Where the former Soviet Union’s eastern border met the ancient Silk Road is the new campus for the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The architecture, inspired by local nomadic traditions of mobility and hospitality, supports an American style education.

The design’s open and flexible spaces are densely woven to generate a free exchange of ideas and high energy. At the same time, AUCA comfortably accommodates its 1,600 students in 125 square feet per student, which is half the median area per student at American colleges as reported by American School and University. Students inhabit the diverse campus spaces like nomads with iPads. Faculty and administrators migrate from open office suites to communal banks of quiet meeting and study rooms. The furniture is nomadic too. Tables and seating on wheels beckon anyone to freely stage spaces.

The architecture fits its environment and culture. Pitched roofs echo nearby alpine mountains. The façade patterns recall native rugs, called shyrdaks. Central skylights operate like the crown of a yurt. Rocks gathered from the construction site clad an arcade to say “AUCA.” The building’s geothermal system for heating and cooling was a first in Kyrgyzstan.

HMA2 Architects
Associated Firms: AKF Group (MEP), Thornton Tomasetti (Structure), Fisher Marantz Stone (Lighting), Ardsak (Architect and Engineer, Bishkek), Kent Imhaart (Construction Manager)

Design Team
Henry Myerberg (Principal-in-Charge), Christine Sheridan (Project Architect), Miranda Danusugondo (Project Manager), Owen Huang (Architect), Karen Foley (Designer), Bryan Jag (Architect), Aida Sulova (Designer), Tudor Vemaster and Alimey Lysogorov (Graphic Design), Karen Davidov (Designer)

Client
American University of Central Asia

Area
200,000 sq. ft. $27,000,000

Capacity
1,600

Space per student
125 sq. ft.

Cost/square foot
$125

Completion
August 2015

Photographer
Christine Sheridan, Henry Myerberg

“Appreciate the allusions to local culture. Facade has interesting design elements with a nice mixture of materials, forms, and colors. Innovative planning and a joy-filled dynamic interior with pleasing symmetry.”

—2017 JURY

“The new AUCA campus building brilliantly models the behaviors and modes of thought we try to inculcate in our entire community: openness, transparency, and flexibility.”

—ANDREW WACHTEL, PRESIDENT, AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ASIA, BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN