She has already begun establishing her voice as a researcher by contributing to academic publications such as the journal *Innovative Academy*, where she has explored the critical role of cross-cultural communication competence in the modern professional world. As a burgeoning specialist at one of Uzbekistan's premier institutions for language and diplomacy, she is focused on developing the linguistic and analytical skills necessary to foster meaningful dialogue between Central Asia and the broader global community.

Mary Machira

Dr. Mary A. Machira, Ph.D. is Executive Director of International Programs and Services and Senior International Officer at Weber State University, Utah. With over 20 years of experience in higher education, she provides strategic leadership for comprehensive internationalization, overseeing international student recruitment, admissions, retention, study abroad, and international scholar services. Dr. Machira is a graduate of the AIEA Senior International Officer Leadership Academy and an active contributor to the field through national and international conference presentations. She has co-chaired the Women and Leadership in Higher Education Member Interest Group, a leadership role within NAFSA, and previously served as chair of the Study Utah Consortium. Her global perspective is informed by participation in the Fulbright International Education Administrator Program in Korea. Her doctoral research, funded by Rotary International, examined women's participation in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa and continues to inform her commitment to equity, women's leadership, and global engagement. She also serves as Executive Director of Rachel's Refuge: A Mentoring Program for Girls and as a board member of Preserving Human Dignity Ministry, Inc.

Maha M. Mansour

Maha Mansour is a highly accomplished educational specialist, researcher, and Arabic language expert with over 26 years of experience at the UAE Ministry of Education. She currently serves as a National and International Assessments Specialist, bringing deep expertise in Arabic pedagogy, curriculum development, and international assessment frameworks. Maha specializes in language acquisition and the teaching of Arabic to non-native speakers (TAFL), and has played a leading role in teacher training, academic leadership, and the integration of digital tools and artificial intelligence in education. She previously served as Head of the Academic Affairs Unit at the Zayed Educational Complex and has extensive experience as an Arabic language teacher and researcher. Maha holds a BA and postgraduate qualifications in Arabic Language and Literature from Damascus University and is completing her MA with a focus on advanced linguistic research. She is an active member of several national curriculum and examination committees, as well as the International Federation of the Arabic Language. In addition to her professional work, she is a published author, competition judge, and cultural advocate. She is fluent in Arabic, English, and French, and is recognized for her leadership, public speaking, and contributions to educational innovation.

Megan Green

Megan Green is a senior at Brigham Young University who is majoring in Geography with an emphasis on Geospatial Intelligence and minoring in Africana Studies and Global Environmental Studies. She is especially drawn to the intersections of geography, culture, and development. She cares deeply about sustainable development and environmental stewardship. Her work blends technical skills like GIS and remote sensing with a strong foundation in research, communication, and cross-cultural collaboration.

Mehran Kamrava

Dr. Mehran Kamrava is a Professor of Government at Georgetown University Qatar. He also directs the Iranian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Kamrava is the author of a number of journal articles and books, including, most recently, *How Islam Rules in Iran: Theology and Theocracy in the Islamic Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 2024); *Righteous Politics: Power and Resilience in Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); *A Dynastic History of Iran: From the Qajars to the Pahlavis* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); *Triumph and Despair: In Search of Iran's Islamic Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2022); *A Concise History of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Cornell University Press, 2018); *Inside the Arab State* (Oxford University Press, 2018); *The Impossibility of Palestine: History, Geography, and the Road Ahead* (Yale University Press, 2016); *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2015); *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, 3rd ed. (University of California Press, 2013); and *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). His edited books include *Iran's Look East Policy: New Directions* (2025); *The Sacred Republic: Power and Institutions in Iran* (2023); *The Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (2020); *The Great Game in West Asia: Iran, Turkey, and the Southern Caucasus* (2017); *Fragile Politics: Weak States in the Greater Middle East* (2016); *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East* (2015); *The Political Economy of the Persian Gulf* (2012); *The Nuclear Question in the Middle East* (2012); and *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (2011).

Miles Hansen

Miles Hansen is the president and a board of director for The Stirling Foundation, a global philanthropic organization with initiatives in 50 countries around the world. He also serves as the vice chairman of World Trade Center Utah, an organization that facilitates global growth for international businesses. Prior to joining The Stirling Foundation, Miles was the President and CEO of World Trade Center Utah. Miles also served as chairman of the Utah Inland Port Authority, commissioner on the State of Utah's Economic Commission, member of the United States Trade Representative policy advisory committee, and director on several public and private boards. In 2022, Miles was honored by Utah Business as CEO of the Year. Earlier in his career, Miles served in the White House during the first Trump Administration as the director of Gulf Affairs on the National Security Council. He also was a diplomat working on energy and business issues throughout the Middle East and Eurasia. He graduated with honors from Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and with distinction from Brigham Young University. Miles is an advisor to several international businesses and policy leaders; a director on public and private boards; the chairman of the International Committee and a member of the Steering Committee for the 2034 Winter Olympics; and a frequent author and commentator on foreign affairs and international business.

Mohammad Eid Al-Qaraan

Dr. Mohd Aed Mohammad Qoran is an educational expert with over 15 years of experience specializing in curriculum development, instructional design, and national and international assessments. He currently serves as a National and International Exams Specialist for the Ministry of Education in Ajman, UAE, a role he has held since 2021. His professional background includes significant roles as a Training and Development Specialist at the Teacher Training Institute in the UAE, a Field Coordinator for USAID/Johns Hopkins University in Jordan, and a Training Consultant for various institutions across the Middle East. Dr. Qoran holds a PhD and a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from The World Islamic Sciences and Education University in Jordan, both completed with a grade of "Excellent". He also earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Curriculum and Instruction from Hashemite University and a Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language from Holy Qoran College at Iraqi University. A prolific author and researcher, Dr. Qoran has published several books on pedagogical topics, including *Teaching Thinking and Training* (2016), *Applied Perspective on Deep Thinking* (2017), and *Ask Smartly – The Art of Questioning* (2024). His research papers, which cover critical thinking, teacher training, and distance learning, have been published in international peer-reviewed journals. He is an active member of the academic community, currently serving on the Advisory Board for Al Wasl University in Dubai and the Editorial Boards for the *Scopus Educational Journal* and the *Journal of Language Studies* at Tikrit University. Dr. Qoran is also a frequent speaker and workshop leader at educational conferences across the Middle East and Asia.

Muzaffar Kamilov

Dr. Muzaffar Murotovich Kamilov is a distinguished Uzbek scholar, academic leader, and public official with extensive experience in higher education, religious affairs, and state administration. By decree of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, he has been appointed Head of the Department for Religious and Educational Affairs within the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Uzbekistan, where he plays a central role in shaping policy at the intersection of education, religion, and civil society. Dr. Kamilov received his higher education at the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies, where he later began his academic career as an intern-researcher. As part of his scholarly development, he undertook advanced language training at Cairo University. From 1997 to 2000, he pursued postgraduate studies at the same institute, laying the foundation for a career marked by both academic excellence and institutional leadership.

Throughout his career, Dr. Kamilov has held a number of senior academic positions. He served as Deputy Dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Economics and later as Vice Rector for Scientific Affairs at the Tashkent State Institute of Oriental Studies. His work in higher education administration expanded further between 2009 and 2016, when he held leadership roles within the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education, overseeing departments dedicated to spiritual and moral education. In 2016, he was appointed Vice Rector for Spiritual and Enlightenment Affairs at the Tashkent State University of Economics, where he contributed to integrating ethical and cultural values into academic life. Dr. Kamilov's expertise in religious affairs and public policy has been a defining aspect of his public service. From 2018 to 2022, he served as First Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan, where he was instrumental in advancing state policy on religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and cooperation with religious organizations. He later served as Rector of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan from 2021 to 2023, further strengthening the institution's role as a center for Islamic scholarship and international academic engagement.

In addition to his academic leadership, Dr. Kamilov has held key advisory roles at the highest levels of government. From 2022 to 2024, he served as Advisor to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on cooperation with public and religious organizations. He currently serves as Rector of the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan and as Deputy Advisor to the President on issues related to representative bodies, non-governmental organizations, religion, and youth affairs. Across his career, Dr. Kamilov has demonstrated a sustained commitment to fostering dialogue, promoting education, and strengthening the role of ethical and spiritual values in public life. His work continues to contribute to the development of Uzbekistan's educational system and to the promotion of social cohesion and constructive engagement among diverse communities.

Muslima Abduljalilova

Muslima Abduljalilova is a Chief Specialist at the Youth Union of Uzbekistan, where she works on initiatives that engage and empower young people across the country. She is a First Class Honours graduate of Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge, United Kingdom, where she developed a strong academic foundation alongside an international perspective. Muslima is particularly passionate about social impact projects, including water conservation, youth development, and community engagement, and is actively involved in initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable and responsible practices among the younger generation.

Nabijon Holov

Dr. Nabijon Holov is the Chief Expert within the Science Department at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Dr. Holov is a distinguished economist and public sector leader with over a decade of experience in the fields of higher education, scientific policy, and economic development. At the Ministry, Dr. Holov coordinates national and international research programs to drive Uzbekistan's innovation ecosystem. Previously, Dr. Holov held senior roles at the Ministry of Innovative Development, where he oversaw the design and execution of national scientific programs. He also served as a Senior Lecturer at Tashkent State University of Economics, where he taught Finance and Taxation, and held positions in the banking sector focused on SME development. Dr. Holov earned his Ph.D. in Economics and is on track to complete his Doctor of Economic Sciences in 2025. A recipient of the Erasmus scholarship, he has studied at universities in Spain, the UK, and Germany and has published extensively on topics such as digital finance, electronic payments, monetary policy, and sustainable agriculture. Dr. Nabijon Holov is fluent in Uzbek, English, Russian, Turkish, and Spanish.

Natalia Alenkina

Dr. Natalia Alenkina is an Associate Professor at the American University of Central Asia and currently teaches at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law. She holds a Ph.D. in Law. Dr. Alenkina is a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic and is accredited by the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic as an expert in law and human rights. She is also a member of the ICC Commission on Arbitration and ADR and serves as the Ambassador of the Vienna International Arbitral Centre in Kyrgyzstan.

She has contributed to the development of key legislative acts in Kyrgyzstan, including the Civil Procedure Code and the Law on Mediation. Currently, she is involved in supporting the Ministry of Justice in the implementation of the Singapore Convention on Mediation. Her research focuses on alternative dispute resolution, arbitration, mediation, the privatization of justice, and legal pluralism, with particular attention to the interaction between formal and informal dispute resolution mechanisms.

Her selected publications include "Interaction Between Litigation Procedures of State and Non-State Courts: The Case of Aksakal Courts in Kyrgyzstan" in MPI (Luxembourg), Procedural Science at the Crossroads of Different Generations (2015); "The Kyrgyz Aksakal Court: A Non-State Institution for the Consideration of Disputes" in the Kiel Journal of East European Law (2019); "Quasi-Judicial Function of Aksakal Courts: Living Voices from the Regions of the Kyrgyz Republic" in Russian Law: Education, Practice, Science (2023); and "Customs as Objects of Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage: The Kyrgyz Example" in the Kiel Journal of East European Law (2024).

Nozima Baxtiyorova

Nozima Baxtiyorova is a final-year undergraduate student of English Language and Literature at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. Her academic interests include literary analysis, metaphor studies, and cross-cultural communication. She has published several articles on the literary analysis of various works. She is currently conducting research in comparative literature, focusing on connections between Uzbek and English literary traditions. Her work particularly explores the role of storytelling and poetry in promoting intercultural understanding and peacebuilding. She plans to pursue a master's degree in English studies and contribute to the field of intercultural communication.

Olim Astanakulov

Dr. Olim Astanakulov, D.Sc., is the Vice Rector for International Cooperation at the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan and a Professor with over 20 years of academic and administrative experience. He has previously held prominent leadership roles at the Tashkent Financial Institute and the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. A prolific researcher, Professor Astanakulov has authored more than 250 publications, including eight monographs and seven textbooks, with a specialized focus on Islamic economics, finance, and tourism. His extensive international engagement includes serving as a Higher Education Reform Expert for the Erasmus+ program and acting as a national coordinator for numerous global academic mobility and curriculum modernization projects.

Paul Picard

Elder Paul Picard was named an Area Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the April 2023 general conference, serving in the Europe Central Area with responsibilities in Eurasia. Elder Picard has served in a number of Church callings, including full-time missionary in the Russia Rostov Mission in 1996-1998, high counselor, bishop and mission president. Elder Picard received a bachelor of arts in international relations from Brigham Young University in 2008 with a specialty in Middle Eastern Studies. From 1999 to 2006, he served as an officer in the French army and worked in peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. From 2009 to 2019, until he was called as a Mission President, he was a senior officer in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). He spent much of these 20 years in conflict areas working in the field of conflict prevention, conflict management, and post-conflict rehabilitation, supporting various mediation processes and peace efforts throughout the Eurasian continent. From 2014 to 2019, he was especially involved in supporting diplomatic and mediation efforts in Ukraine. Paul Picard was born in Bordeaux, France. With his wife, they are the parents of three children. Elder and Sister Picard reside in Frankfurt, Germany. In addition to his native French language, he is fluent in English and Russian, and has an intermediate knowledge of Ukrainian, Serbian, and Persian.



Quinn Mecham

Dr. Quinn Mecham is Associate Director for Research and Academic Programs at the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies and Associate Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University. He previously led the BYU program in Middle East Studies/Arabic and now leads BYU's 12 academic programs in international and area studies. He teaches courses in international politics, focusing on issues related to conflict resolution and the quality of democracy. He previously taught at Middlebury College and was a visiting professor at The George Washington University. He was also an Academy Scholar at The Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies. He served as Franklin Fellow and policy advisor in the Policy Planning Office of the U.S. Department of State, focusing on the Arab Gulf, political Islam, and global religious affairs. He also worked at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.), and at the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration at the U.S. Department of State. He received a B.A. in comparative literature from BYU and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in political science from Stanford University.



Rustambekov Islambek

Islambek Rustambekov is the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs at Tashkent State University of Law and a prominent expert in private international law, investment arbitration, and mediation. A prolific scholar with over 100 publications and a fellow of the Max Planck Institute, he has been instrumental in shaping Uzbekistan's investment legislation and developing model bilateral investment treaties. His extensive practical experience includes representing the Republic of Uzbekistan in international arbitrations and at UNCITRAL during his tenure as a senior official at the Ministry of Justice. An internationally recognized arbitrator, Rustambekov is a designated member of the ICSID panel and is listed with prestigious institutions such as HKIAC, AIAC, and WIPO, utilizing his fluency in English, Russian, and Uzbek to facilitate global legal and academic exchange.



Rivoiddin Karimov

Dr. Rivojiddin Gulomjonovich Karimov is the Rector of the Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, a position he has held since September 2023. Born in 1977 in the Namangan region, he is a distinguished academic and linguist who earned both his Bachelor's (1999) and Master's (2006) degrees from the Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU), specializing in English Linguistics. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Pedagogical Sciences and has dedicated much of his career to the study of pragmatics and communicative features of discourse, including diplomatic and commercial correspondence. Before leading the institute in Namangan, Karimov served as the Dean of the Faculty of Translation at UzSWLU and held various academic roles where he supervised doctoral research and contributed to the modernization of language teaching in Uzbekistan. Beyond his academic pursuits, his professional background includes service in the armed forces and extensive experience in educational administration and international cooperation.



Richard Goodall

Dr. Richard Goodall is a highly experienced British educator and academic consultant with over 40 years of international experience in creating supportive learning environments. Throughout his career, he has held significant leadership positions, including serving as the Director and Overseas Director of the International Colleagues School (ICS) in Norwich. A specialist in Academic English and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Richard has spent 15 years as an IELTS examiner for the British Council and IDP, while also contributing to the academic mission of INTO at the University of East Anglia (UEA). His current professional focus is centered in Uzbekistan, where he serves as a teacher trainer for the Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU). Deeply fascinated by the history and spirit of the Silk Road, Richard has spent much of the last few years involved in a critical re-thinking of "Critical Thinking" pedagogy within Central Asian institutions. He is a firm believer that the multilingual skills and deep cultural knowledge held in the region will play a vital role in the future rebalancing of global relations between the East and West. Beyond his pedagogical work, Richard is an accomplished linguist and editor with a diverse background in project coordination. He possesses intermediate proficiency in Turkish, Italian, and Spanish, and has worked in various capacities across Kazakhstan, Turkey, the UAE, India, and Sicily. His broad expertise is supported by a BA Hons in Social Anthropology and a Diploma in Creative Writing, enabling him to bridge technical academic requirements with a nuanced understanding of cultural and social dynamics.



Sarah Caffrey

Sarah Caffrey is a junior at Brigham Young University studying Public Health with an emphasis in health promotion. Her academic focus centers on international development. Although she is proficient in Spanish, she has a particular interest in the African diaspora and hopes to address health disparities within those countries. She has gained extensive hands-on experience in nonprofit work within the public health sector. Sarah spent a summer in Nicaragua with a grassroots organization providing medical care and health education to underserved communities. This coming spring, she will continue her global health work in Nepal, supporting initiatives focused on childhood malnutrition. After completing her bachelor's degree, Sarah plans to pursue a master's degree in Global Health.

Sattarov Khayrulla Fayzullaevich

Sattarov Khayrulla Fayzullaevich is an Uzbek public figure and finance specialist. Since May 2024, he has served as Acting Chairman of the Central Council of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan, and since December 2019, as Executive Director of the "Yoshlar – kelajagimiz" Foundation. He graduated from Navoi State Pedagogical Institute in 2002 and the Tashkent Institute of Finance in 2006, specializing in Business Management. Fluent in Russian, he has built a career in banking and finance, holding senior positions at "Microcreditbank" JSCB and later at the People's Bank of Uzbekistan. His professional path includes roles in lending, treasury, corporate investment financing, and program monitoring. With over two decades of experience in financial institutions and youth development initiatives, Sattarov plays a key role in shaping programs that support young entrepreneurs and strengthen youth engagement in Uzbekistan.

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali

Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali is the Chairman of a research think-tank MUSLIM Institute based in Islamabad and London. Chairman of the Advisory Board of peer-reviewed journal MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES, Chief Editor of Pakistan's largest monthly Urdu magazine Mirrat-ul-Arifeen International, Chairman of Al-Arifeen Group of Publications and Al-Arifeen Digital Production, and also board member of many educational, social, and academic bodies. Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Ali is a scholar who has authored and compiled more than 10 books in English and Urdu, tens of research articles published in international journals and international conference proceedings and hundreds of articles and opinion pieces published in various newspapers and magazines. He is from the tenth line of descendants from the royal house of renowned Sufi of Qadiriyya Order, Sultan Al-'Arifin Sultan Bahau (1629 - 1691), with millions of followers.

Spencer Bennett, M.S. Candidate

Spencer Bennett is a Junior at Brigham Young University, where he is studying Geospatial Science (Geography) and Political Economy. His undergraduate research focuses on territorial disputes, using satellite imagery to detect wartime damage, and international affairs in the Former Soviet Union area. He has spent time volunteering in Ukraine and Poland, studied Russian in Latvia, and has learned Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish. He has been accepted to the Hertog War Studies program run through the Institute for the Study of War to learn more about modern warfare and its implications on GIS research. After his undergraduate, he plans on getting a Master's degree in Geospatial Science and Technology and a hopeful future career as a Foreign Service Officer in the U.S. State Department.

Sydney Jezik

Sydney Jezik is a junior at Brigham Young University, where she studies political science and the Arabic language. Her undergraduate research spans religious extremism, moral ethics and AI, modern-day political culture in America, and, of course, the Arab world. As a young journalist, she reported democratic rights violations that took place during Morocco's iteration of the Gen Z protests. She has also investigated and published on Arab brain drain and immigration difficulties, women's exodus from Christianity, and a number of other issues related to politics, faith, and intersecting cultures. She is a native English speaker and proficient in Arabic. Right now she works for Utah's Salt Lake Tribune while freelancing in other outlets; she is also published in Morocco World News, Deseret News, and has contributed to The Atlantic. Following graduation she hopes to continue studying the Arab world and become a journalist who builds bridges between the West and the Arab world.

TaraLee Cook

TaraLee Cook is Associate Director of the Whitmore Global Business Center at Brigham Young University, where she leads initiatives that expand international learning opportunities and global engagement for business students. She is guided by the belief that all business is inherently international and that immersive global experiences can meaningfully shape students' perspectives and careers. Cook began her academic journey at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates, where she was the only Western student, an experience that continues to inform her approach to cross-cultural education. She later earned a joint MBA from the IU Kelley School of Business and an MS in Economics from Purdue University. Her work focuses on increasing access to transformative global experiences and preparing students to operate effectively in an interconnected world.

Tillaboev Shokhrukhbek Mirzatillaevich

Dr. Tillaboev Shokhrukhbek Mirzatillaevich is a PhD specializing in international law, an expert in the field of intellectual property law, human rights and digital law. He is a researcher at the Research Center of the Faculty of International Law and Comparative Law, and a part-time lecturer at Tashkent State University of Law. Tillaboev Sh.M. is a specialist in the field of international law, human rights, intellectual property law, and digital law. He has completed internships in foreign scientific and educational institutions, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). On August 28, 2026, Shokhrukhbek Tillaboev successfully defended his PhD thesis on "Problems of international legal enforcement of intellectual property rights in the digital age", specializing in International Law.

Thomas Packham

Thomas Packham is a senior at Brigham Young University pursuing a bachelor's degree in International Relations with a regional emphasis on the Middle East and the Persian language. His academic and professional interests focus on international engagement, cross-cultural collaboration, and Middle Eastern politics. Thomas currently resides in Tashkent, where he is an intern with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation of Uzbekistan, and serves as Conference Coordinator for the Baskerville Institute. In this role, he has helped organize international gatherings, including the 2025 Diplomacy of the Heart conference in Samarkand. He also works as a research assistant in the BYU Political Science Department on Iranian politics and revolutionary ideology. Previously, Thomas worked with the BYU International Center for Law and Religion Studies and interned with the Stirling Foundation, supporting initiatives in humanitarian relief, education, and international exchange. Following graduation, he plans to continue his studies and pursue a career in international affairs with a focus on the Middle East and Central Asia.

Tony Brown

Dr. Tony Brown completed an undergraduate degree in Russian at Southern Methodist University followed by advanced degrees in Russian and Second Language Acquisition at Bryn Mawr College. Since joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 2004, he has taught courses in Russian language and cultural history and published books with Georgetown University Press and Academic Studies Press and articles in venues, such as *Modern Language Journal*, *Foreign Language Annals*, *Slavic and East European Journal*, *Russian Language Journal*, and *Language Policy*. In addition to teaching and research, he directs international internship programs for the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University.

Tulqin Olimjonovich Akhmedov

Dr. Tulqin Olimjonovich Akhmedov is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. He holds a PhD in History and the academic title of Senior Researcher, and earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in history from Samarkand State University. Dr. Akhmedov specializes in historiography, source studies, and modern and contemporary history, and has held several academic and research positions, including serving as Head of the Department of Modern History at the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan. He brings extensive teaching experience across universities and academic lyceums in Uzbekistan and is fluent in Russian, English, and Turkish.

Vaxob Xoshimovich Kuchkarov

Vaxob Xoshimovich Kuchkarov is a Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. He holds a Doctor of Political Sciences degree and earned his initial training as an English language specialist from the Leninobod State Pedagogical Institute. Professor Kuchkarov has an extensive career spanning academia, research, and public administration, including senior roles at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan. He has also served as a professor at several leading institutions, including the Tashkent State University of Economics and the International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan. His work focuses on political science, civil society, and public administration, and he is fluent in Russian and English.

Will Van Hoff

Will Van Hoff is a senior at Brigham Young University pursuing a bachelor's degree in Economics with a minor in Russian. His academic and research interests focus on Iranian and Central Asian affairs, specifically regarding the impact of economic sanctions and foreign policy. He has gained international experience through a consulting internship with PwC in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and previously worked as a strategy intern with the Stirling Foundation. At the Baskerville Institute, Will serves as Conference Coordinator, where he is helping to organize the 2026 Diplomacy of the Heart conference. He is a recipient of several federally funded scholarships, which will support his upcoming year of intensive Persian language study in Uzbekistan. During this time, he will also intern with the Fintech Association of Uzbekistan. Will is fluent in Armenian and Russian and is currently studying Persian. Following graduation, he plans to pursue a Master of Arts in International Relations at Johns Hopkins SAIS, with the goal of working in foreign policy focused on Central Asia and the Middle East.

Yerzhan Nukezhanov

Yerzhan Nukezhanov is a distinguished expert in public administration with over 20 years of experience specializing in state-confessional relations, information policy, and ideological management in Kazakhstan. Currently a PhD candidate in Religious Studies and a graduate of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, he has also received advanced international training at the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands. Mr. Nukezhanov has held several high-ranking government positions, including Chairman of the Committee for Religious Affairs, Chairman of the Information Committee, and Deputy Head of the Apparatus of the Mazhilis. By bridging his deep academic foundation in history with practical leadership within the Administration of the President, he is recognized as a leading authority on fostering interfaith harmony, promoting secular governance, and ensuring social stability through strategic risk forecasting and national policy development.