



CESS Elections 2020 – Candidate statements

[Candidates for President](#)

[Candidates for Board members](#)

Candidates for President (one vacancy)

Listed in alphabetical order by last name

[Alexander Diener](#)

[Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili](#)

Alexander Diener

I am dedicated to the success of the CESS and believe that the Society has great potential as both a resource to learning and a catalyst of scholarly production. Many Central Eurasian universities require international faculty for dissertation committees. I believe this affords an opportunity for the CESS to serve in a connective role between doctoral candidates and established, region-interested international faculty. Collaborative grants are also something that might be facilitated through CESS-connections. Challenges wrought by the COVID 19 crisis will require innovative and disciplined consideration to overcome. The overall mission of the CESS will not be altered by limitations of fieldwork, but should be approached as an opportunity to generate communities of scholars and region-interested professionals to advance work on and in Central Eurasia. As the Director of Graduate Studies for my department, I have become increasingly aware of the benefits of mentorship for young scholars. I would seek to advance the CESS's extant programs for professional guidance and to advance the standing of the region in academic and other professional communities. My mission as President of the CESS, if elected, will center on developing new and creative ways to support scholars with interests in Central Eurasia, promote diversity within our community, and build bridges between varied professional organizations and institutions pertinent to Central Eurasia.

My membership in the Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) goes back to the organization's earliest days, when I was a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin. Some twenty-years later, I am very pleased to submit my credentials of candidacy for the Presidency of the CESS. I am currently an Associate Professor of Geography in the Department of Geography and Atmospheric Science at the University of Kansas (KU). I have served as the Interim Director of the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies at KU and am the institutional representative to the American Center for Mongolian Studies. Over the course of my career, I have held board positions with the Russian/Eurasian Specialty Group and Asian Studies Speciality Group of the American Association of Geographers and have been a member of a number of international scholarly organizations with direct or indirect interests in Central Eurasia (e.g. International Studies Association, Association for the Study of

Nationalities, Association for Borderland Studies, Association of Slavic, East European, Eurasian Studies, American Geographical Society). I am currently being reviewed for promotion to Full Professor and have served the last three years as Director of Graduate Studies for my department.

My research has resulted in a consistent record of publication on Central Eurasia. My topical interests include: Processes and Consequences of Territorialization & Place Attachment; Geopolitics & Border Studies; Migration & Diaspora Studies; Geographies of Nationalism & Transnationalism; Justice, Ethics, & Geographies of Citizenship; Urban Landscape Change; and Development & Transportation Infrastructure. I have authored or co-authored three books, edited or co-edited four books, edited or co-edited three special issues of journals, and have regularly contributed articles, edited volume chapters, encyclopaedia entries, book reviews, and special reports to disciplinary, interdisciplinary-topical, and region-related journals and collections.

I received my doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and have held fellowships at the Kennan Institute of the Wilson Center, George Washington University's Elliott School's IRES Program, and Harvard University's Davis Center. In 2011-2012, I was the Regional Research Fulbright Scholar for Central Asia and a visiting scholar at the American University of Central Asia. I have held similar held visiting scholar positions at KIMEP, KAZGU, The Mongolian Academy of Sciences, and Mongolian National University. Throughout my career, I have supported the work of Central Eurasian scholars in the form of research collaboration, mentorship, dissertation committee membership, and assistance with grant writing.

Jennifer Brick Murtazashvili

I am Associate Professor of International Affairs and Founding Director of the Center for Governance and Markets at the University of Pittsburgh. My first book, *Informal Order and the State in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), won the CESS Social Science Best Book Award in 2018. A second book, *Land, the State, and War: Property Rights and Political Order in Afghanistan* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press (with Ilia Murtazashvili). I'm working on three new book projects: *Red Tape: How Bureaucratic Legacies Derailed State Building in Afghanistan* (with Mohammad Qadam Shah), a book on the current reforms in Uzbekistan, and a comparative book that explores the rise of traditional authority around the world. My research spans several countries—especially Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

It is an honor to be nominated for the Presidency of CESS, an organization that has given me so much. I attended my first CESS conference in 2002. I've tried to give back by serving as an elected member of the board, chairing the 2021 regional conference in Tashkent, hosting the 2018 CESS Annual Conference in Pittsburgh, chair/founding of the Institutional Linkages committee, serving on several book and article awards committees, serving on the Task Force on Field Safety, and several other committees.

If I were elected president, my priority would be to address the deep challenges faced by so many of our members as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis. Many of us are facing slashed research budgets leaving little money for travel or fieldwork, furthermore the future of both activities is under question. I would play an active role fundraising for our organization to provide more opportunities from scholars, especially those in Central Eurasia who have suffered most acutely. Although the pandemic creates so many challenges, it also has encouraged us to use digital tools to come closer together. As President, I

would encourage our organization to host more online workshops that can provide feedback to young scholars. I would also encourage online listening sessions to understand the ideas and concerns of members. Finally, I would like to solidify CESS' role as a truly Eurasian organization, to bring former Soviet Central Asia closer dialogue with scholars of Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia, Xinjiang, etc. Finally, I would work to strengthen membership and leadership opportunities for our members in Central Eurasia. These goals are not just aspirations, but represent work I have already done at my university.

My interdisciplinary training helps me understand diverse interests of CESS members. I completed a B.S. in Foreign Service from Georgetown, an M.A. in Agricultural and Applied Economics and a Ph.D. in Political Science—both from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I have extensive experience in the policy world having worked for independent think tanks, government agencies, and international organizations. During more than twenty years of engagement in the region, I've been fortunate to work with local research organizations to strengthen research capacity including the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, the Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies. I'm currently working with Narxoz University in Almaty to help them develop their public administration program. I have also worked closely with the faculty and leadership at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent in preparation for our Regional Conference.

My perspective on Central Eurasia is shaped by people in communities where I have lived for many years. I served in the Peace Corps in Samarkand, Uzbekistan for two years where I learned Uzbek and Tajik. After finishing the Peace Corps, I worked in Tashkent for three years as a Democracy and Governance Officer for the United States Agency for International Development (living five years in Uzbekistan). When I started graduate school, I had intended to study Uzbekistan, but due to visa problems I turned my attention to Afghanistan where I have been working since 2005. In Afghanistan I have done ethnographic fieldwork in rural areas and have also conducted large public opinion surveys. I have also conducted and developed surveys on local governance in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Candidates for Board members (two vacancies)

Listed in alphabetical order by last name

[Christopher P. Atwood](#)

[Noor Borbieva](#)

[Aisalkyn Botoeva](#)

[Oidinposha Imamkhodjaeva](#)

[Edward Lemon](#)

Christopher P. Atwood

I believe deeply in a unified view of Central Eurasia. Whether they have a history of rule from Moscow or Beijing, whether their faith is Muslim, Buddhist, or shamanist, the peoples of Central Eurasia share intertwined histories, cultures, societies, and economies. The Central Eurasian Studies Society (CESS) serves the vital purpose of bringing scholars of these regions together in ways that turn peripheries into the center. That is why I look forward every year to the CESS annual meeting as a chance to place what I am doing in the broader context of the Central Eurasian world.

As a scholar with a focus on the history of Mongolia and China's frontier and ethnic history, I am one of the few members of the CESS with an academic home in East Asian studies. Precisely for this reason, I believe that I can make a valuable contribution to the CESS. If elected as a board member, I will work to share the benefits of participating in CESS among scholars of Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Tibet.

My background will be helpful in crossing these boundaries. After receiving my undergraduate degree from Harvard University in East Asian Language and Civilizations (1986), I spent two years in Inner Mongolia, before receiving my doctorate from Indiana University's Central Eurasian Studies Department (1994).

I currently chair the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania where my research ranges from the Mongol empire to the early twentieth century, with a focus on ethnicity, state-building, and historiography. Previous books include *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades* (2002), and *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (2004). I just recently completed a book manuscript with Hackett: *The Rise of the Mongols: Five Chinese Sources*.

I play an active role in The Mongolia Society, the American Center for Mongolian Studies, and the International Association of Mongol Studies, the Association for Asian Studies, and the American Historical Association. If elected I look forward to serving the CESS's great mission of promoting knowledge of and scholarship on Central Eurasia at all levels.

Noor Borbieva

I have been involved with CESS for about ten years. I have participated in numerous meetings and served on the Awards Committee and Conference Committee. In 2015-16, I served on a Taskforce on Fieldwork Safety, which was created by the Board to investigate and report on researchers' safety in Central Eurasia. We constructed a survey that was returned by over 300 members of CESS and related organizations, interviewed individual researchers, and spoke with the leadership of related professional organizations. Our fifteen-page report was presented to the Board in May 2016. Other relevant professional service includes serving on and chairing the Committee on the Status of Women for the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. I am also a proud member of the American Association of University Professors and am currently president of the chapter at my campus. In that role, I am building the power of our chapter through educating faculty about the importance of shared governance and academic freedom and monitoring the rights and well-being of our contingent/part-time/adjunct faculty.

As Professor of Anthropology at Purdue University Fort Wayne, I teach a demanding schedule of undergraduate courses while maintaining an active research agenda. My scholarly and teaching expertise is in cultural anthropology and gender studies. I have conducted most of my research in Kyrgyzstan, which I have been visiting since 1997. In my publications, I have written about religious change, women's experiences, the development sector, and hospitality. My most recent work is a full-length ethnography, *Visions of Development in Central Asia*, which examines the approaches to development employed in Central Asia since independence and the assumptions about culture that inform them. More recently, my interest has turned to systems theory, as this growing field offers important insights into the relationship between power and social/institutional change.

In my teaching, research, and service, I examine existing power structures and stand with under-represented and marginalized populations. If I were elected to the board, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in our society and profession would be my priority, through supporting rising students and scholars from under-represented groups. Another priority would be defending the rights, well-being, and economic security of our contingent/part-time/adjunct faculty. In terms of committee membership, I would be willing to serve wherever there is a need, but my interests and experience are particularly aligned with the Academic Freedom, Advocacy, and Scholars at Risk Committee.

Aisalkyn Botoeva

I am a sociologist with broader interests in intersections of Islam and economy, entrepreneurship and the political economy of development. I would contribute to the ongoing work of the board with my professional training in Sociology, with my regional expertise in Central Asia, and with an expansive collegial network of academics and policy-makers who focus on the broader Eurasian region.

As a new board member, I would support the new President-elect and the board in their continuous endeavors of organizing annual conventions, retaining existing members and generating interest CESS among wider audiences. I would also be eager to support new initiatives, particularly those related to the professional development opportunities for junior scholars and professionals. Some of the initiatives that I envision taking place under the aegis of CESS include:

1) Publications & outreach: Supporting junior researchers (particularly those based in the region) in their efforts of publishing their work in academic and policy journals with wider readership-base. This could be done through writing groups where a few interested colleagues in groups of 5-6 people would circulate their drafts to each other, and later convene via an online platform to discuss and provide feedback.

2) Strengthening the weak ties: Cultivating ties between junior/aspiring researchers and scholars and the more established colleagues. This could be done through the initiatives similar to the one mentioned above, but also through more formalized mentor-mentee connections. Professionals could be paired up by their field of specialization or research interests and connect once a month to discuss broader goals, important milestones and techniques for putting one's best foot forward.

I would qualify to contribute to these efforts based on my combined professional experience. Currently, I serve as a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for European, Russian & Eurasian Studies (IERES) of the George Washington University, where I have instructed the last two cohorts of Central Asia Program fellows on social science research methods. Furthermore, my individual research has been funded by the Aga-Khan Foundation, Open Society Foundations as well as Hazeltine Fellowship of the Business, Organizations and Entrepreneurship Program at Brown University. The results of my research projects have been published in *Politics & Society*, *Theory & Society*, *Families, Relationships and Societies*, *Post-Soviet Affairs* and *Central Asian Survey* among other journals. On a more personal level, my already existing connections to the scholars and researchers of Central Asia, friendship and collegial ties that have been forged through CESS, determine my level of commitment to cherish being part of the CESS board.

Oidinposha Imamkhodjaeva

My name is Oidinposha Imamkhodjaeva and I am an assistant professor of philosophy at Pennsylvania State University and research associate at Binghamton University.

I am a woman of Central Asian origin and a member of the National Language Service Corps (NLSC). I speak and understand Russian, Uzbek, Tatar, Kirghiz, Uyghur and Kazakh Old Chagatai, as well as Latin, Arabic, Persian and Turkish. I have traveled extensively in West and East and have friends and relatives all over the world, including the Central Asian region.

I have created courses here at Penn State in Asian history, Asian philosophy and Muslims in America. The courses I teach currently include Leadership Ethics, Environmental Ethics and Medieval Philosophy.

I contributed articles, "Russia, Chechnya and the Global War Against Terrorism," and "The Role of Central Asia in the 'War Against Terrorism'" to the collection, *Philosophical Perspectives on the 'War on Terrorism'*, edited by Gail M. Pressby, in the Philosophy of Peace series, Rodopi Press, 2007.

More recently I completed a paper, "Ecological drama of the Aral Sea and the dangerous future of the region," which I hope to publish soon.

I was an administrative officer (program director) for the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) coordinating and assisting international scholars, students conducting research in Central Asia and abroad (1992-95).

I have had various leadership positions for doing research and organizing honors seminars here in the US (FIPSE) project, Schreyer's Institute for Teaching Excellence (Penn State), World Campus (PSU) and more.

In order to understand what is happening in Central Asia today, we must look at the history of Asia's politics, religions and cultures, and use an interdisciplinary approach to see how they are intertwined. We should critically reexamine how the great Asian civilizations have evolved and changed, but also how certain religious, philosophical and cultural values have endured through the centuries, in spite of suppression of religious freedom.

Edward Lemon

Since joining CESS as a graduate student in 2014, I have participated in a number of annual convention's, convening roundtables, presenting, and chairing panels, most recently on activism and academia at the 2019 CESS Annual Convention in Washington DC. Beyond CESS, I have convened a number of Central Asian-focused public events and workshops, mentored students in the region, and edited a special issue of Central Asian Survey on critical approaches to security in Central Eurasia. Recently, I founded a new Washington DC-based non-profit, the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs, which is dedicated to fostering academic exchange between Central Asia and the rest of the world. We have already created a network of over 180 experts working on Central Asia, assembled original datasets on protests and security cooperation, and plan to hold a number of events aimed at further developing Central Asian studies. Through these activities, we aim to strengthen networks of knowledge transfer among a wide range of people and institutions.

Over the past decade researching and working in Central Asia, I have striven to break down barriers between different disciplines through my work on security and governance, and to create a productive dialogue among academics, experts, journalists, activists and policymakers on current issues within the region. If elected, I would continue to broaden CESS's membership to include a range of experts from beyond academia, promote and support the work of younger scholars, and work to create more of a dialogue between those working on post-Soviet Central Asia and other parts of Central Eurasia. As well as expanding membership, I would work to further develop CESS's communications and outreach via the social media, and increase the number of posts on the Society website, especially from young scholars from the region. I am a current CESS member and native English speaker. I am prepared to allocate the necessary time to helping to further develop CESS and its activities.