

Zia Andar (July 1988 – November 2020)



Zia passed away in Kabul on November 5th 2020 at the age of 32 as the result of complications from COVID-19.

At the time of his passing, Zia was the Director of the World Bank financed Higher Education Development Program in the Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan.

Zia Andar completed his Master's degree in International Education in 2018 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, supported by the Fulbright Scholarship program. Coming from an aid dependent country, Zia's research focus was on effectiveness of international aid in educational programs. His Master's project analyzed a textbook distribution program in Afghanistan. It is available on the UMass Scholarworks site [here](#).

After graduation he returned to Afghanistan to work with Ministry of Higher Education as the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Manager. He supports the newly established Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate, which is the higher education accreditation agency of Afghanistan. This directorate conducts external quality assurance reviews for university accreditation and promotes the creation of quality assurance cultures by establishing and supporting internal quality assurance units at public universities.



Before coming to UMass, Zia was involved in the education sector of Afghanistan since 2009. While with the Ministry of Education, he served as the Manager for the USAID-funded Basic Education Literacy and Training Program (BELT) for over three years. Through BELT, he led the process of production and distribution of over 50 million textbooks to schools across the country and established over 5,000 Community Based Education classes in the marginalized communities that did not have access to regular schools.

Those who wish to send condolence message to his family can send them to his younger brother, Mr. Bilal Atal, (Bilalatal@gmail.com - +93782694155).

Remembrances from those who knew him

I met Zia at UMass and it did not take us long to become close friends. Zia was friendly, honest, polite, and respectful, who always greeted people with a big smile. I will never forget the great memories I have from him when we went to the Gym/swimming together, and the long conversation we had at CIE. I will always remember the delicious food he cooked for us at his house the night before he departed to Afghanistan - not knowing that I would never meet him again.

Zia was an intelligent and hardworking man who became the Director of a multi-million World Bank-funded higher education program in Afghanistan, soon after his graduation from UMass. He had plans to achieve new heights of success and serve the people of Afghanistan, but his short life took that opportunity from him. I was shocked and saddened by the news of his death. I wish him Jannah and express my deepest condolences to his family. May his soul rest in peace. **Mujtaba Hedayat**

Yes, it's painful to the core. He was a promising emerging leader. He had enormous aspirations. We chatted on Oct 17 and he was in good spirits. I met him in his office a few weeks ago. He wanted to apply to UMass for PhD and was unsure of funding. He asked for consultation. He successfully led the HEDP project, one of the few successful projects of the WB in Afghanistan. He had plans and all were good and was struggling to prioritize, including representing the Afghanistan desk at the WB in Washington DC. I told him to go to DC and he said I am more useful here in Afghanistan.



In his office at the Ministry of Higher Education, he expanded the garden with new trees and flowers and a nice place for sitting outside. He walked me on a tour of the place. He had a good taste for serenity and peacefulness with a lovely smile. We sat down in the garden and refreshed our memories of Amherst and the CIE office space where we would chat till late night. After that we went and met with Mr. Darwish, the Deputy Minister for Admin Finance. We chatted about improving the quality of higher education and reforms, not realizing that he would depart us and leave us alone. Afghanistan barely gets such an aspiring man once in a while with an entire life ahead of him, a strong family, a strong network and a particular intelligence that he had. **Nangyalai Attal**

Zia was inspiring young leader for Afghan education development. He had genuine commitment to his work and professional career. He had calm, gentle and honest personality which had made him an influential leader in MoE and MoHE. In my last meeting with him he had expressed his interest to pursue his doctoral at UMass Amherst. He had a clear vision of preparing himself for a more challenging positions in education development. I hope the news of his death is not true! We will truly miss you Andar Sahib. راجعون اليه وانا لله انا. **Habibullah Wajdi**

I was very shocked when I heard the devastating news that Zia, a dear friend, passed away. It was very hard to believe that my best friend rested in peace. He was so young and enthusiastic about his future goals. He consulted about his future plans several times. Among the others, he was interested in pursuing a Ph.D. at UMass Amherst, however, his dreams left him alone.

I knew Zia as a dear friend and a colleague since 2016. We first met at UMass Amherst, and our friendship continued since then. Zia was an authentic personality who respected the diversity of opinion and cared for his relation with others. I cannot help thinking about our memories together. We did a lot of things together: going to the library, gym, and grocery shopping, taking classes, and spending time with each other.



On a personal level, he was very trustful and dependable. While he finished his master's program in 2018 and settled in Afghanistan as the program director in Higher Education Development Program (HEDP), a World Bank project for higher education in Afghanistan, we had regular conversations. **Sayed Javid Mussawy**

November 5th was the worst day in my life. Zia's passing broke my heart. His passing came as a shock to me. It is unfortunate that we don't have Zia with us. Afghanistan lost an exceptionally young man who always worked for the betterment of people with high energy and enthusiasm. He was a prominent education leader, great friend and such a brilliant young man that I can't explain in words. He will be missed greatly and will be remembered for all the brilliant work he did for out-of-school children in Afghanistan. His work made dreams true for many children in hard-to-reach areas. Zia and I became friend in 2012. We worked closely on community-based education initiatives in Afghanistan.



His ideas and presence significantly enriched education programs in Afghanistan. He had big dreams. He wanted to tear down the walls that stand in the way of modern education in Afghanistan. When I came to CIE for master's degree, I was so happy to see Zia along with other friends. Zia hosted us lunch and dinner and cooked very tasty Kabab. His unforgettable memories will remain in my heart. I pray that God grant his family and friends the fortitude to bear the irreparable loss. God comfort all those he left behind. **Iqbal Halimi**

Zia Andar was part of a generation of young, talented Afghans who came to the Center for International Education at UMass to study with a strong commitment to return home and make a difference in the education system of Afghanistan. He was well on his way to making good on his commitment. When his life was cut short he was the Director of a World Bank funded higher education program, working in the Ministry of Higher Education. He brought fresh, modern ideas about what quality means in higher education and was using his position to help transform the system. His loss is not only a personal one for his family and friends, but is also a loss of vibrant, forward-looking leadership for Afghanistan's education system. **DRE**

I smiled at that last message as I too was fortunate enough to have been with Zia on that hike. The sun was bright and the sky blue and if memory serves me correctly, Zia pretty much led the way up the mountain. I remember when at the top, seated around one of several picnic

tables enjoying a bit of lunch, Zia shared “his family” with us. You could hear the love and pride in his voice as he spoke. I remember another time we crossed paths walking on campus and it was clearly evident that his soft and kind manner was instrumental in helping another student cope with the recent loss of a parent. Never heard a harsh or embittered word pass his lips and readily picture his quiet strength and his friendly smile. I share your loss. **Barbara Gravin Wilbur**

Zia Andar was a source of inspiration and delight to all he came in contact with. His exuberance and dedication to education in Afghanistan shone through in all he did. In one of my classes, he was a diligent and committed student who took on the challenges of doing research virtually with ease and thoughtfulness. He always brought his infectious smile to classes and to all activities in CIE, as well as his delightful sense of humor. Those of us at UMass Amherst and all those in Afghanistan will sorely miss this rising star in education. My deepest condolences to his family, close colleagues, and all those whose lives he touched. May he rest in peace. **Gretchen Rossman**

I first met Zia at UMass at a Kabab party. I well remember that he was searching to find nicely grilled pieces of Kabab for me and kept telling me, ‘you are our guest.’ We only needed that first interaction to become good friends. Zia was a decent, kindhearted, polite, and honest person.

The last time we met was November 2019 at the Ministry of Education in Kabul, when I was gathering data for my dissertation. We talked about different issues and I realized how committed and dedicated he was for improving the education system. Soon after, I learned that he was appointed as the Director of the World Bank Higher Education Program. I was happy for him to achieve his ambitions and goals being in such a senior position. But I did not know that he would not have enough time to see some of his dreams fulfilled.

I was completely shocked and deeply saddened when I learned that Zia has passed. I pray his soul rest in peace, and may Allah grant him the highest place in Jannah. My heartfelt condolence to his family and friends. **Hassan Aslami**

It was hard to know what to think of Zia when we first met. He was quiet but not shy. He walked through campus wearing a small smile, like he knew a joke that was all his own. Zia was the type of person who talked the least and said the most. Even though he spoke softly, everyone listened when he had something to say. He was funny and kind. When his own experiences differed from everyone else’s, he was always able to bring empathy, understanding, and poignant thoughts to the conversation. I was in awe of the passion and certainty he had for his life moving forward. His pathway to helping others and success was always so clear to him. He knew where problems existed, he knew how to fix them, and he knew how he could get into a position to make it happen.

Not only do we mourn his passing, we mourn for life he would have lived. A life that was stolen from us all far too soon. We mourn the laughter we might have shared together, the work he may have accomplished on behalf of a nation he loved, and a lifetime of memories with a loving father, moments of joy. He will be missed, but never forgotten. **Blake Marcus**

Zia was my advisee. He was passionate and kind and smart – with a wonderful sense of humor. It feels so strange to speak about him in the past tense. His work was related to something unique and often overlooked in education programs – the logistics of textbook distribution. The very day

he passed away, I received a request for recommendations for him from the University of Toronto. He wanted to pursue his PhD, and I very much encouraged him to do so. I honor the memory of his too-short life - and would like to convey my most sincere condolences to his family and many friends. Also, I would like to share a few verses from the poem *There is no death* by John Luckey McCreery (below). **Bjorn Nordtveit**

THERE IS NO DEATH

There is no death! The stars go down
To rise upon some other shore,
And bright in heaven's jeweled crown
They shine for evermore.

There is no death! The dust we tread
Shall change beneath the summer showers
To golden grain or mellow fruit
Or rainbow-tinted flowers.

There is no death! The leaves may fall,
The flowers may fade and pass away—
They only wait, through wintry hours,
The coming of the May.

There is no death! An angel form
Walks o'er the earth with silent tread;
He bears our best-loved things away,
And then we call them "dead."

And ever near us, though unseen,
The dear immortal spirits tread;
For all the boundless universe
Is Life—there are no dead!