

15-18 January,
American University of Kuwait

AMICAL 2020

consortium's 17th annual meeting and conference

CONFERENCE THEME:

Digital transformation at international liberal arts institutions: Innovation, collaboration & sustainability



ABOUT AMICAL

AMICAL is a consortium of American international liberal arts institutions, working together on common goals for libraries, technology and learning. AMICAL brings together 29 institutions of higher education from 22 countries across Eastern, Central and Western Europe, West and North Africa, the Middle East, Central and Southern Asia, and Russia. Operating in diverse cultural contexts but committed to the American model of liberal education, AMICAL institutions have chosen to collaborate to support the advancement of learning and teaching.

AMICAL SMALL GRANTS PROGRAM

Small Grants Program supports professional development and projects related to digital liberal arts, digital scholarship, digital collections, digital pedagogy, and library innovation.

AMICAL CONNECT

online discussion & collaboration platform. Registration is required.

YOUR AMICAL REPRESENTATIVE

Jyldyz Bekbalaeva,
Library Director

e-mail: bekbalaeva_j@auca.kg

library.auca.kg

tel: 915 000 ext.300

Jyldyz Bekbalaeva, Library

This year's AMICAL conference focused on the impact of digital transformations at liberal arts institutions. I attended Library Leadership pre-conference workshop which brought together library managers across AMICAL institutions to discuss how we can work together to ensure our work is in line with current developments in teaching, learning and research. The conference program was very diverse as usual and included an interesting keynote, extensive



experience sharing, and productive discussions on a variety of topics, including many new questions emerged during unconference sessions.

AUCA team was the largest at the conference. Each out of 13 team members contributed to the conference program by sharing their teaching experience, projects and collaboration activities. We were also very much involved with the conference organization. Anguelina Popova served in the Conference Program Committee; Ekaterina Kombarova and Mariya Antonova joined the Conference Volunteers Team. I myself was involved in a lot of behind-the-scenes work of the Consortium Coordinating Committee, where I serve since October 2019.

AUCA presentation at AMICAL 2020

- **Information literacy as liberal arts: Pilot course at AUCA** by Zhuzumkan Askhatbekova & Jyldyz Bekbalaeva
- **Assessing the role of academic support services in student success** by Mariya Antonova
- **Students as historians: Teaching students how to be researchers and creators in digital humanities** by Aijamal Sarybaeva & Aidai Anvarbek kyzy
- **How does your digital pedagogy transform your students learning?** by Anguelina Popova
- **AUCA pilot project: Documenting, demonstrating and assessing student learning with "Portfolium"** by Maya Sharsheeva & Anguelina Popova
- **Digital humanities course at AUCA: First steps and lessons learned** by Jyldyz Bekbalaeva & Kamilya Kadyrova
- **To transfer or not to transfer? Digital transformation and the exclusivity of higher education "offline"** by Ekaterina Kombarova & Elena Molchanova
- **Integrating a media literacy course in the curriculum of higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan** by Elira Turdubaeva
- **Introducing digital methods in a social sciences course: Creating e-portfolios on Wikipedia on feminist activists and female politicians of Central Asia** by Aisuluu Namasbek kyzy & Shirin Tumenbaeva
- **Implementing project-based learning in liberal arts through digital apps** by Ekaterina Galimova

Aisuluu Namasbek kyzy & Shirin Tumenbaeva, Sociology Instructors

This year we have presented our progress on introducing digital methods in Social Sciences course: creating e-portfolios on Wikipedia on Feminist activists and female politicians of Central Asia. It was the next step of OER implementation in our courses through creating open content about people of local communities. In two courses *Introduction to Gender Studies* and *State and Society* students were assigned to create Wikipedia pages. Thanks to the workshop on Wikipedia by AUCA library, students were able to create various portfolios in their native languages.

These portfolios are about feminist activists, feminist organizations, and female politicians from Central Asia. During the conference, it was valuable for us to hear feedback and recommendations for further improvement of the project, as well as the shared excitement on similar ideas across the AMICAL network.



Kamilya Kadyrova, NGA & Jyldyz Bekbalaeva, Library

AMICAL 2020 conference was of the specific interest to us due to the focus of this year's theme : Digital transformation at international liberal arts institutions: Innovation, collaboration & sustainability. We were particularly interested to learn about various digital humanities initiatives across AMICAL network. We presented the results of the first *Digital Humanities* (DH) course at AUCA which we co-taught in Fall 2019. This pilot course was developed as a result of our participation in AMICAL sponsored Digital Humanities Institute in Beirut earlier in 2019. The course aims to introduce students into the field of DH and equip them with methods and tools to be used across various disciplines throughout their liberal arts education. We talked about the course structure and materials, methods and techniques, as well as collaboration models and feedback received. Our presentation was very well received and stimulated a great discussion, post-presentation question-answer session and inspired us to continue thinking about

future projects. It was extremely important for us to discuss with colleagues across the consortium what common challenges we have and what support is needed while introducing DH teaching and learning. We realize that Digital Humanities is significant in fostering collaboration between various people on campus and beyond and bringing different expertise together.



Ekaterina Galimova, General Education Department

AMICAL 2020 held in the state of Kuwait was like a Sand Storm of Change in the world of technological innovations. Librarians, IT developers, and faculty members of various American universities openly shared their new approaches in teaching Liberal Arts with each other. For instance, a presentation given by Fatme Charafeddine and Abir Ward who were talking about "A collaboration between Wikipedia AUB librarians and



communication skills classes in teaching Academic Writing" was especially memorable and informative for me. Other speakers like Kim Fox were not only talking about the new ways in teaching but also provided handouts with links and digital keys to their educational platforms used by their students. The intriguing title of an unconference session regarding "Reclaiming our online privacy and fight against surveillance capitalism" encouraged me to attend Dimitris Tzouri's session. The speaker talked about plausible problems that regular internet users might face and provided attendees with Firefox, Chrome browser extensions to be protected. Therefore, thanks to AMICAL 2020, I was able to get acquainted with the culture of Kuwait, enrich my own teaching approaches using new informational technology, and make a connection with a colleague who kindly agreed to participate in the future project.

Aijamal Sarybaeva, General Education Department



AMICAL conference was a great opportunity to meet new people, to learn new things about digital tools and digital world, to listen to the experiences of other faculty members in different institutions, and to be a part of this community dedicated to excellence and innovation in learning, teaching, and researching. Aidai Anvarbek kyzy and I presented the results of a seven-month long oral history research project conducted by students and faculty of AUCA regarding the Stalinist period in

Soviet Kyrgyzstan. This project has used the elements untypical for research in Kyrgyzstan: students and digital tools. This conference enabled us not only to share our experience but also to gain knowledge about new ways of approaching our next research project.

Zhuzumkan Askhatbekova, Library

I thoroughly enjoyed attending the AMICAL consortium's annual conference. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference was a great opportunity to network with scholars across AMICAL institutions.

It was both humbling and inspiring to provide and receive feedback on our initiatives, activities and projects. My colleague Jyldyz Bekbalaeva and I were able to speak in-depth with librarians and



faculty members about potential of information literacy course in liberal arts institutions. The conference provided a much needed space for networking, research, and dialogue, which are cornerstones to promoting information literacy skills in higher education.

Maria Antonova, WARC

Although only two years have elapsed since I last participated in an AMICAL conference, the 2020 experience was much more immersive and had a greater practical value for me personally. For one, I was fortunate to be selected as a last-minute volunteer, providing me with a glimpse of the tremendous effort that goes into making of this event. It also gained me a deeper appreciation of the scale, complexity and the truly cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional value of the work presented there. Secondly, as I was also pleasantly surprised at the number of faculty involved in teaching writing that attended the event. In particular, I would like to mention Jasmina Najjar's "Writing the Future" session that brought all of us together, and express my



enthusiasm and support for her idea of a writing-focused community under the umbrella of AMICAL. And finally, at every turn, at my own presentation as well as at other events, I was able to meet like minded colleagues working on very similar goals of creation of a thriving student writing and publishing culture, active data gathering and transparent assessment of our work, and also efficient management of student workers. I very much look forward to following up on all this bounty.

Elira Turdubaeva, Department of Journalism and Mass Communications

The first day of AMICAL 2020 started with the keynote speech by Siva Vaidhyathan on “The operating system of our lives: How we misunderstood the digital transformations”. Siva Vaidhyathan is a Robertson Professor of Media Studies and Director of the Center for Media and Citizenship. It was very interesting and critical keynote speech about privacy and cyber security. The sessions and Community Idea Exchange sessions of AMICAL 2020 were related to digital pedagogy & digital humanities, information literacy & digital literacies, open learning & scholarship, civic engagement & social justice. I really enjoyed listening to and learning from Community Idea Exchange Session Presenters. Unconference session on “Reclaim your online privacy and fight against surveillance capitalism” by Dimitris Tzouris was very useful and mind-opening where we learn new tools and apps how to protect ourselves and our data online. We started by briefly talking about browser cookies. What are cookies and how they can track you? We learned how these tools can also monitor our actions on the web. Who watches the watchers? As Shoshana Zuboff says, “Who decides who decides?” Her book on Surveillance capitalism was mentioned in our session. We learned a good resource on this topic Your Undivided Attention, a podcast co-hosted by Tristan Harris, former design ethicist at Google, who left the company to found the Center for Humane Technology. We finished by briefly mentioning password managers and VPNs, tools that can protect you and make your life easier and more secure. Another Unconference session I attended was on “Idea lab: faculty-librarian-IT collaboration on writing assignments, a cross-AMICAL student research platform”. Three participants from three different institutions and from three different disciplines came together as a group during this Unconference session and came up with a new idea to implement. Unconference was very interesting experience where I collaborated with people whom I did not know before and worked with them for one hour to design a project. It was a nice experience. I also really enjoyed the The Glass Room Community Edition exhibit where the participants had the opportunity to experience the Glass Room Community Edition exhibit and Data Detox kit firsthand and reflect on their usefulness for developing digital literacies at their own institutions in a discussion session. I have got my Digital Detox kit and I have one more if you want.

It was my second AMICAL Conference and I have learned many new tools, apps, digital technology trends in education, teaching methods for digital literacy, information literacy and media literacy, exchanged ideas with other researchers and colleagues from other American Universities, learned new projects and programmes they are implementing, experienced new culture (Kuwait) and I suggest other faculty of AUCA to take part at next AMICAL Conferences and workshops and use new knowledge and technologies learned at AMICAL back at AUCA during their classes and projects and collaborate with AUCA Library, CTLT and WARC to develop digital humanities at AUCA further.



Ekaterina Kombarova, AUCA Website Director & Elena Molchanova, Psychology Department

Participation in the AMICAL conference is of particular significance to me. In addition to presenting at the conference, I was also honored to serve as a Lead Volunteer Coordinator, for the group recruited from among the participants of the conference. This is not the first time I have participated in the work of the conference, for example, in 2018, when the conference was held at AUCA, I was among the organizers, but it is always exciting. As for my presentation, its topic was devoted to the digital transformation of both higher



education and the higher education institution itself and sounded like "To transfer or not to transfer? Digital transformation and the exclusivity of higher education "offline". The presentation, as well as the research work preceding it, were prepared jointly with Elena Molchanova, Full Professor of the AUCA Psychology department. The topic of the presentation was fully consistent with the theme of the conference and was received with great interest. The time allotted for the presentation was not enough for all interested participants to ask their questions and exchange experiences, so the conference was decided to hold an additional similar session online. The issue of digital transformation is so interesting and at the same time so poorly discussed within the HEIs communities that during the conference I initiated and held an unscheduled session on the topic "What is the digital transformation of higher education?". During this session, everyone could exchange views on what they and their communities understand by digital transformation, ask each other questions and, of course, share their experiences. The session was attended by representatives of six universities. Especially interesting was the discourse on the role of communication within the HEI's community, both for the purpose of transferring the best digital practices, agreeing on definitions, possible rethinking of educational strategies and the role of a teacher, planning digital transformations and ultimately incorporating aspects of digital transformation in the strategic development plan of the HEI. Also, as part of the unscheduled sessions, I took part in the work of a group of IT specialists. Based on the results of the work, the group decided to strengthen its role in the AMICAL consortium, conduct several educational events for the consortium members, and organize events with the support of the consortium for the IT specialists themselves, in particular in the direction of the leadership and communication skills development. It is also worth noting the high appreciation of the participation of the entire AUCA team in the conference. So during an unscheduled session on digital transformation, Aziz El Hassani - Research & Learning Services Supervisor from Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, said the following: "... AUCA team is doing noticeable and amazing digital work and it is really gratifying to see all your projects coming to fruition". Membership in the AMICAL consortium and participation in the annual AMICAL conference is a great opportunity to expand the boundaries of worldview, accumulate new experience, establish new or strengthen existing contacts.

Anguelina Popova, CTLT

This year AMICAL conference was a day shorter than usual, but productive and memorable nonetheless.

I took part in the pre-conference workshop on strategic approaches to the development of digital literacies with Doug Belshaw. I've known of Doug's work since I started teaching digital literacy in Spring 2014. He had published his doctoral thesis-turned-into-a-book on "The Essential Elements of Digital Literacies", elements of which I used for inspiration in building my own course. I am glad I met and talked to Doug in person, and engaged in a reflection



on how to get AMICAL institutions' administration and faculty on board with effectively integrating digital literacy into the curriculum.

I hosted my own event at the conference: a discussion session on "How does your digital pedagogy transform your students' learning?". We started by sharing the types of digital tools we use for achieving different outcomes of the Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes. Then though I took a sharp turn to the future, asking people to reflect on how their practices support the development of the skills of the future, and on what we need to teach/ do with our students to prepare them for moving to Mars. This was a tough question (people suddenly became silent, and the AMICAL folks are not of the quiet type), some thoughts were shared and decision was taken to keep thinking of this while reflecting on our current practices. The table of tools matching to the outcomes, can be consulted here . I held an Unconference session, where we further discussed the issues and questions from the main session.

Maya Sharsheeva and myself then presented on CTLT experience in choosing and administering an electronic portfolio system. A few years back some other AMICAL institutions (such as the American University in Paris) were putting efforts in implementing an eportfolio. The interest was strong, several partners asked to provide them with extra information on how and why we chose Portfolium. We might well be the institution with the most successful implementation of electronic portfolio, in part because our top administration was very supportive of the initiative. We are very thankful for this support!



Anguelina Popova, CTLT

My main takeaways from AMICAL 2020 were:

(1) organising Gen Ed education around competences rather than around disciplines. The presentation by Dimitar Christozov from the American University of Bulgaria talked about a 4-year effort to reorganise Gen Ed around competences, and specifically data science competences. The motto of the presentation was “Move from “knowledge” towards “competences” training”. Several years ago a working group at AUCA established a list of 6 core competences all of our students should possess at graduation. Back then departments were asked to look through their curricula and evaluate which of these competences and to what extent, are integrated already into the courses. So pitching the idea of competence- build curricula is very much in order at AUCA.

(2) A few research groups presented on their work with oral histories, and preserving archives. There is now a group of universities, among which AUCA, with active groups researching and documenting oral histories, and AMICAL Director Jeff Gima talked to me about the possibility of hosting an event targeting the specific needs of this group of people. This would greatly support the work by Daniayr Karabaev, Aijamal Sarybaeva, and their students, who this summer collected oral memories on the Stalinist past from elderly people around Kyrgyzstan.

Aidai Anvarbek kyzy, BA student

For me, AMICAL was a place where people from the library, archive, IT, and faculty come together to collaborate and create projects that aim to make teaching and learning processes much easier and effective for the students. Each and every lecture and presentation that I was able to attend at the AMICAL conference looked like the accelerated courses that were compressed into short presentations; therefore, attending AMICAL was extremely valuable and informative in terms of getting all the unique and latest information on researches and digital humanities in an accessible form. I was lucky to share my experience from the student's perspective and co-leading the session

"Students as historians: Teaching students how to be researchers and creators in digital humanities." While being one of the co-presenter at AMICAL I tried to share my student experience in researching in digital humanities as well as to present the use of specific digital tools such as AntConc, Voyant, WavePad, Transcribe, ListENWrite, and many others in transcription, record editing, data analysis, and visualization of oral history. I believe that my participation in the international scholarly conference was a new level of student and faculty collaboration.

