

The Aga Khan University

JANUARY - JUNE 2021

# STUDENT AFFAIRS AND SERVICES NEWSLETTER



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THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

# Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of the Student Affairs and Services newsletter! Encompassing the Registrar's Office, Hostels, Student Experience, Student Health and Student Counselling and Wellness, this office serves as a one-stop shop for student services and their overall health and well-being at the University. This wide scope means a lot goes on under our umbrella: among many other things, this ranges from recruitment drives and Convocation by the Registrar's office to co-curricular activities by the Student Experience office; from comfort and care of on and off-campus hostel students by the Hostels team and mental and physical healthcare by the Counselling Services and Wellness office.

This newsletter provides a glimpse at some of the activities we have carried out in the first half of the year, while under COVID regulations and with constant uncertainty like all of you.

**We hope you enjoy it.**



**Dr Laila Akbarali**

Interim Vice-Provost and University Registrar  
Office of Student Affairs and Services

Dear AKU Community,

This year may only be halfway done and even amidst all the uncertainty that surrounds what we, with your support have accomplished, is indeed noteworthy. We have had a lot of firsts at AKU – first global convocation with virtual and in-person participation, and the first virtual joint new student orientation for undergraduate and graduate students from the Medical College, SONAM and IED. And as the uncertainty caused by COVID continues, our skilled Student Health team diligently monitors our students and helps us to ensure that safety and security is at the heart of our decisions and actions.

I hope you enjoy this newsletter. All of us have shown great perseverance and patience in adapting to changing situations and new challenges. I look forward to seeing what the rest of the year brings.

I wish you all the best.

# Revived E-gaming league connects 100 plus students through board games, video games and more

**500+**  
Matches

**160+**  
Registered members

**8+**  
Tournaments

**20+**  
Registered teams

**30+**  
Student mentors

The disruption brought on by the pandemic in 2020, accelerated the revival of the Gaming League which now organises matches for everyone across AKU, including current students, staff and faculty. A group of committed students, under the umbrella of the Office of Student Experience, worked alongside the Critical Creative Innovative Thinking forum (CCIT) to launch an e-gaming platform. Kudos to the core student team – Daniyal Musharraf (MBBS'22), Muntazir Mehdi (MBBS'22), Munir Mehmood (MBBS'23) and Daniyal Ali Khan (MBBS'23) for putting in hundreds of hours into giving structure to the e-gaming league and setting up the matches. And to the CCIT team, in particular Areeba Ahmed, for providing the necessary support.

## Feedback from participants

"Helped me through quarantine."

"The league has allowed me to interact with more people from AKU especially people from other cohorts such as IED, ASDH, and SONAM with whom I haven't had the chance to interact before."

# New students received a special welcome to life at AKU in a first-ever joint and virtual orientation

This shift to a virtual format allowed students to stay in the safety of their homes while receiving their introduction to AKU. This was the first time that all undergraduate and graduate programs received an orientation together.

Prior to the formal start of the programme, one day was specifically allocated to acquaint students with the online learning systems they would be using over the course of their orientation, and indeed their time at AKU. This was key to ensure that the orientation programme ran smoothly and students felt comfortable over VLE.

*“I really enjoyed the quick responses to our questions and the two-way conversation. It was really a good start for me and for all of us,” a student commented on the anonymous feedback form. Another highlighted that “the extremely accommodating environment especially for technology newbies like myself,” gave him the confidence to participate in the orientation.*

During the orientation programme, students received information essential to their success at AKU. They were introduced to relevant stakeholders, facilities, policies and online learning tools, and received warm welcomes from the university leadership and their entity Deans. One student remarked that the “welcome address by President Firoz Rasul was very uplifting and motivating” while another found it “intriguing how all the Deans were so involved and captivating with their sessions. It’s amazing how skilled they all are.”

Current AKU students played a role in welcoming their peers. Student society representatives enthusiastically introduced the 20+ student-run societies and committees present at AKU, while others, through a video message, shared words of advice, their own experiences as an AKU student and methods of coping with online learning. Students commented that they “really liked the part of the orientation when senior students shared their journey stories and their good wishes.”

A faculty panel session with leaders from SONAM, MC and IED in the areas of healthcare and education, was especially well-received. Students appreciated learning about the personal journeys and challenges their faculty had gone through, terming it motivational and inspiring. A student commented that “The faculty seems to be very charismatic, diverse and experienced in their fields... [and] gave great pieces of advice for all of us.”

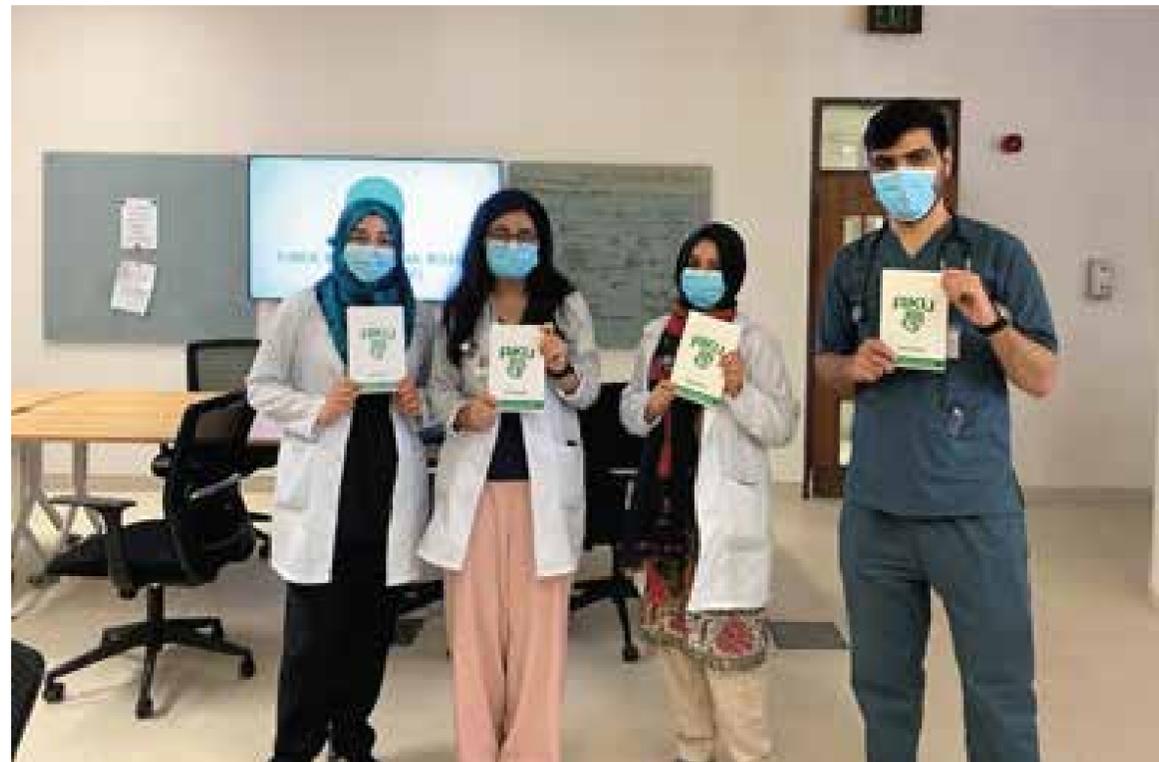
With any online activity, there is special concern for those students who could not participate fully due to poor internet connectivity. Most of the sessions were recorded and uploaded on the student portal, allowing even students who had attended all the sessions to revert to the presentations that were of special interest.

As one student noted on the feedback form: “I liked the way the whole session was organised in proper sequences. It made me excited to start the semester!”

Students also learnt how they could make use of key services such as the Library and Counselling from their homes. The session on physical and mental well-being was especially welcomed with students appreciating that their health was of high priority. Other sessions included those on Student Finance, guidance on using the student portal AKUROSS, walk-throughs of the Blended and Digital Learning tools available and opportunities for those wanting to improve their English language skills.



# Customized mascot themed notebooks for all current students, interns, residents, and fellows



The Student Experience office designed a notebook, customized with photos of student activities, useful contact numbers, calendar pages and fitness tips, and gifted it to all current students as well as interns, residents and fellows who are part of the Post-Graduate Medical Education (PGME) department.

The mascot is fast becoming an important symbol of university life, and this notebook aims to further embed its spirit and ethos within our key audience: current students in Pakistan. It is hoped that by using this notebook in their daily lives, they will continue to identify with the mascot and through it build a cohesive student identity around AKU's core values and global ethos.

Virtual conferences,  
hybrid sessions,  
sports events and more:  
student societies give  
their best amidst  
COVID regulations

## Students Research Forum (SRF)

### Meet the Matched (MTM)

In April 2021, SRF conducted their annual MTM event via Zoom, where 27 graduates, from several different specialties including general surgery, radiology, pediatrics, orthopedics and neurosurgery, came together and shared their journeys from medical college to the matching process with more than 300 medical students. The matched doctors shed some light upon their research experiences, STEP scores, gap years and provided exceptionally helpful advice to their juniors.

### Session on Personal Financial Management during Residency

In May 2021, SRF conducted its recurring session on financial management. Delivered by AKUH CEO Dr. Shahid Shafi. This session aimed at giving insight into how to make sound financial decisions by evaluating the possible expenses and saving strategies as newly appointed residents in the US.



## Discussion and Demonstration of Portable MRI

This hybrid event, spread across two sessions was conducted by Dr. Harry Hu and Dr. Fyezah Jehan. Through collaborative efforts between SRF, the Department of Pediatrics at AKUH and Pediatrics for Life, the first session took place virtually in April 2021, with a focused discussion on the role of research in the biomedical industry and the potential groundbreaking impact of portable MRI. The second session was a live hybrid session (in-person and virtual), where Dr. Harry Hu demonstrated how this machine worked. This session proved to be a massive success as it tried to keep aspiring doctors up-to-date with the current situation in the medical field.

## ABC of the Research: Learn the Art of Getting Published

Mr Salman Muhammad Soomar, one of the most prolific research specialists at the Aga Khan University, conducted a session with more than 100 participants from around the country with different field backgrounds of Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry and physiotherapy. He introduced students to the basics of conducting research and the different opportunities available to help them kick start this journey.

## The Journey from an Experiment to Publication

Ms Shehla Khan, Asst. Professor, along with Ms Sara Saleem Valliani, current President of SRF SONAM and a Trainee Nurse Intern elaborated the use of scientific methods in experiments, in a session specifically for nursing students. They discussed the significance of writing abstracts and the benefits of publishing nursing project works on national and international forums.

## Volleyball, Cricket... and Waterballoons!

In 2021, the AKU Sports Society continued to actively organise a variety of events. The week long intra-university sand volleyball tournament drew in 11 teams with 90 male and female students. Congratulations to the team led by Mazhar Ali (BScN'21), and the team led by Mehreen Safiullah (BScN'21) for respectively winning the boys and girls events. Illyas Safi (BScN'21), and Mehreen Safiullah (BScN'21), were awarded Best Players.

The intra-batch tape ball cricket tournament took place with 12 male and 6 female teams. The close tournament came to an end with MBBS'21 winning the boys event and BScN'23 winning the female. Taimur Ali Roomi (MBBS'21) and Ameera Mirhaj (BScN'23) were crowned as the Best Players of the Tournament.

For those not interested in team sports, there were other activities. In two separate endurance bicycle rides, students completed a 35 km loop from the SRC to Boat Basin (Clifton) and back to AKU. While a true test of stamina and strength, there was a provision of first aid supplies, water bottles and vehicles where students could rest if needed. 75 students took part over two days, with many left waiting for future such events.

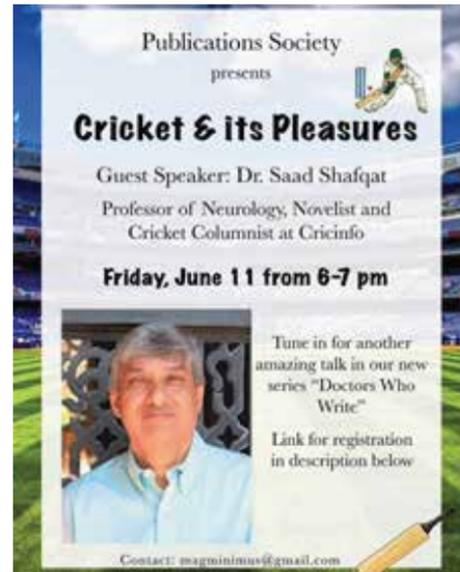
In a unique spin, a three day waterballoon event was also organised in the Children's Play Area in the Sports Centre. Divided into small groups, students enjoyed the warm evening air by throwing waterballoons at their friends and peers. Separate waterballoon 'fights' were held for males and females.

## Message from the Sports Society

The Sports Society would like to thank all the participants, and acknowledge the commitments of Munir Mehmood (MBBS'23), Amna Minhas (MBBS'23), and Sher Younus (BScN'21) for organising and completing the tournaments. We would also like to extend our appreciation to our volunteers Sher Wazir (BScN'22), Syed Sajid (BScN'21), Arsalan Javid Khattak (MBBS'23) and Rafay Mohammad (MBBS'24) for helping the organisers in the above events.

*At the end, the Sports Society would also extend appreciation to Amin Lakhani and Saad Zubair from Student Affairs Office, and to Sajjad from the SRC for constantly supporting the ideas, work and commitment of the students.*





**The AKU Publications Society** has started a series called 'Doctors Who Write', which connects doctors who are prolific writers with current students. This opens a discussion these doctors and students, allowing them to share their journey and encourages the study body to express their creativity through writing. So far, Dr. Usman Malik, an AKU graduate and author of speculative fiction, and Dr Saad Shafqat, published author, columnist, and Professor of Neurology have participated in this series.



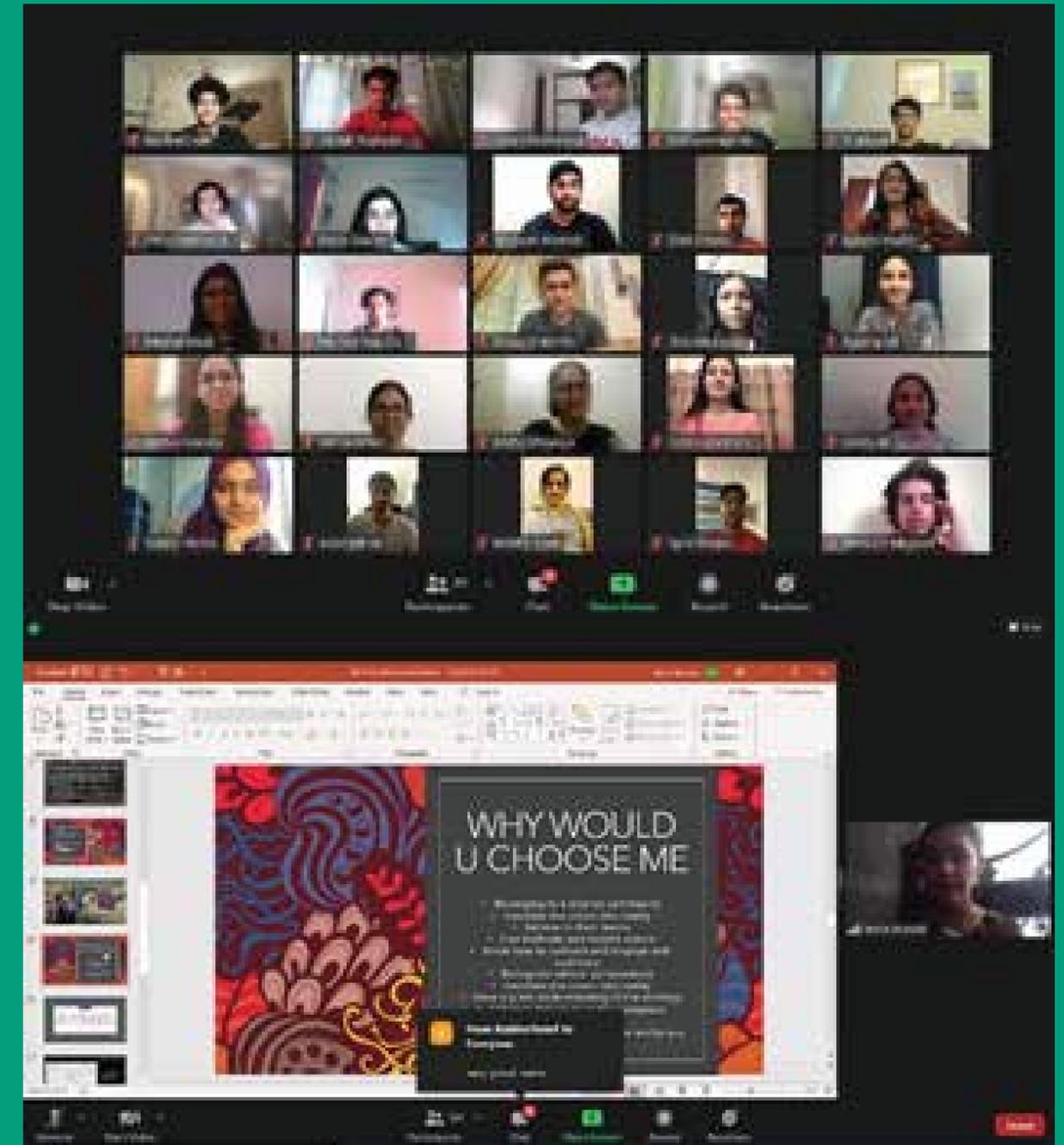
**Coming Up:** A blog to give advice for students, highlight the achievements of students, as well as post literary works created by the student body.

**The Mohsin Abro wing of Falah** has the primary goal of helping deserving patients cover their medication costs from the AKU Pharmacy. Additionally, with the help of the Student Fund Drive, they also assist numerous patients in bearing the cost of essential medical tests and imaging scans. In 2020, they were able to help more than 1200 patients with a total of Rs.1.8 million all while strictly adhering to social distancing and infection control protocols.



In June, **Falah** held a Mango Drive where they raised funds for their organization by selling mango milkshakes to students and staff. This was a successful and much appreciated event. Special thank you to Dean Adil Haider for his support of the cause by sponsoring one drink for all the staff of the Dean's Office and the Clinical and Translational Research Incubator (CITRIC) at the Medical College.

Virtual elections for student representatives draws in record attendance and exuberant engagement



# Student Experience website is now live!

Home > Students > Student Life

## Student Life in Pakistan

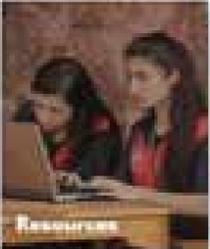
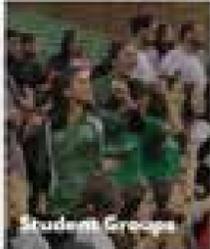
Being a student at AKU is about becoming your best, both in the classroom and in your personal life. A unique student experience awaits every one of you!

Join a quality society or committee and become part of a community of like-minded passionate individuals, attend social and networking events – but do not stop – and open yourself to new friends and experiences. Stand for values to be a true representative as part of a faculty and contribute and connect for most of your years in the student unions. Take part in leadership programs and give it to the person you want to be.

### Our Mission

Empowering our students, the world beyond, through Courage, Agility and Perseverance. Capable of thriving in various environments, a resolute strength, independent of thoughts and action and the determination to revolutionize education.

[Read More >](#)



### Report a Concern

Keep emergency and non-emergency contact information at your fingertips. AKU provides you with easy and convenient options to report concerns, ask questions and submit complaints the place or the way.

[Report >](#)



The newly revamped Student Experience website contains all the essential information students may require to help navigate their co-curricular life at AKU. And if you would like to see something more – please let us know.

Quick Links:

Student Societies and interest groups [Click Here \(https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/groups-events/Pages/home.aspx\)](https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/groups-events/Pages/home.aspx)

Useful Contacts – you are recommended to have them saved on your phone. [Click Here \(https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/Pages/report-concerns.aspx\)](https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/Pages/report-concerns.aspx)

Campus Facilities – a list of all the amenities, with their timings and details. [Click Here \(https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/facilities/Pages/home.aspx\)](https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/facilities/Pages/home.aspx)

Work and Study Programmeme – platform for details and application form for all the latest jobs for students. [Click Here \(https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/groups-events/Pages/wasp.aspx\)](https://www.aku.edu/students/student-life/groups-events/Pages/wasp.aspx)

And much more. Visit [www.aku.edu/studentlifepk](http://www.aku.edu/studentlifepk) to learn more.

# Convocation



# Mini-Gyms set up in male and female hostels



To maintain the physical and mental well-being of our students, common and easy-to-use equipment was set up in the Hostel premises. Guidelines were also set to ensure safety protocols, with the equipment cleaned on a daily basis.

Eid Milan celebrations  
bring cheer in the  
female hostels

Hostel Ambassadors  
provide necessary link  
between students and  
management



# Counselling Services and Wellness office welcomes new counsellors, expands its services to all PGME



Dr Hadia Pasha



Dr Sana Siddiqui



Aqsa Hanif



Aqsa Yaqoob

Aqsa Yaqoob and Aqsa Hanif have joined the Counselling Services and Wellness team as trained and practicing counsellors. Welcome aboard!

The office has also expanded its scope and now provides counselling services and workshops for Residents, Fellows and Interns who are part of the Post Graduate Medical Education programme at AKU. Furthermore, it also offers support to those members of the AKU staff and faculty that engage with students. As part of those services, the office has prepared Crisis Algorithms and Referral Guides for dealing with students in distress and shared them with the Deans and Directors of all academic entities in Pakistan.

The Counselling Services and Wellness office also collaborates with different offices at AKU, and the Brain and Mind Institute (BMI), for capacity building and knowledge sharing. Students continue to be at the heart of the office's services, with sessions on adjusting to university life, time management and handling academic stress delivered to first year MBBS students and planned for first year students of other entities when they would start in-person classes.

To contact the office, you can email at [student.counselor@aku.edu](mailto:student.counselor@aku.edu) or call at +92 21 3486 4456/4301 (ext. 4456 or 4301 if within AKU) during work hours.

# Intellectual Marathons Organised by Registrar's Office to Promote Conceptual Learning



The Registrar's Office organised virtual 'Intellectual Marathons' for students of pre-medical groups to learn about concept mapping. The aim was to transform their rote learning approach into conceptual learning that will help them in their future studies.

The virtual nature of the programme meant that students could attend from all over Pakistan. Ten marathons were organised and 3000+ students attended those sessions.

# Our Team

The Office of Student Experience, Pakistan; Counselling Services and Wellness Office;  
Student Health, Registrar's Office, Hostels.

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