

## Article #1

# USAID TAPS UI AND ISU EXPERTS TO CONNECT HIGHER EDUCATION AND PRIVATE SECTOR IN KOSOVO AND IOWA

[APRIL 24TH, 2023]



*The activity's launch event at the National Library in Kosovo. April 24th, 2023*

For more photos on this article go to this link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1hmkX04nuQfv5m32cskBF5GNtI3LDKxyW>

More than 20 University of Iowa faculty, students, and staff will be working with colleagues at universities in Kosovo over the next five years to strengthen ties between higher education and the private sector, fostering students' success and professional opportunities.

The efforts are part of a \$3.9 million Cooperative Agreement from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to the University of Iowa, which is partnering with Iowa State University and the Kosova Education Center (KEC), a Prishtina-based educational training nonprofit. The USAID-funded activity aims to improve how three public universities in Kosovo interact with agricultural and information and communication technology companies, leading to more industry-driven research and graduates who are better prepared for the workforce.

UI experts will lead the efforts to increase cooperation between Kosovo and the state of Iowa to increase economic opportunities for Kosovo youth by tangibly linking Kosovo's private sector to its public universities.

Cassie Barnhardt, associate professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs in the UI College of Education, is the principal investigator, who is leading the project from Iowa.

*"Our cooperation will create opportunities for University of Iowa faculty and staff in different disciplines and administrative units to interact with their counterparts in Kosovo through*

*mentoring, idea sharing, and capacity building,” Barnhardt says. “The exchange of expertise, relationships, and approaches will enhance classroom teaching, research, and discovery, and spur new forms of cooperation within our universities and with industry partners.”*

Barnhardt adds that the set of interventions designed to meet USAID’s objectives in Kosovo will improve opportunities for young people in Kosovo by assuring that Kosovo university students have curricular and applied experiences that translate to professional success for themselves and their employers.

*“Doing so will in turn, support economic opportunity and strengthen and add stability to one of the world’s youngest democracies,” Barnhardt says.*

In Kosovo, the need for high-quality university preparation is paramount as young people are Kosovo’s most abundant natural resource as 42% of the nation is under age 25. Generally, Kosovo is perplexed by a persistently weak labor market, with general youth unemployment hovering around 30%.

*“UI’s leadership as an implementing partner for USAID, is an important milestone in assuring that public universities in the U.S. uphold national and international commitments,” says UI College of Education Dean Daniel L. Clay. “UI is providing its expertise to foster relationships that hold the potential to exist for a new generation of professors, students, and industry leaders. We will elevate existing relationships with the private sector in Iowa and in Kosovo that will bring mutually beneficial opportunities and connections in both places. Opportunities for students, professors, and the private sector will grow.”*

Ultimately, this project will align university academic programs with Kosovo labor market needs, promote collaboration between universities and companies, and improve economic and professional opportunities for university graduates in Kosovo.

ISU experts will lead efforts to increase collaboration in the agricultural sector, including guidance on topics such as applied research, industry engagement, curriculum development, teaching methods and student services, says Curtis Youngs, professor and ME Ensminger Endowed Chair of International Animal Agriculture who is leading ISU’s involvement in the initiative.

Mr. Armand Krasniqi, Rector of the University of Peje “Haxhi Zeka” one of the partnering universities, expressed excitement and willingness to cooperate. He stated, *“We are delighted to collaborate with scholars from the University of Iowa and Iowa State University to achieve our core objectives of strengthening cooperation with the private sector, increasing the number of internships, and improving the employability of our students. We express our sincere gratitude to USAID and are confident that representatives from UI and ISU will share their best practices and knowledge with our staff and students. I firmly believe that this project will have a significant positive impact on Kosovo’s society.”*

This initiative builds on decades of international cooperation between Kosovo and the state of Iowa. Established in 2013, the Iowa-Kosovo “sister state” connection created a foundation for partnerships across numerous sectors including military, security/safety, education, agriculture, commerce, youth/sports, arts, and tourism.

*“The characteristics and similarities between Iowa and Kosovo, such as population, rural and agricultural tradition, and knowledge-capacity potential, make Iowa an ideal partner to help*

*develop Kosovo's educational, economic, and societal potential,"* says Russell Ganim, associate provost and dean of University of Iowa International Programs. *"After years of forging civil society interactions between Iowa and Kosovo, this activity formalizes multiple relationships by bundling expertise and leadership."*

The UI has long had professors from education, law, and business working collaboratively with Kosovo universities, and this initiative will further engage other parts of the institution – International Programs, the Public Policy Center, professors from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as well as additional experts across the College of Education, according to Barnhardt.

*"We are capitalizing on the existing relationships and growing new ones,"* Barnhardt says. *"The presence of the Republic of Kosovo Consulate in Des Moines, Iowa has helped nurture relationships between companies, universities, and the civil sector in Iowa and Kosovo, this includes the connections that UI and ISU both have."*

The USAID activity was announced in a launch event April 24 at the National Library of Kosovo in Prishtina attended by U.S. Ambassador to Kosovo Jeffrey Hovenier and Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti, along with officials and project leaders from the UI and ISU. This included Barnhardt, UI College of Education Dean Daniel L. Clay, and UI Associate Provost and Dean of International Programs, Russell Ganim.

*"This project will improve opportunities for young people in Kosovo by assuring that Kosovo university students have curricular and applied experiences that translate to professional success for themselves and their employers."* Cassie Barnhardt, University of Iowa Higher Education and Student Affairs Associate Professor.