



Advancing OA Initiatives: A Case Study from the American University of Central Asia

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of the evolution of OA initiatives in Kyrgyzstan, with a particular focus on the collaborative efforts of the library at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) with public and university libraries nationwide. It highlights the successes and challenges encountered in implementing OA and examines the current state of OA publishing and OA repositories in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan Universities, Open Access, Scholarly Communication, AUCA Library, Educational Training Sessions

The traditional role of librarians as collectors, organizers, preservers, and disseminators of information has evolved significantly with the advent of digital technology. Libraries now play a crucial role in promoting and facilitating Open Access (OA) by educating researchers about its benefits and encouraging the use of OA repositories. This paper explores the significant trends in the development of OA in

Kyrgyzstan, highlighting the collaborative efforts among university libraries to advance OA.¹

Since gaining independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has undergone significant political and socio-economic transformations that have influenced its educational policies and landscape. The concept of Open Access (OA) in Kyrgyzstan emerged in the early 2000s, yet the establishment and development of comprehensive OA programs are still ongoing. Despite the early start of OA initiatives, there remains a pressing need to further promote and support OA practices among university students, teachers, researchers, scholars, and librarians.

One of the pioneering initiatives to advance OA in Kyrgyzstan involved EIFL-supported training focused on the development of open access repositories. A landmark achievement occurred in 2017 with the amendment of Kyrgyzstan's Intellectual Property Rights law. This reform mandates unrestricted open access to all publicly funded educational resources and includes provisions for fair use in education, facilitating the use of open licenses by creators. Additionally, the legislation aligns with the Marrakesh Treaty, which Kyrgyzstan joined in 2017, requiring libraries to serve as authorized entities.²

Various local projects, spearheaded by government agencies, educational institutions, and donor organizations, have concentrated on creating open national and institutional repositories, raising OA awareness, and providing training programs. The library of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) is at the forefront of the OA movement in Kyrgyzstan, supporting OA both institutionally and nationally. Our annual workshops, both online and in-person, for public and university libraries, have yielded productive results, spreading OA widely among students, teachers, researchers, scholars, and librarians.³ These efforts led to the formation of the Open Access Working Group among leading universities in Kyrgyzstan. The Working Group is dedicated to promoting open access and advancing scholarly communication across the country. It includes library directors, research officers, and administrators from universities in six regions.⁴

The establishment of the Working Group was one of the outcomes of open access training that took place at AUCA in June 2022, involving over 25 representatives from major public universities. The training was part of a project supported by EIFL and implemented by EIFL's partner, the Kyrgyzstan Library Information Consortium. The project was titled "Building a Foundation for Open Access Development Across Universities in Kyrgyzstan."⁵ The Group prioritized activities such as training on launching an institutional repository, an information session on Open Journal Systems (OJS) software, and sessions on open access publishing opportunities for Kyrgyz authors. The EIFL grant has also supported development and dissemination of a

¹ KyrlibNet (2017). OOR: Novaya Realnost' dlya Vuzov Kyrgyzstana. [Open Educational Resources: New Paradigm for Higher Educational Institutions of Kyrgyzstan]. Retrieved from <http://kyrlibnet.kg/ru/oor-new/>

² EIFL (2017, May 9). Kyrgyzstan Set to Accede to Marrakesh Treaty. Retrieved from <http://www.eifl.org/news/kyrgyzstan-set-to-accede-marrakesh-treaty>

³ AUCA (2024, Jul 1) Digital Technologies for Libraries. Training for Partner Universities. Retrieved from https://www.auca.kg/en/auca_news/6232/

⁴ EIFL (2022, Nov 30). EIFL contributes to open access in Kyrgyzstan. Retrieved from <https://www.eifl.net/eifl-in-action/open-access-kyrgyzstan>

⁵ BIK (2002) EIFL in Kyrgyzstan. Retrieved from https://www.bik.net.kg/en/eifl_in_kyrgyzstan/

handbook on open access in Kyrgyzstan, in Kyrgyz and Russian.⁶ The handbook covers the history of open access in Kyrgyzstan, current trends, and offers guidance on applying open access in practice. It is being distributed in print and electronic formats to all major universities, targeting libraries, research/science departments and doctoral and master's programmes.

In 2024, the U.S. Embassy supported the "Equity and Access to Knowledge for a Better Future" project, the primary objective of this initiative was to enhance access to electronic information resources for libraries throughout the country and improved access to electronic resources for regional institutions. As part of this project, the libraries of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) and Naryn State University co-authored a practical guide titled "Electronic Resources in Educational Organizations. Published in Kyrgyz and Russian, this guide was widely distributed to university and public libraries and made available in open access through the AUCA repository⁷.

These efforts are part of a broader movement toward OA, supported by legislative reforms, institutional initiatives, and capacity-building projects. The collaborative work among university libraries in Kyrgyzstan marks a significant advancement in the development of OA. However, continuous effort is needed to expand these practices, particularly by raising awareness and providing support to key groups such as students, educators, researchers, and librarians. Without sustained attention and resources, the full potential of OA in advancing knowledge and scholarship may not be fully realized.

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⁶ Bekbalaeva, J. et al. (2022). Otkryti dustup k nauchnym znaniyam. [Open access to scientific knowledge] Retrieved from <https://dspace.auca.kg/handle/123456789/2797>

⁷ Bekbalaeva, J. et al. (2024). Elektronnyie resursy v obrazovatel'nyh organizatsiah. [Electronic resources in educational organizations] Retrieved from <https://dspace.auca.kg/handle/123456789/2797>

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