



# Keeping up the motivation of students in a challenging environment – A case study of American University of Afghanistan (AUAF)

**AMICAL CONFERENCE – JUNE 2022**

*Presented by:*

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# American University of Afghanistan

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- AUAF is the only private, not-for-profit, non-partisan and co-educational university.
- Opened in 2005 with 50 students, and today enrolls more than 800+
- 97 Fulbright Scholars
- Partnerships: Stanford University, University of Nebraska, and the University of California network.



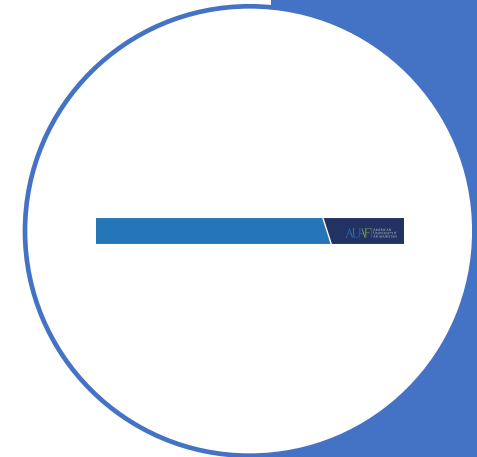
# Emergency is Not New!



- On August 24th, 2016, AUA was attacked by terrorist groups
- Lead to over 7 months close, but classes offered online with limited resources.
- After reconstruction, re-opened March 2017.
- Living through the trauma, students, faculty and staff remained resilient, and
- Since then, the collective motto remains “**education prevails**”.

# Pandemic – Immediate Transition

- On 15th March 2020, The MoHE announced the closure of all universities and schools
- AUAF had a ready COVID plan
- Senior Leadership met to strategize about the universities next move.
- AUAF designed a
  - comprehensive learning provision plan
  - robust student retention policy
- Full utilization of Learning Management System (LMS) [Canvas and Students Management System [Powercampus]
- Afghan Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) site visit to verify the readiness to teach online.
- Within a week, AUAF was teaching online with a ministry approval, a first in Afghanistan, since MoHE had been reluctant to embrace online learning in the past





# Normalcy? Time to open the campus!

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- Entire AUAF community was fully vaccinated
- Students were eager to resume their offline classes and faculty was waiting to be back on campus
- Fall 2021 planned to start offline
- Excitement and buzz – once again “resilience” triumphed!



# The ill-fated day of 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021

- Most of Afghanistan's provincial capitals had to fall during a Taliban offensive by mid August
- Late morning on 15 August, Taliban has reportedly arrived in Kabul and President Ghani fled the country.
- By the end of the day, Kabul had Fallen off to the Taliban
- City was captured amid a United States military withdrawal in accordance with a US–Taliban peace agreement
- More than five dozen countries called for safety of people wishing to leave Afghanistan
- What followed was “mayhem” in the city, people trying to flee fearing for their lives.

# What happened at AUAF?

- AUAF had elaborate Hibernation, Relocation and Evacuation plans.
- International staff footprints were kept minimum.
- What followed was denial and complacency
- Records were destroyed and burnt to avoid Taliban getting a hold of them
- What followed was hurried fleeing of the university compound in less than 30 minutes.
- The first two weeks can be described only as chaotic, fearful, uncertain and bleak



# Urgent Plea from students!

I am in Kabul and the situation is so stressful and none foreseeable. Everyone's mental health is awful here.....

Me and all my family are in the corridor of the first floor of our house from the morning till now...because we are afraid if they land rocket or fight

Nothing is clear and no one knows what the future of all Afghans will be in a state of confusion. The Taliban's attitude has not changed, and they are taking young girls with them.





# Role of Education in Emergency

- The role of education in an emergency is undeniable.
- The academic and leadership team at AUAF realized the need to continue providing quality education and access to a safe learning environment to its students when the country is facing a humanitarian crisis.
- True to its mission the university was determined to ensure that **education shall prevail**.
- The academic committee was cognizant of the destruction of records and current logistical challenges related to student registration for the Fall Semester.
- Ensuring mental wellbeing and instilling confidence back in students was the priority of its faculty members connecting from all corners of the world, with those who were still in the country and leading a life of obscurity.



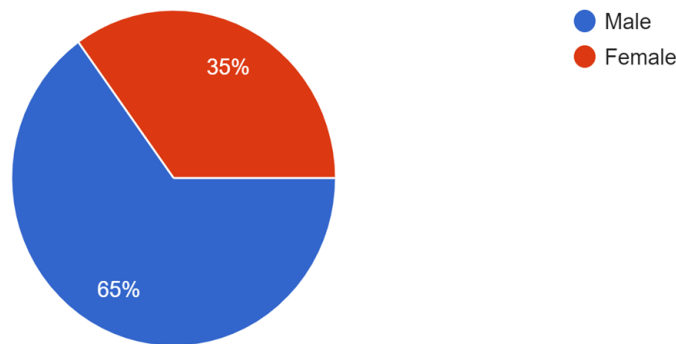
# Student Survey

A survey was conducted to assess the current situation with regards to students.

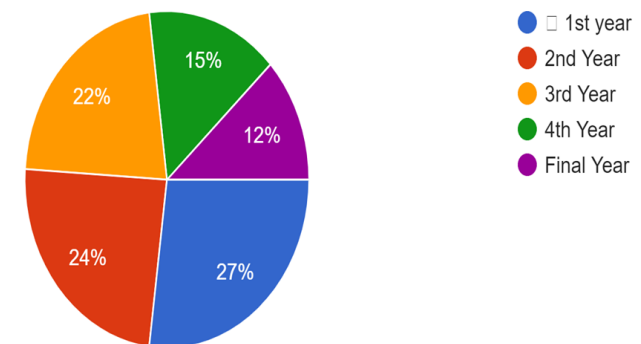
A google survey form was emailed and students were urged to fill it up, provided they had access to their computer and internet.

The purpose was to gauge the general mood of the student community and their willingness to continue with their education : Fall semester 2021

Gender  
100 responses

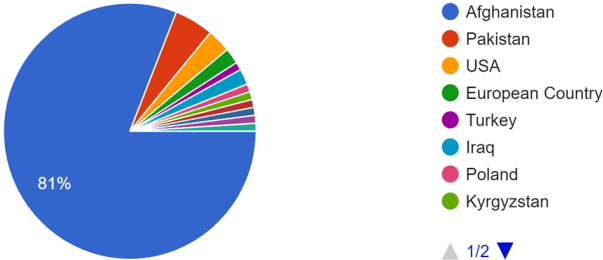


Year of Study  
100 responses

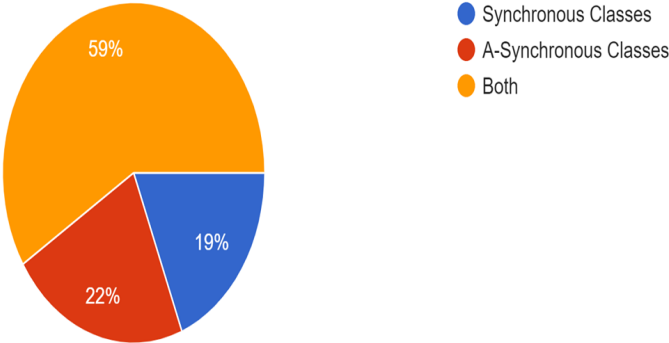


# Checking on Students – Feedback

Are you in  
100 responses



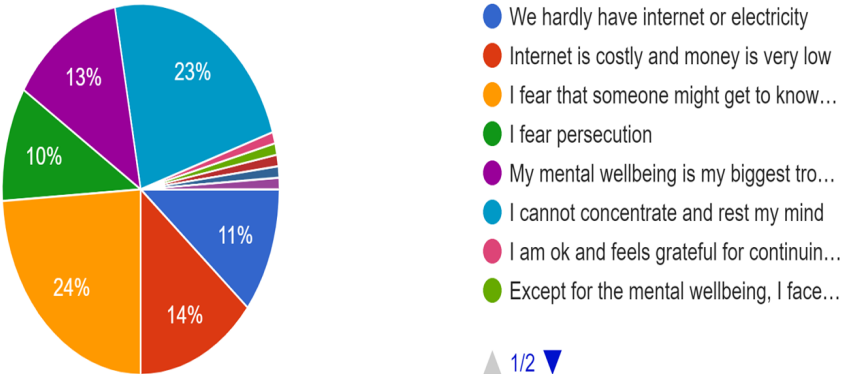
Do you prefer  
100 responses



What is your feedback about the starting of the semester?  
100 responses



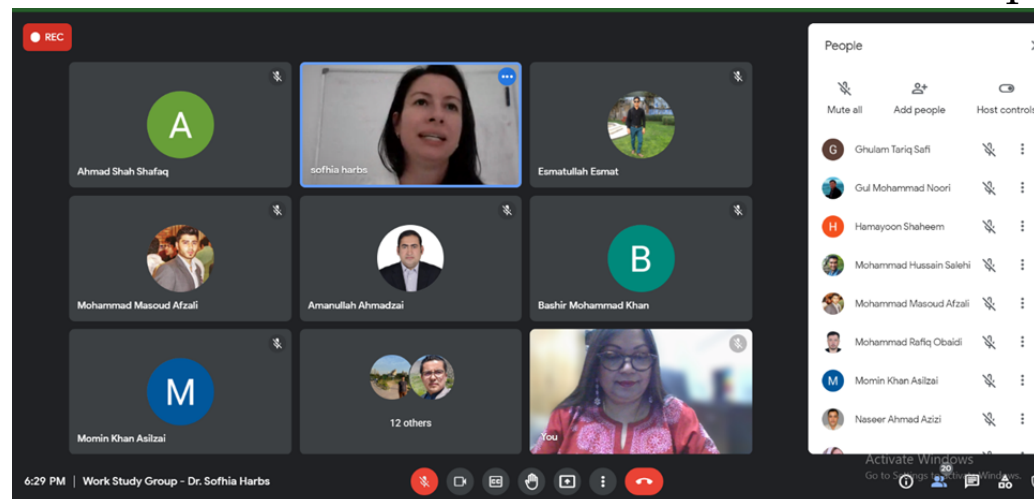
What are the challenges are you facing?  
100 responses





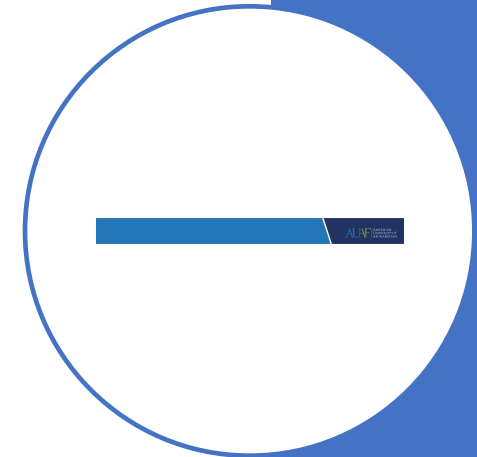
# Study Groups

- A three-week study period was designed, within majors.
- Each department designed its own unique three weeks study-Group session
- The purpose was to process the current events in a safe academic space designed to ease all into an uninterrupted resumption of academic life at AUAF.
- Students processed recent events with faculty as a part of their reflection and narratives.
- They also received instruction and assignments on lessons learned.
- Students read various articles, discuss questions posed by the instructor, and respond to questions in a prescribed format.
- Experts on mental health were invited to counsel students and inculcate a sense of hope and positivity.



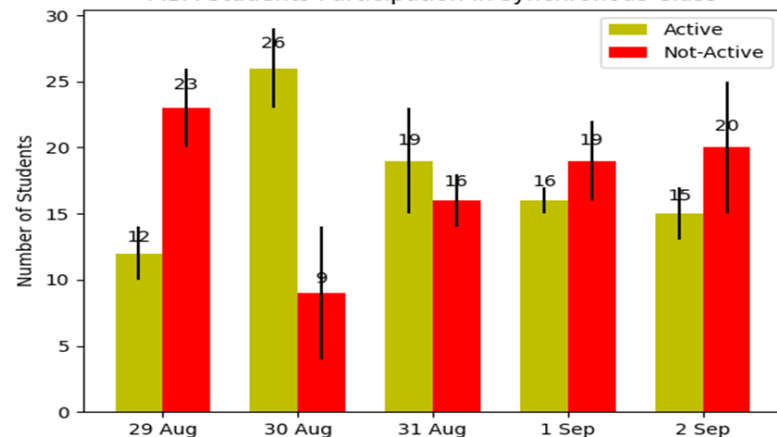
# Study Group - Business

- 35 MBA students and 198 BBA students divided into 5 groups and were assigned to the fulltime faculty
- Students added to Google rooms and canvas page for the courses.
- Preparing course materials, assignments, discussion and shared them daily with students.
- The basic objects were:
  - Alleviate students' stress and increase their confidence in education/university
  - Review lesson learned from the current difficult situation in Afghanistan in terms of Business environment
  - Engage students to connect with their experiences and put forth solutions
  - Understand theories and practices in Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Leadership and Finance.
  - Comprehend case studies and narratives
  - Work on understanding mental wellbeing and combat stress.

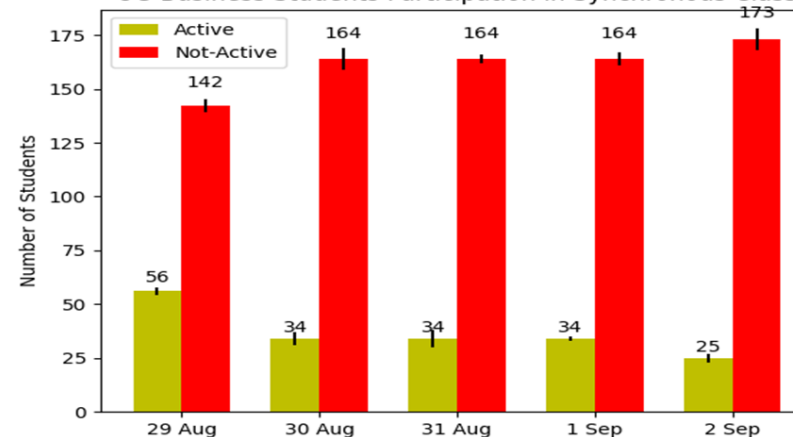


# Study Group – Business – Week 1

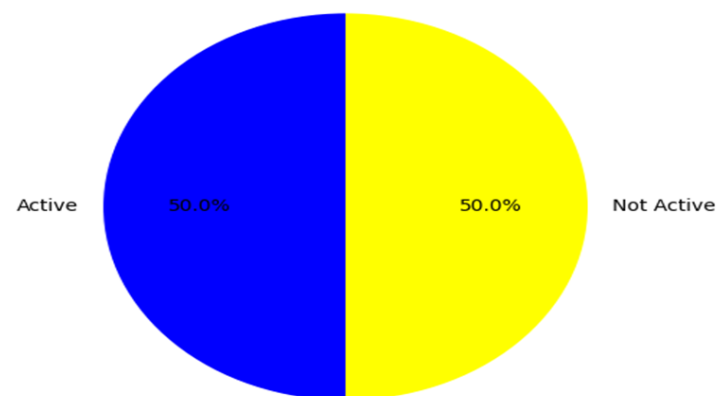
MBA Students Participation in synchronous Class



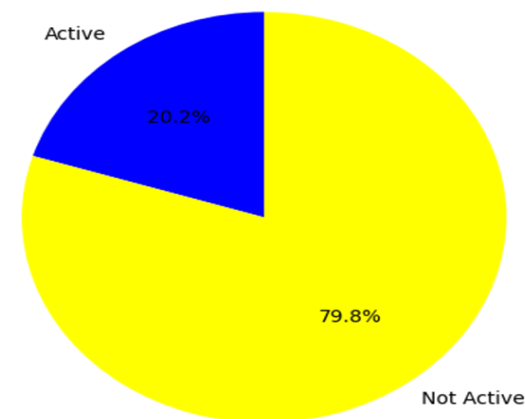
UG Business Students Participation in Synchronous Class



Average Percentage of MBA Students Participation in Synchronous Class

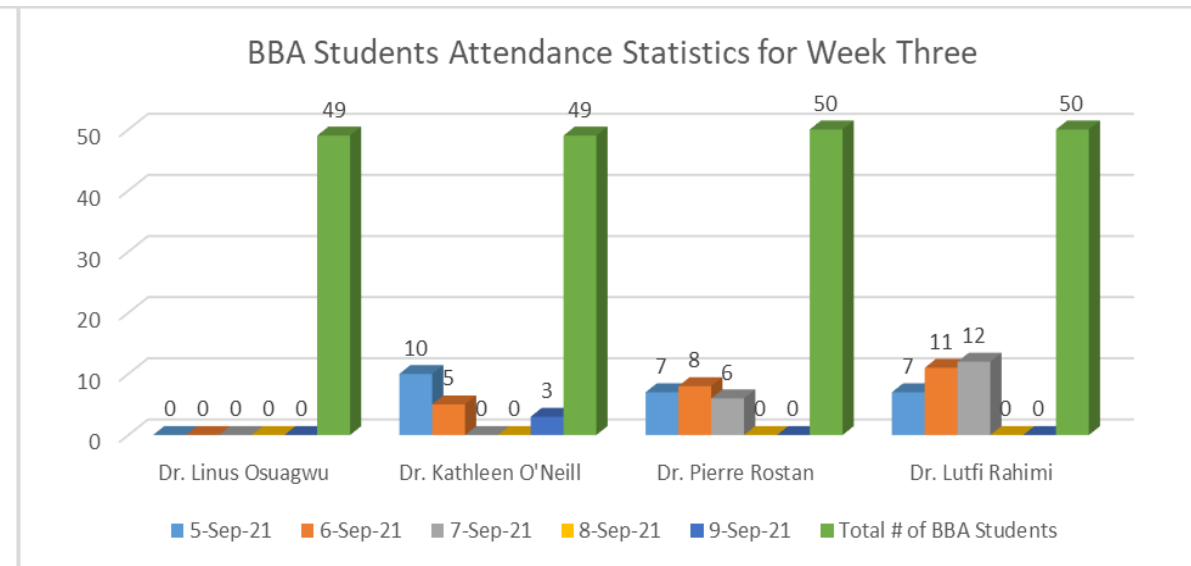
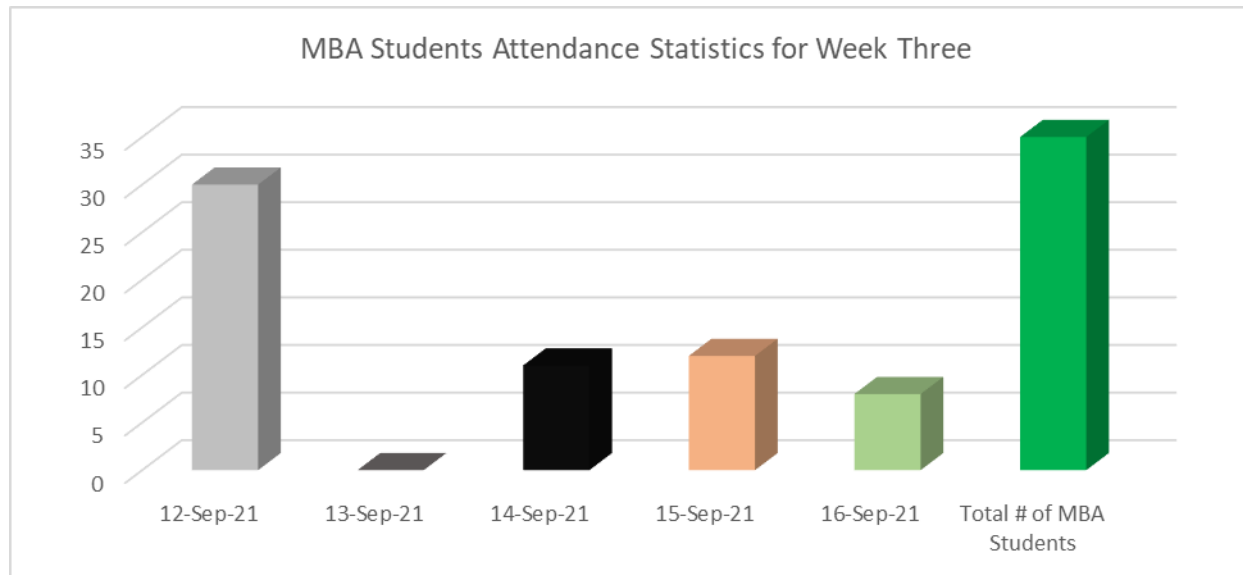


Average % of UG Business Students Participation in Synchronous Class



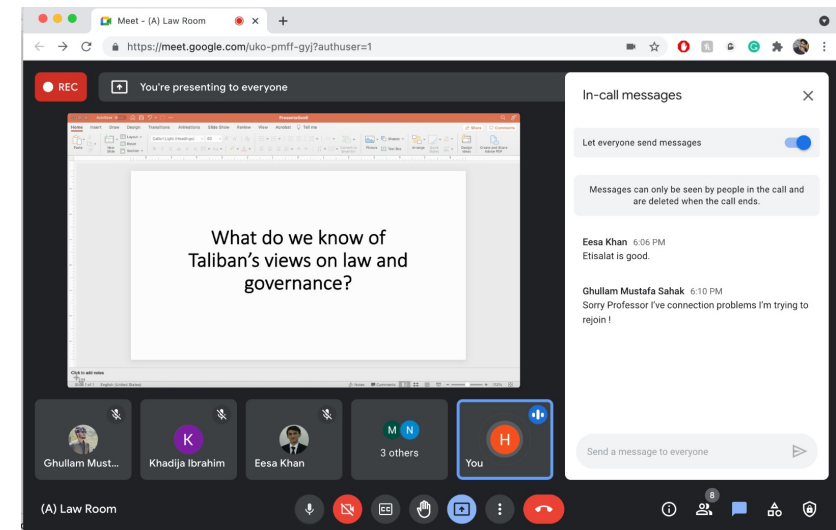
# Study Group (Business)

The numbers became promising:





# Three Weeks Study – Group Law Department

- Focus on students' mental health and psychological support
- Synchronous and asynchronous sessions
- But generally, Objectives were:
  - Enhancing student's mental health
  - Providing psychological support for students
  - Enhance student engagement in real life challenges and finding solutions for the rule of law uncertainties the country
  - Improve students understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the current situation



# Mental Wellbeing

- A one full week session with two psychotherapist
  - High number of the student participation
  - Not only those majoring in law, but laws minors were also included
  - Aiming to bring the motivation and hope back to students
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- Two volunteer psychotherapists:
    - 1. **Chetna Duggal**, Psychotherapist and Associate Professor and Director of MA Applied Psychology Program at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai
    - 2. **Pamela Oberoi**, Psychotherapist and Director of Refugee and Immigrant Services at Pathways Counseling Center, St. Paul

# Designing A Mental Wellbeing Program

- Designed for AUAF students
- Was extremely helpful

Session 1: Framing our experiences

Session 2: Tapping our resources

Session 3: Building connections

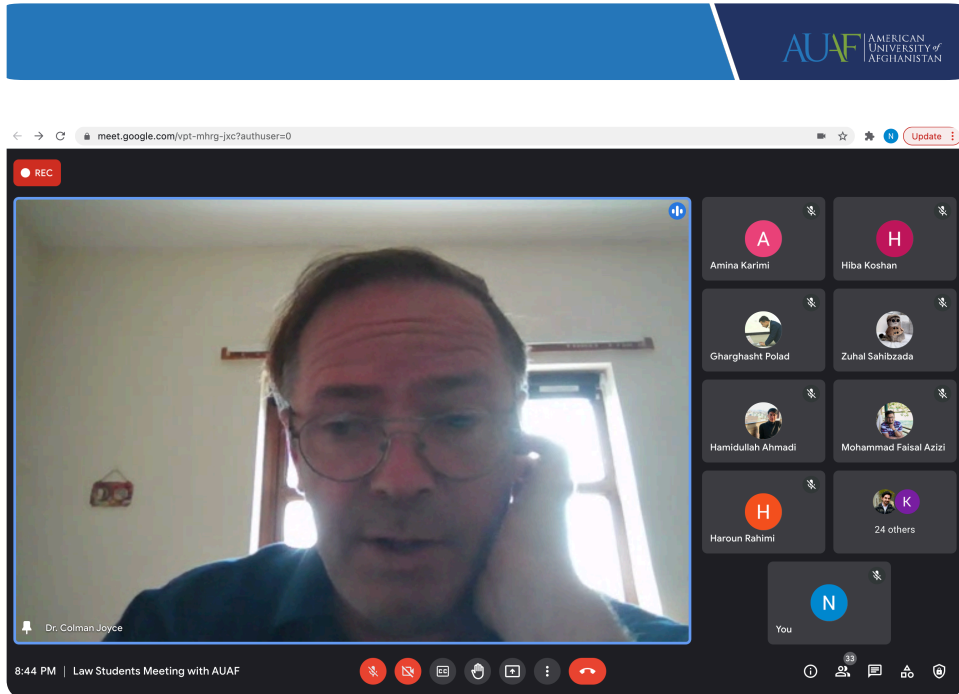
Session 4: Stories

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface. At the top, a status bar indicates 'Pamela Oberoi is presenting'. The main window displays a PowerPoint presentation titled 'Stories of hope Session 4'. The current slide is titled 'Hand on the heart exercise' and features a cartoon illustration of a white cat holding a red heart. The presentation window includes a sidebar with slide thumbnails and a top menu bar with various editing tools. On the right side of the Zoom window, there is a grid of participant tiles. Visible participants include Chetna Duggal, Saqalain Eqbal, Pamela Oberoi, Faisal Khan Mashal, Freshta Zuhail Rahman, Zuhail Ahmadzai, Khadija Ibrahim, and a tile for 'You' (N). A notification bubble at the bottom center of the Zoom window states: 'Are you talking? Your mic is off. Click the mic to turn it on.' The bottom status bar of the Zoom window shows the time as 8:44 PM and the session title as 'Session 4: Stories'. At the bottom right of the overall image, there is a blue banner with the AUAF logo and the text 'AMERICAN UNIVERSITY of AFGHANISTAN'.



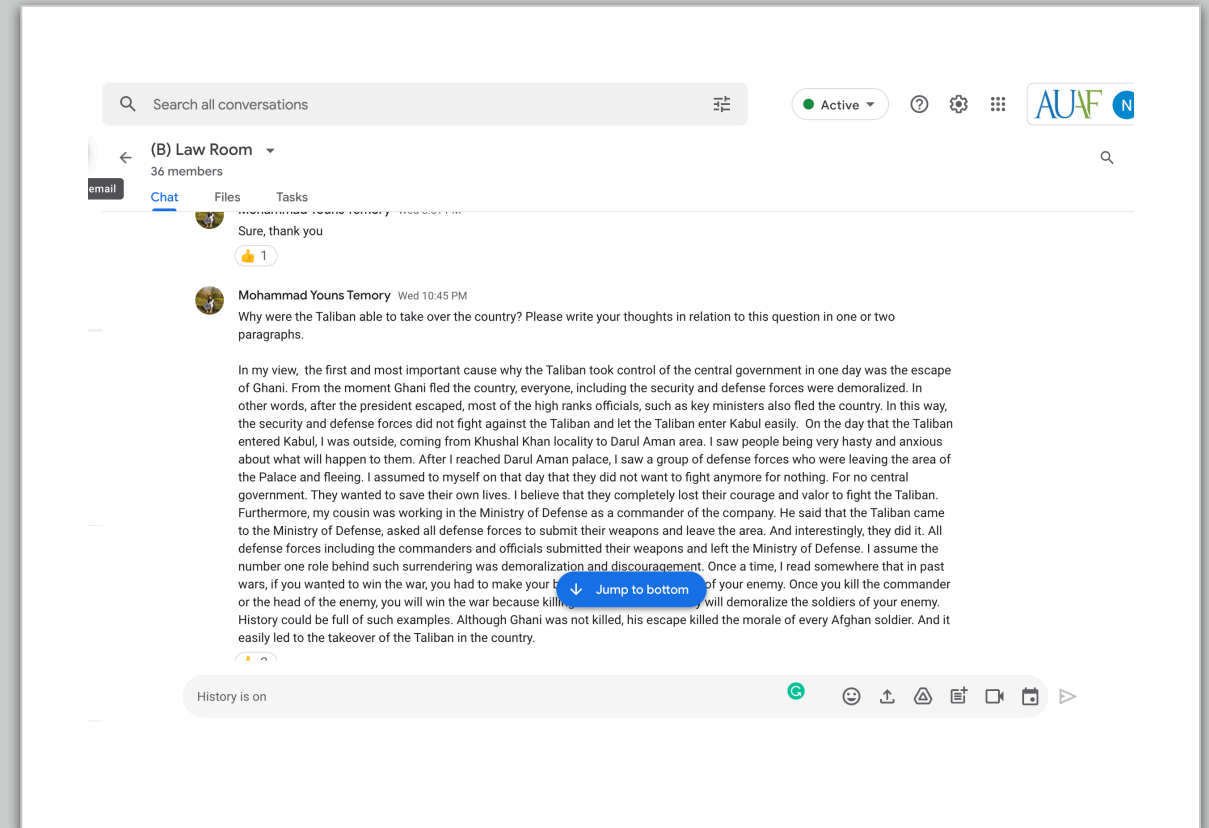
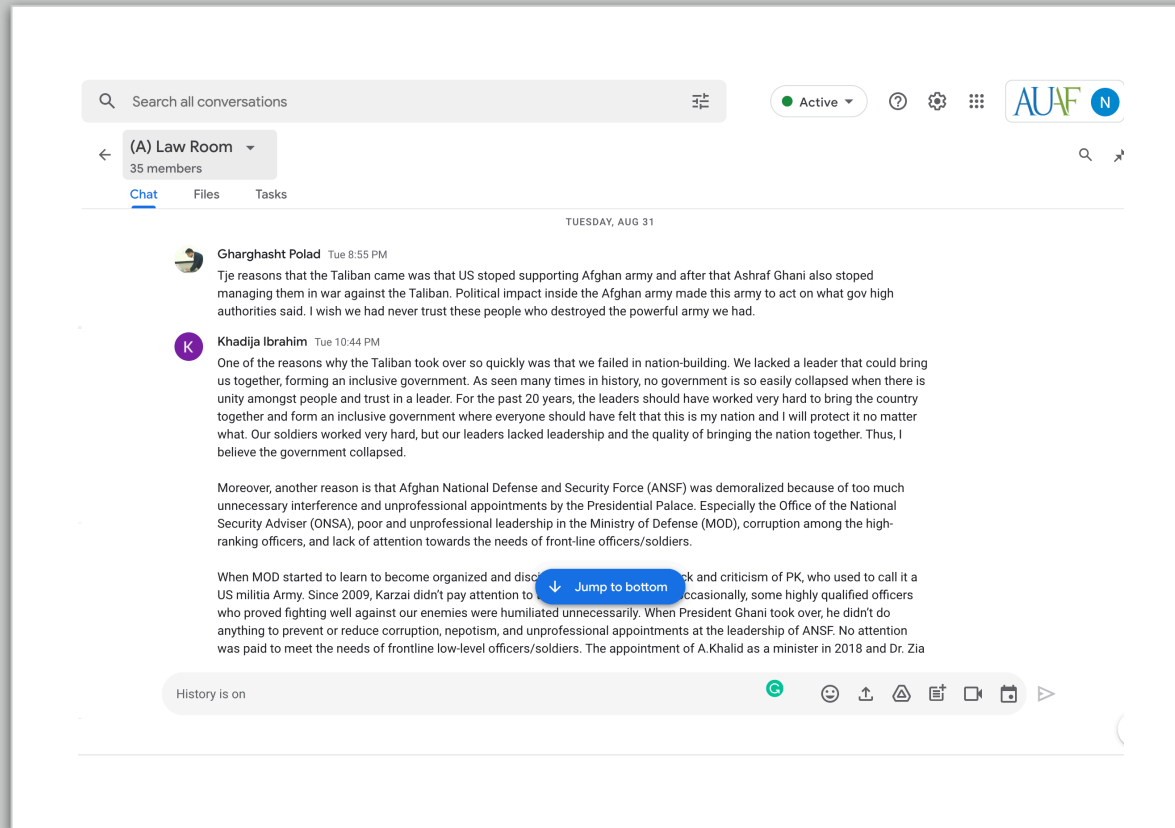
# Additional Steps

- Department Townhall Meeting
- Students – AUAF leadership Meeting
- Students – Stanford Meeting



# Discussion Groups

- Google room discussion groups
- Answers to posted questions





Active participation and once again  
eager learners!

BBA Work Study Group - FALL 2021

Meet - ygi-ajei-kgh

meet.google.com/ygi-ajei-kgh?pli=1&authuser=1

Apps AUAF exeter Inbox - lutfira@gm... Hotmail Exeter Jobs Khorasan Biruni Streaming

You're presenting to everyone Stop presenting

afghanistan-analysts.org/insights/economy-development-environment/afghanistans-coming-economic-catastrophe-what-next-for-the-taleban...

halted planned transfers of funds.

- The banking sector is in crisis, with cash reserves extremely low and international sanctions regimes restricting international transactions. Commercial banks are still, for the most part, closed as they have no money to give out to their depositors. This crisis is pushing the afghani to depreciate and prices of flour, medicine, electricity and other basic goods to rise across the country.
- The effects of the banking sector crisis will be far-reaching. Afghanistan's financial system has been the beating heart of its economy, upon which vital formal institutions which fuel and supply much of the rest of the informal, cash-based economy rely. Afghanistan already faced a humanitarian emergency - over half of Afghanistan's entire population are in need of assistance, one-third malnourished and half of all children under five are severely malnourished.
- Afghanistan was already in for a painful adjustment period, necessary to

1:48 PM | ygi-ajei-kgh

Type here to search

13:48 06/09/2021

Participants: Hamasa Zeerak, Mustafa Sabari, Hadya Nejati, Neda Mirdadi, Shahnawaz Ahma..., Aqela Nussrat, Ahmad Saddad Faiz, 2 others, You.

AUAF AMERICAN UNIVERSITY of AFGHANISTAN

Let everyone send messages

Hewad Temori 5:58 PM  
yes

Amanullah Ahmadzai 6:06 PM  
Yes

Esmatullah Esmat 6:26 PM  
What does separate urban communities from semi urban communities and where does it stand in development hierarchy in your country?

Ghulam Tariq Safi 6:31 PM  
You have social studies education background. How was your experience of being working on urban development projects.

Ghulam Tariq Safi 6:32 PM  
Thank you Dr. Enakshi. I had the same question

Send a message to everyone

Activate Windows  
Go to Settings to activate Windows

6:33 PM | Work study Group - Presentation

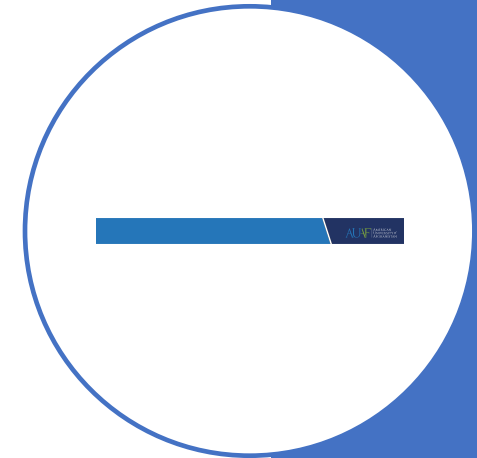
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27°C AQI 38 6:33 PM 9/7/2021

Participants: Amanullah Ahmadzai, Eglantina Gjermeni, Gul Mohammad Noori, Nawida Faizy, Bashir Mohammad Khan, Ghulam Tariq Safi, Ahmad Hamed Dehzad, 6 others, You.

# Concerns raised by students

- Due to unavailability of Power campus some of them have not been able to register for Fall 2021 - what kind of implication does late registration have and by when?
- As banks are almost inaccessible does late payment of tuition fees have any implication on the students?
- As many have lost their source of income and are basically sitting at home - will the university review the tuition fee and offer any kind of relaxation?
- With MoHE being dysfunctional, what will their final certificates look like, what value / endorsement / accreditation will it have for their marketability in the near future? Will it be acceptable for further studies or for a job?
- Is there a possibility in the near future to have some kind of offline courses where students and faculty can be together?



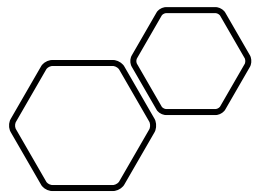
# Appreciation

*"Hello professor, Great work and thanks for your great efforts".*

*"Thank you, Professor. Not stopping our studies at this time is one of the most effective alternatives/ solutions to overcome the psychological stress of the recent national political chaos in Afghanistan. While the studies will continue online, there may not be any major obstacle to stop us from completing our MBA degree. Let's finish what we have started. I will prefer moving forward with our studies as far as possible. Thank you."*

*"Special thanks to you for adding me in this group and creating these wonderful sessions".*

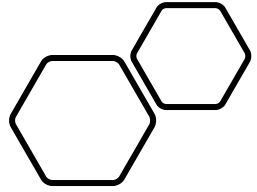
*"Thanks a lot, dear Mam for arranging such an important lecture. We indeed are in need of such discussions".*



# Towards a resilient beginning...

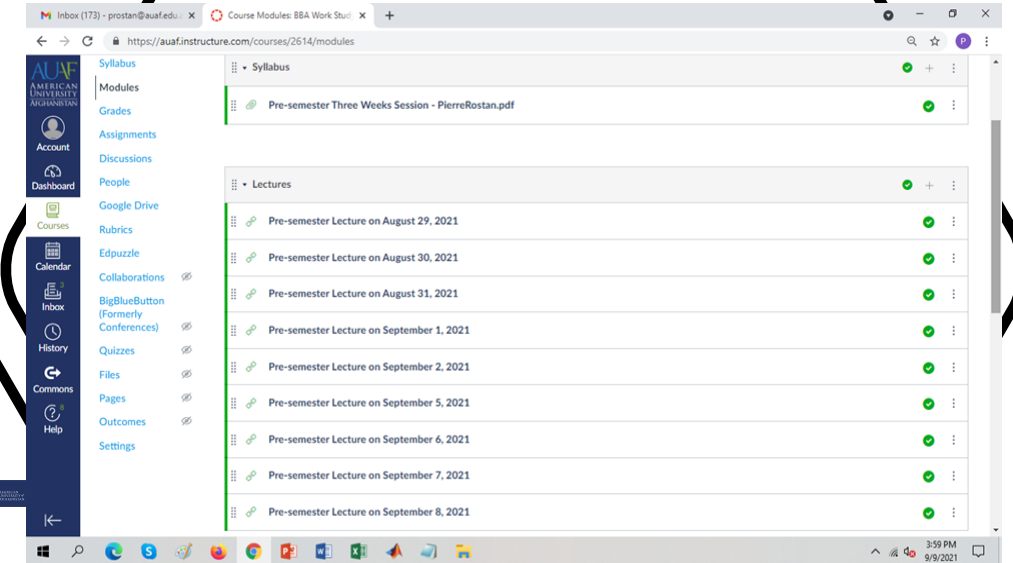
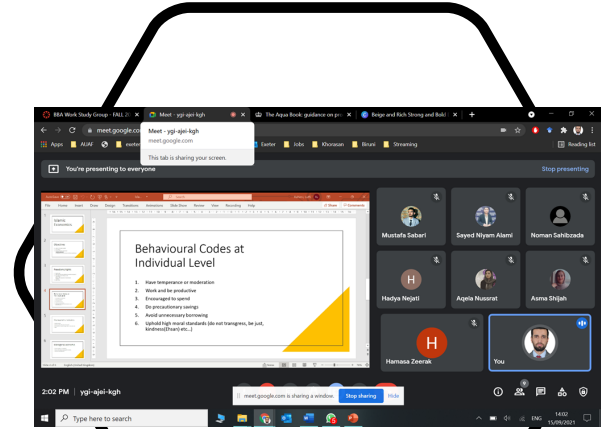
- Over 300 students evacuated to AUIS and AUCA
- Zero payment of tuition fees
- 35 female MBA students on scholarship at AUCA
- Dual Degree programme with Bard College
- Footprints at Doha Education City – university in exile





# The journey continues....

And we journeyed towards a full-fledged online semester for Fall 2021 and now completed even our Spring 2022 semester successfully







**THANK YOU!**

**QUESTIONS?**

**Dr. Enakshi:**

***esengupta@auaf.edu.af***