FOREWORD FROM AMBASSADOR SPRATLEN

Assalomu Alaykum Dear Alumni,

Welcome to the premiere edition of the Exchange Alumni of Uzbekistan Newsletter!

We are very pleased to launch this initiative on the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Uzbekistan. The United States was one of the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan’s status after it became a fully independent nation and had established an Embassy by March 1992. So it gives me great pleasure to wish everyone, “Happy 25th Anniversary!”

As alumni of our exchange programs, you play a unique role in connecting our countries and cultures. On the one hand, you are our best representatives to the Uzbek people. Because of you, people in your region, in your local communities, and in your universities and work places learn about life in the United States and the opportunities available there. On the other hand, you are also cultural ambassadors of Uzbekistan to the United States, telling the American people about this ancient and rich land. As a result of your U.S. exchange experience, you have done – and are continuing to do – many wonderful things for the benefit of our two nations. We highly value your tireless efforts and support. I also commend the initiative of your creative alumni friends to launch this project.

The primary goal of this quarterly newsletter is to keep you all connected and informed of alumni programs and Embassy-wide events. I hope the newsletter will be an up-to-date source of information and inspiration for the exchange alumni community of Uzbekistan. I wish you all every success in your future endeavors!

Sincerely,

Pamela L. Spratlen
U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan

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ARE YOU APPLYING FOR AEIF 2017?

The State Department created the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) in 2011 to support alumni initiatives that promote shared values and innovative solutions to global challenges. The competition provides small grants (of up to $25,000 USD) to teams of past and current participants of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs to carry out public service projects utilizing the skills and knowledge they gained during their exchange experiences.

Mark your calendars! AEIF 2017 closes on March 30 at 12 pm (Noon) ET. Be sure to note the time zone: ET, Washington D.C. time zone.

Do you know the eligibility requirements? You must have 3 team members (including the team leader). Learn more by visiting alumni.state.gov/aeif.

Be sure to log into alumni.state.gov and review the AEIF Help Desk. There, we have provided sample proposals and budgets.

Our Commonly Asked Questions page is publicly accessible. Review the page to find answers to the most frequently asked AEIF questions.

Don't have an IEA account? Please REGISTER here

Start drafting your projects early and be sure to emphasize the deadline

STAY TUNED

FY17 Round I - Alumni Outreach Grant Proposals
Announcement date: Wednesday, March 22, 2017

LEARN ENGLISH WITH U.S. EXCHANGE ALUMNI PROJECT LAUNCH – ROUND III

Alumni Programs Team is pleased to announce the launch of the third round of the “Learn English with U.S. Exchange Alumni” project. Check out our Embassy website for more detailed information.

Registration deadline: Friday, March 24, 2017

U.S. EMBASSY POSITION VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Disaster Preparedness Coordinator, FSN-6, FP-8* | Closing Date: COB March 28, 2017

Applications should be e-mailed to: personnel@usembassy.uz

The vacancy and DS-174 form can also be found here:

https://uz.usembassy.gov/jobs/vacancies/
During the English Language Weekend Summer Camp, the first class from the Learning English with U.S. Exchange Alumni project started by Fulbright Foreign Student Program alumna Flora Tosheva graduated. The event was designed to enhance the participants’ language proficiency, help them explore American culture with other exchange program participants, and recognize the project team and the students for their progress and contribution.

Embassy staff, U.S. exchange alumni, and English Language experts led sessions about personal and professional development and language proficiency. The event allowed the project participants to meet new people, socialize in new settings while practicing their language skills, and to come out of their comfort zone and feel as a part of an English speaking community.

Flora Tosheva, a 2014 Fulbright alumna, initiated the project to fulfill her dream of bridging Uzbek and American cultures through English learning. The pilot project started with 50 students of different ages and English proficiency levels and lasted for 6 months. Now, the project has launched for the second time with two intensive courses scheduled for 3.5 months.

At the beginning, Flora faced many challenges: “Pilot projects have problems; that’s why they are called pilot projects”, says Tosheva, “At first, I thought we were going to have very few people. I wanted to have a larger outreach so that more people from different parts of Tashkent could participate.”

The application process was open for anyone willing to learn English, with no special language proficiency requirements. Thus, the selection became the most challenging part for the organizers and, as they say, they had to narrow the focus of the project. “The initial thought was to do a variety of courses, starting from beginners to upper-intermediate level and TOEFL preparation,” Flora recalled. “But we had to come up with two particular classes because we weren’t able to accommodate everybody. We could only provide space for 50 people. So, out of around 300 applicants we selected 50 students.”

The project offers two courses – pre-intermediate English and TOEFL preparation. Flora explained the courses selection: “Pre-intermediate students are people who know the language. They understand a lot but they have issues speaking because this is when they take their first steps in real communicative life. We decided to do that course because this is when we can give them a really good push with the help of authentic language and great classes.”

The TOEFL class was launched because this popular English proficiency exam is convenient for test takers. The TOEFL preparation class is designed to help those who are applying to U.S. schools, and many of those people are frequent visitors to the Embassy’s Information Resource Center (IRC).

The students of the Learning English with Alumni project are not just high school or university students. “In class we have some university professors, engineers, lawyers, doctors, and pharmacists.” Flora also comments on the variety of students, saying the students’ age range varies from 14 to 75. She notes that the variety of students and their backgrounds adds value to the class. For example, one of the students...
This year, five talented women and experienced professionals from Uzbekistan spent five weeks interning at some of the top companies of Silicon Valley as TechWomen program participants. In this interview Shodiabegim Bakhtiyorzoda and Elena Selezneva shared their program experiences and spoke about the opportunities for women working in STEM areas.

Every year 90 women from 20 countries get a chance to come together in Silicon Valley to strengthen their professional capacity, increase mutual understanding among professional networks, and expand their interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers. Participants engage in project-based internships in the top companies of Silicon Valley. In addition, they attend professional development workshops and networking events.

During the program each participant works with their assigned mentor who helps with professional advancement and also cultural exchange.

“99% of the program success comes from the participating companies and mentors that every participant is assigned to,” says Elena Selezneva, General Manager of StartupFactory.uz Startup Accelerator. “It’s a mutual learning experience, as we learn from mentors and they learn from us too.” Every day on the program is very busy – participants spend most of their time at internship and program seminars, after which they can visit host companies or some networking events. Even weekends can be full of activities like cultural tours or volunteering.

Elena shares her experience of the program: “You might say it’s a cliché who is a biologist surprised the class with a presentation about 34 types of tomatoes.

Having 10 years of experience in teaching English as a second language, Flora uses all her knowledge to design course activities and exercises, and compile them in the program. “I think I’m born for this – I have innate charisma, creativity, I’m super positive and super loud.” These qualities, says Flora, make her a perfect teacher. “I also possess the theoretical knowledge and practice.” But teaching requires not only professional qualities, but also an enormous amount of energy and motivation. The best motivation for Flora is seeing how happy her students are.

However, running such a project requires additional help which was provided by the IRC. “The IRC staff has been a great help for me; they provided all the supplies and offered their help every time I had some sort of issue like scheduling classes or contacting students,” says Flora about her cooperation with the IRC.

The summer camp concluded the first part of the project last July. Students received their certificates and organizers were recognized for their efforts and contribution. The second batch of students has just recently finished their classes. Flora and PAS are currently working to put together a third group of people interested in improving their English language proficiency.

For many people this project has become a chance not just to improve their English, but also to expand their personal and professional horizons while learning about American culture and pursuing their dreams of studying in the U.S.
to say it was a life changing experience, but in a professional sense it’s true. The program aims to improve your professional qualities and leadership abilities, as well as expand your networking. Out of five weeks, the first week is introductory, the next 3 weeks you spend interning in a company that fits your professional background, and the last week you go to Washington D.C. for program meetings. This is a remarkably effective program, maybe because you get to work in Silicon Valley."

Elena was selected for an internship in one of the most famous startup accelerators of the U.S., 500 Startups. “I really like 500 Startups and it was very exciting for me to become the only person to be selected for an internship there. During my internship I studied the accelerator processes and learned about how to organize them. Unfortunately, I am not able to implement everything I learned here in Uzbekistan yet.”

She was assigned a role of a mentee and assisted her mentor in regular meetings with startups, investors, and colleagues. “Through this shadowing I was able to learn about many parts of the accelerator and see how they deal with startup consulting, finance, marketing, and investors.”

Another participant, Shodiya Begim Bakhtiyorzoda, who is a Resident Product Engineer and Program Coordinator at GM Powertrain Uzbekistan, did an internship in one of the most technologically advanced and famous startups in the world – Tesla. “Under this program I was the first one mentored at Tesla, and the whole TechWomen community was happy for me,” says Shodiya Begim. “Being in Tesla is just a mind-blowing experience. Tesla is a truly innovative and leading company in EVs [electric vehicles], they do great things and the team is both strong and dedicated. While on the program I also visited some of the top IT companies you could think of: Google, Google X, Instagram, Theranos, Autodesk, Mozilla, 500 Startups, LinkedIn, Symantec... What I learned from my experience is the benefit in the variety of cultures, environments, behaviors, and attitudes. Most of it, of course, is tacit knowledge, so it’s difficult to explain in words, but the experience is truly mind-blowing and so valuable.”

Each participant is assigned a personal project. Additionally, the program offers numerous cultural and professional development activities. Shodiya Begim describes her working day at Tesla: “My typical day started at 8 am with coffee! After that, we had a half an hour recap session with my mentor, after which I worked on my project for the rest of the day. My project involved research in the Design Failure Mode Analysis (DFMEA) process at Tesla so I talked to many people: design engineers, design for reliability engineers, test engineers, and integration engineers. I met lots of new people every day and talked to them about their experience and opinion on the DFMEA process. Within a day I would meet 4 to 6 people. Besides, I attended team meetings and ongoing projects on DFMEA. I enjoyed weekly learning sessions from colleagues on Python programming troubleshooting and also on accelerated testing theory from people who hold doctorate degrees in the field and work and do research at the same time. You can imagine how valuable this experience was!"

For Elena a typical day in the startup accelerator included a minimum of 3-4 meetings and events, not to mention some program activities outside of accelerator later in the evening. “What an accelerator does is consulting, which means numerous meetings with startups and mentorship,” she says. “So, a startup can ask for help with some question and mentors would provide advice. Since my competency and knowledge of the U.S. market are limited, I could not take a big part in the consulting, but I was able to make my own contribution during mentorship meetings and pitching sessions along with my mentor.” Although TechWomen participants do have their projects, the main goal is to learn from the companies rather than work for them.
One of the crucial parts of the program is the impact participants will make upon the completion of the project. Having great networking opportunities, participants build strong professional ties and connections with mentors and program participants from other countries, and Elena says she feels a part of a sisterhood of TechWomen. They continue to keep in touch with each other and are always ready to provide help or advice. “I can contact my mentors and ask them to help me with a project, for instance, and I am 100% sure they will respond and help out.”

Shodiyabegim mentions the delegation trip during which she, along with other TechWomen mentors and participants, travelled to Kazakhstan to reunite with their Kazakh program fellows. She describes her personal and professional advancement: “I changed my attitudes towards risk and change. I used to be a risk-averse person and avoid change. My Silicon Valley experience has taught me that there is nothing you can lose. The biggest failures are the best learning experiences you can have. When everything goes well and smoothly your learning is limited, you do not realize many things and you are limited in improvement.”

The selection of the next cohort of TechWomen started on November 15 and is open to all women engaged in STEM fields who are ready to demonstrate their willingness and ability to participate in exchange programs and who are open to new mentorship and partnership development opportunities.

THE EXPANDING ALUMNI COMMUNITY OF UZBEKISTAN

On September 28, 2016 the Alumni Programs Team hosted a Reception, Debrief, and Exchange Program Certificates Award Ceremony at the Miran International Hotel. The event brought together thirty-two alumni of various programs to debrief those who recently returned from U.S. Government-funded exchange programs and award them respective program completion certificates. Among others, new alumni of the Fulbright and TechWomen programs were introduced and welcomed to the alumni community. During the ceremony, Public Affairs Officer Jon Larsen addressed the audience and underlined the importance of the alumni community, starting with their first exchange visits and continuing with their roles as cultural ambassadors between the two nations.

In commemoration of the International Day for Tolerance on November 19, 2016, the U.S. Embassy Tashkent’s Alumni Programs unit brought together 29 youth delegates to discuss and debate issues related to the theme of tolerance and intercultural dialogue. The delegates included alumni of U.S. government exchange programs, students of academic institutions in and around Tashkent, and members of the general public. Three alumni members, Muqaddas Tursunova, Umidjon Yorkulov and Jakhongir Azimov, who participated in the regional Model UN Conference organized by PAS Kathmandu, chaired the sessions of the UN General Assembly Committees and the Security Council. In her opening remarks, Ambassador Spratlen welcomed the participants and said that respect and tolerance towards other cultures, religions, and ethnicities are more important than ever in this era of rising violent extremism and widening ethnic conflicts. In his remarks, UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan Stefan Priesner told the youth delegates about the importance of Model UN programs in developing personal and professional skills that will be useful
Security Council. They were especially collegial when debating the issues, and were able to come to a resolution that was adopted by all of the delegations on the Security Council. They learned the working procedures at the UN, and gained great experience in diplomacy in action. All of these are important skills that future diplomats or anyone who wants to succeed in international affairs should possess. The alumni team who organized and guided the delegates through the process also deserve special credit for their dedication to the program and for helping to motivate these up-and-coming leaders of Uzbekistan.”

The conference concluded with Public Affairs Officer Jon Larsen and the Alumni Programs team awarding certificates of participation to all delegates and alumni organizers.

Kamoliddin Nigmatullaev, the delegate of France in the Security Council, comments on the emergency call, “I was really surprised, at first I thought it was an embassy alarm or something like that. Later, when I figured out what happened and after we watched the video, I was impressed with the story the organizers came up with. All the delegates were concentrated on the topic of tolerance, and we had to quickly deal with a different problem that required immediate attention. I guess that’s what it’s like in real life when the Security Council has an urgent meeting.”

Through a series of debates and caucuses, the Alumni Model UN Conference delegates came up with a final, unanimous UN Security Council resolution for an ethnic clash between two fictional UN Member States.

Cultural Affairs Officer Diane Del Rosario, who has worked at the UN, commented on the results of the conference, “The participants of the Embassy’s Model UN program did a great job preparing their statements, and handling an emergency situation in the Security Council. They were especially collegial when debating the issues, and were able to come to a resolution that was adopted by all of the delegations on the Security Council. They learned the working procedures at the UN, and gained great experience in diplomacy in action. All of these are important skills that future diplomats or anyone who wants to succeed in international affairs should possess. The alumni team who organized and guided the delegates through the process also deserve special credit for their dedication to the program and for helping to motivate these up-and-coming leaders of Uzbekistan.”

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great way to reconnect: “I have met someone I haven’t seen over the past 10 years, which is fantastic!” Talking to his FLEX fellow Diyora, he shared a memory of their homecoming trip: “We were supposed to switch planes at the Frankfurt airport. But then we realized that our plane was delayed and we had to spend the day in the airport with the whole group of alumni. The flight kept getting postponed and we were sent to a hotel to spend the night. So, we all got Schengen visas and left for the hotel. That was an exciting time and it’s amazing that we bumped into each other at the election event.”

Diyora reflected on her program experience and shared how FLEX changed her life after coming back: “FLEX was an awesome year that changed our lives. After I got back home, I spent another two years in Samarkand, after which I entered the American University in Central Asia (AUCA). I think it was because of FLEX that I got a full scholarship. Now I work for an international organization, where I got accepted right after graduation. I think 80% of the reason why I got that job is because my early FLEX experience had given me very important skills and qualities.”

The election morning was full of excitement about the question of the day – who would be the next president of the United States? The results of the mock elections hosted during the event showed that Uzbekistan preferred Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump. However, it only raised the level of excitement among guests, as the competition between the two presidential hopefuls was very tough.

The Republican nominee Mr. Donald Trump gained the necessary number of electoral votes to win the election and was declared President-Elect, despite the fact that Secretary Clinton won the popular vote. While the result of the election was surprising for many, the presidential race was definitely worth following. However, the election process was not formally completed until the Electoral College confirmed Mr. Trump’s candidacy on December 19, when the electors from each state cast their final vote.