



NAZARBAYEV  
UNIVERSITY  
Graduate School  
of Education



Graduate School of Education  
**Penn**GSE

**Teaching Cases**

**2016**

---

**Research Project: Advancing Models of Best Practice in Academic Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan**

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

In close cooperation with the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

**Authors:**

*Aida Sagintayeva, Matthew Hartley, Murat Orunkhanov, Fatima Zhakypova, Darkhan Bilyalov, Renata Apergenova, Peter Eckel, Dina Gungor*

Teaching Cases. Research Project: Advancing Models of Best Practice in Academic Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan. Astana, 2016. – 20 p.

*Electronic edition only*

**Please cite this publication as:**

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Sagintayeva A., Hartley M., Orunkhanov M., Zhakypova F., Bilyalov D., Apergenova R., Eckel P., Gungor D. (2016). Teaching Cases. Research Project: Advancing Models of Best Practice in Academic Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan. Astana: NUGSE. – 20 p.

**Content**

Introduction ..... 3

Teaching Case A: State University A and the “Year of Quality” ..... 4

    About the University ..... 4

    Setting the Course ..... 5

    Focusing on Quality and Compliance ..... 6

    Securing the Direction ..... 7

    Embedding the Change ..... 8

    Teaching Notes ..... 9

Teaching Case B: University B: Towards Excellence ..... 12

    About the University ..... 12

    Teaching Case ..... 13

    Incorporating shared governance ..... 13

    Teaching Notes ..... 16

NUGSE Selected Recent Publications ..... 19

## **Introduction**

In the course of implementation of the research project entitled “Advancing Models of Best Practice in Academic Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan” in 2014-2016 (carried by Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education and the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education), the research team developed two teaching cases that illustrate the challenges of implementing governance reform and promoting innovation in Kazakhstan. The cases can be used as exemplary practice. They can facilitate the discussion at a conference or in a workshop for senior managers or prospective managers in higher education. They can also be used by policy makers to understand higher education’s challenges. Furthermore, they can serve as an effective classroom tool for university students in social sciences to brainstorm solutions to a certain situation and to polish their decision-making skills. Each case includes a briefing document which offers the discussion leader some analysis and questions to explore.

## ***Teaching Case A: State University A and the “Year of Quality”***

### **About the University**

State University A is a short drive from one of the seas in Kazakhstan. The city in which it is situated is the country’s main seaport. The region is arid and also oil rich. The university was founded in the 1970s as a Polytechnic Institute. After Kazakhstan’s independence the city was renamed and in the 1990s the institution also had its name changed slightly. Only at the beginning of the twenty-first century did it receive its current name.

State University A is the only regional state university in the oblast (region). It prepares nearly all of the school teachers. Today, the university is comprised of five faculties (departments): natural science and humanitarian training, oil and gas, marine technologies, economics and law, and pedagogical.

In the fall of 2012, a new rector was appointed at State University A, who had left a rector’s position at another university. The Minister of Education and Science offered the position to the new rector in hopes of further strengthening the institution because of its importance to the region. The rector recalled, “I knew the situation at the university already and knew that there would be some big decisions to make, maybe even drastic decisions.”

The previous rector had focused a great deal of time and money on developing the University’s new campus. A senior faculty member explained, “The previous rector came to us from a position at the MoES. From his point of view, the training process was organized adequately, but the facilities were in poor shape. The main task set by him was to establish a modern appearance for the university. The new main building was constructed during this time as well as a sports center and a dormitory.” While commenting on the facilities, a senior administrator remarked, “there is a Kazakh proverb that the beauty of a woman should be matched by her intelligence. Then, she will be a harmonious person.” In short, the beauty of the new facilities needed to be matched by high academic quality.

State University A draws nearly all of its students from the region. Unfortunately, the region's schooling system has struggled. Prior to 2014, the schools scored last out of all the oblasts on the Unified National Test, which high school graduates take in order to determine which universities they will be eligible to attend and what merit aid they will receive. The pedagogical training provided by the university was of vital importance not only to the region, it also influenced the quality of future students who would attend the university.

In recalling the state of the university in the fall of 2012, one administrator remarked, "There were a lot of difficulties. Many of the staff members were not motivated and there were some very poor managers in charge of the academic process." Altering this situation would require some sweeping changes. The newly appointed rector began to build a team to support a change effort throughout the university. Early in his tenure he hired a talented professor and administrator from a university in one of the largest cities in Kazakhstan, whom he respected greatly, appointing him the first vice rector. Both the rector and the new first vice rector had worked their way up through the academic ranks as professors and deans before becoming vice rectors. They had extensive knowledge of the academic process as it is outlined in the policies of the MoES. Although the rector actively recruited only two people to come, in total, ten additional individuals from across the Republic sought positions at the university to become part of the change effort. When asked why he had chosen to leave his previous job to come to State University A, one mid-level manager made it clear that it was because of his great respect for the rector as a leader. The rector and his team also identified individuals of ability from State University A who were also committed to following the highest quality standards. This leadership group became a very close and collaborative team.

### **Setting the Course**

Over the fall, the rector and his team gathered information on the state of affairs at the university. The rector then established a set of goals aimed at improving educational quality. He wanted the university to become the number one

pedagogical institution in the western region and the number one institution in the country in the areas of oil and gas and sea transportation within a three-year period. In January he held two four-hour meetings over two days with the academic staff. He made the case for change by pointing to some of the current problems with the academic process. There were inefficiencies in how departments were organized. Some instructors were teaching in areas where they did not have adequate training. When asked to describe the strategy that drove the change process, first vice rector said: "People needed to understand and actually follow MoES guidelines." The rector recalled the intensity of those two meetings. People listened closely to what he was proposing. "I told them a lot of things, quite frankly, and I showed them the state of affairs. They saw the issues, they could not deny it." The rector also explained his three-year goals he set for the institution to achieve.

By the time the series of meetings ended, the campus was divided. Some academic staff members were convinced of the need for change. Others were very unhappy with the rector and his proposed new direction. In their view, the institution had functioned just fine for many years before he arrived. Why should things change? The rector recalled, "I would say more than half of the academic staff were not enthusiastic about my plans." In the aftermath, there were messages posted to the rector's blog, many of them anonymous. One read: "Dear Rector, what are you doing? What is it that you have come up with? Why do we need that? We used to have such a good time and then you came."

### **Focusing on Quality and Compliance**

In the spring of 2013, the rector created a committee comprised of the vice rectors and the deans. Their task was to assess the credentials all 370 faculty members. When the committee's report was completed, it revealed that 57 individuals had inadequate qualifications to teach the courses they had been assigned, based on MoES guidelines. At the end of the summer, the rector made clear that faculty members with inadequate credentials would not be able to continue to teach. This decision sent a shock wave through the campus and rippled forth into the city itself.

In the first week of September 2013, the local media reported (wrongly) that 81 academic staff members had been fired. Another called the situation a “scandal.” One article stated, “The administration of the university thinks that these faculty members do not meet the requirements. The staff does not agree with it, especially those who are losing not only their jobs but also housing. However, the rector announced that the final decision has not been made yet and he will check the qualification requirements and data personally.” The Akym (governor) of the oblast also got involved. The local newspaper quoted him as saying: “At a first glance without any verification from the Prosecutor’s office, it seems obvious that the university committee worked without appropriate preparation and without any process advocating for the faculty. We strongly recommend the Rector to cancel his decision on the faculty dismissal.” The General Prosecutor’s Office announced it would be launching a full-scale investigation into the situation.

### **Securing the Direction**

In the midst of this crisis, the rector reached out to people from the MoES. The MoES confirmed that the rector had acted according to its guidelines regarding the credentialing of faculty members. In further discussions with the Akym, the rector indicated that he would not fire people. Instead, people were dismissed from their teaching responsibilities and given administrative tasks instead. Ultimately, nearly 30 of the 57 individuals chose to leave the university. By the end of its month-long investigation into the situation, the General Prosecutor’s Office found that the university had acted in accordance with the existing legislation.

The rector continued to pursue high quality standards. In the fall of 2013 he introduced a commission to review teaching methods of faculty members. A procedure was launched according to which each day a list of names of ten faculty members was announced. Those faculty members would have a small group visit their class that day with no advanced warning. The group then wrote up reports regarding what they had observed. Those reports were then included in the faculty member’s profiles on various activities at the university. However, along with this



increased scrutiny, the rector also announced a 50% salary increase for the faculty. Further, he reduced the teaching load from 700 to 400 hours annually and the workweek was changed from six days to five days, giving time on the weekend for class planning, writing, and research. The academic calendar was also changed so that classes were only taught until noon, leaving afternoons for students to study and for more internship opportunities to be developed.

In May of 2014, the MoES sent a state attestation committee to visit State University A. The committee spent several days on campus reviewing documents and the academic process and speaking with individuals. It then reported its findings, which the committee presented to the rector and then to the broader academic community. The committee's findings underscored the same issues that had been raised by the rector. The rector said, "They pointed out exactly the same concerns that I had been talking about starting from September 2013. It was very important for me to get their independent opinion. And when my vision coincided with theirs, and when they put it together in their reports and read it to the staff, people began to accept the plans I had been talking about." It was at that moment that momentum seemed to shift decisively in support of the change.

### **Embedding the Change**

Building on the previous work, the 2014-2015 academic year was declared the "year of quality." That year, faculty salary would be paid based on merit as determined by the evaluation committee. There were even discussions about establishing merit-based pay for faculty whose departments were particularly effective at helping students get jobs upon their graduation. A number of departments were working closely with local industries and corporations. Seven years prior, a department of internships and career services had been established. In an effort to deepen university/industry partnerships, the office moved from a system of one to three-year contracts of engagement to one system asking for a five-year commitment. Each partner identifies a supervisor for the students at the site. They work together to address any problems that might arise. Some departments are working with industry

partners to review the content of particular courses of study and syllabi to ensure that they are satisfied with what is being taught, and that the skills and knowledge the students receive are relevant to the employers' need. One department chair noted, "We are heavily involved and devoted to having our students employed. Before students' graduation or prior to the defense of their diploma thesis we conduct additional workshops to help them find jobs. We try to identify which organizations have vacancies and look at their job requirements. Then we train the students accordingly."

The rector has a well-articulated and bold vision for the institution. People at the institution hope to be viewed not only as an excellent institution in the region, but across Kazakhstan and even internationally. As one faculty member explained, "Most of the population in our university is Kazakh-speaking but we are working hard on academic mobility. We are offering English classes, trying to attract professors from foreign higher education institutions, mainly from Europe." There is also a consensus that the true measure of the university success is the employment of its graduates. Achieving these ambitious goals will not be easy. When asked what strategies might be used to achieve the goals set out for them, one dean responded: "We need to work harder." A faculty member looking into the future remarked: "The most important thing is to maintain the positive dynamic that we have had over the recent years because this sort of changes requires a lot of extra work on part of the staff members."

### **Teaching Notes**

The State University A case offers an example of the challenges that are common to many regional state universities. Although they are key institutions in their regions (State University A trains the vast majority of the school teachers) they must perform having limited resources. Faculty salaries at these institutions are often low and teaching loads are high. In some of the U.S. institutions with the same scenario there is a silent settlement that faculty members will not complain, provided that the

university administration do not push them to maintain high quality in their work. The change effort at State University A challenges this organizational dynamic.

A lively discussion can be encouraged using this case. First, participants can be asked to describe the rector's overall strategy for change: "What are the elements of the change effort?" These include:

- Bringing in individuals whom he knew and trusted;
- Bringing in individuals who were experts in key areas (in this case, the academic process as defined by the MoES);
- Bringing on board people from within the institution who were supportive of the change process;
- Gathering supporting data about the problem itself and presenting it to the university community;
- Putting in place a system to review the basic qualifications of the instructional staff.

One of the things that the case underscores is that the change cannot be treated as a completely rational process. Even after the rector made a detailed case about the challenges at the institution over the two four-hour meetings, there were still many people, who did not see the need for change and who resisted it. Similarly, when the committee identified individuals who were clearly unqualified to teach their subjects, the rector faced dynamic resistance from people on campus, as well as from local authorities.

After having read the case, the reader can be asked what the rector might have done to prevent or limit the political crisis that had emerged. Based on the case answers might include:

- Involving highly respected faculty by creating a special advisory committee to review MoES guidelines and to communicate those to their faculties so people were clear on expectations;
- Sharing preliminary findings of the committee with the community and indicating possible responses, rather than surprising people with a full report.

At the end of the case, participants can also be asked to discuss what the rector should do next, both on campus and in his interactions with the Akym.

The case describes the aftermath of what actually occurred. It then goes on to describe the initiatives in year two. Participants can be asked what they think about the process of evaluation of faculty members. In year two the rector significantly changed work arrangements. Faculty salaries were significantly increased and their teaching load reduced. What do people make of this decision? Was this a good way to secure faculty support? What are the downsides of this approach? (Will it be challenging to move in year three to a system where increased salaries are based on merit pay?)

What do people make of the decision to possibly link merit pay to whether students are employed or not? Is this a reasonable approach? What are the downsides? For example, one potential danger of training students for jobs right after graduation may result in a curriculum that does not train them for higher order thinking (critical thinking, problem solving) that will serve them well throughout their careers.

Can State University A achieve the ambitious goals outlined by the rector? The change effort seems to have produced a consensus about seeking higher quality among the faculty and staff. But it is unclear whether people at the institution (such as the dean who suggests people need to “work harder”) have ideas about what tactics might be employed to move towards the larger strategic goals.

## ***Teaching Case B: University B: Towards Excellence***

### **About the University**

University B was established in the 1960s as an education and consulting center of a university in Moscow; in the 1970s it was recognized as a part of a technical institute in the Kazakh Republic, up until 1990s when it was considered to be a branch and an institute of the technical institute later formed as a university in Kazakhstan. At the end of the 1990s it separated from the university as an institute. A year later, it was merged with another institute. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the rankings, commissioned by the MoES among the leading universities of the country, University B gained the 3rd place and was awarded "The Best Technical Institution".

*The mission of University B is to prepare **highly qualified specialists for the oil and gas industry** and other branches of industry of the region, to introduce new ideas and technologies in science and education, to conduct research focused on solving problems in oil and gas industry.*

University B is a very unique being the only institution that prepares specialists in all three fields of petroleum industry: oil production engineering, crude petroleum refining and oil transportation. Additionally, the institution has a very advantageous location being close to oilfield and petroleum industry.

University B offers undergraduate studies in oil and gas fields. At present programs are conducted in 27 majors. There are over **3 000 undergraduate students**, including over than 25 international students.

There are four schools: Department of Petroleum, Department of Technology, Department of Mechanics, Department of Automation, Management and Economics. Academic staff is comprised of 316 members; more than 46% have PhD degrees, Doctor of Sciences, Candidate of Sciences, Professors and Associate Professors.

### **Teaching Case**

Being a key institution in preparation specialists for petroleum industry, the university does not provide postgraduate programs in the same field as its type is an “institute” (according to the Law “On Education” released on July 27, 2007, institutes can only enroll undergraduate students). Before this change in legislation, for almost 10 years University B enrolled Master’s students and Doctoral students, who upon graduation obtained the degree called Candidates of Sciences.

Today there are special laboratories in the field of petroleum chemistry at the university. Recently the labs have been accredited.

University B has a governance structure common to all state universities in Kazakhstan that are obliged to follow the stipulations of the Law “On State Property”. According to the Law, the rector of HEIs operates on the principle of individual responsibility. All constituents of the structure are under the rector’s supervision. The rector is in charge to make final decisions, taking into account guidance of the MoES as an authorized body.

### **Incorporating shared governance**

The board of trustees (BoT) at University B was established in 2012. The first meeting of trustees was held on January 10, 2012. There were 12 members chaired by the rector of the university. However, the picture changed in 2013, when a director of a local enterprise was chosen as a board chair. The composition of the board is approved for every academic year by the board of trustees. Now there are 14 members on the board chaired by a director of a local business enterprise.

The BoT at University B is recognized as an advisory body of institutional governance acting on the principles of voluntariness, equality and collegiality. The main aim of the BoT is to support the university in its development strategies, including the initiative to achieve the leading position in oil and gas industry and to advance the role of the university in the social and political life of the country as a research educational center.

Representatives of all leading industries in the region, including oil transportation, gas transportation, as well as representatives of the local self-governance center serve on the BoT. Therefore, all who graduate from University B go to these enterprises to work; there is a feedback loop through the board of trustees' members.

As one BoT member says, the BoT does not work according to the charter where the responsibilities of the board and its members are specified. It should be called an advisory board, a public/social council. As a public council, the BoT cannot intervene with the domestic and operational affairs, etc.

The BoT is represented by directors of all leading enterprises in the region who help to employ the majority of the graduates at their enterprises—this is a good indicator for the Republic.

Another BoT's member notes that board members made recommendations on how to modify curricula (syllabi). They drew attention to the aspects which are to be studied in theory, and changes were made to balance theoretical and practical aspects in the curriculum.

The leadership force guiding the board of trustees is based on the unified interests of each board member and the rector. Members of the board are heads of enterprises, and they are interested in well-prepared specialists, so that the enterprise does not have to put efforts in retraining specialists.

As one of the officials of the university put it, “the BoT should be called differently: the board of employers. It is, as a matter of fact, a council of employers. That is the social organization which monitors the level of specialists' education—that which is lacking—the quality—is judged at graduation in terms of their practical skills by other organizations”. He points out the problem that even though the boards of trustees were created, there are no investments of the board of trustees into HEI's development. It is not even envisaged by the legislation. “If there are financial contributions by the investors of the board of trustees, it will mean that the HEI will be subject to accounts reporting; we will be accountable to the board of trustees or

the overseers board, which would be an example of shared governance”, he continued.

The main directions of University B development in the near future is to develop cooperation with leading universities, scientific research organizations and oil companies of the world, to equip rooms and research laboratories with modern equipment, to improve the quality of training young specialists and to create an elite university in the country.

Here are some opinions of the officials from the institute:

“...the standards are limited. And on the other hand, the “elective courses” are courses selected by each HEI at their discretion. Then, when we start to work on the academic exchange, mobility, we face very different plans; a very big difference is revealed during examinations. It pertains to Kazakhstan, and even more so to foreign HEIs. We have different plans ... these state standards are limiting us. Even the state-form diploma... is limiting.”

“Right now HEIs operation is regulated by the state, the MoES and its acts – over 50 sub legislative acts. But it should be taken into account that the HEIs are different, their specializations are different, and the regions are different. One region could significantly differ from another region. So, when making decisions on student employment, it would become easier for students to choose their career path themselves.”

“Investors, oil companies, should come to our institution; they should be interested. If we had additional money, we could improve the educational process, research, student personal development...”

“...And if we could choose our own path instead of the one which we are assigned, then we will be a high-quality, successful research institute, which in turn would yield good results to the government.”

In addition to these quotes, here is an additional opinion of the employer: “this year I received the state examinations from the Land and Construction Department. Frankly speaking, I would exclude half of the courses; those subjects are not relevant”.

The members of the board of trustees are interested in quality improvement of the institution. The minutes of the board of trustees meetings note that some members of the board offer real help in implementation of all activities of University B by



updating the institute's resources, developing its facilities, and providing laboratory equipment. A member of the board of trustees, a CEO of famous Kazakhstani company, proposed to involve their specialists in developing the course syllabi in relevant specialties, because the existing knowledge in this field becomes obsolete every six months. He also suggested organizing internships for faculty members to be held in companies or central universities of the country with full payment of such trainings by the companies.

### **Teaching Notes**

The University B case offers an example of perceptions about the BoT that are common to many regional state universities.

As many other regional universities, University B's activities strictly adhere to the guidelines set by the parent body, which is the MoES. Some initial reforms in expanding the degree of shared governance have not resulted in proper distribution in the institute. It is not only the university leaders but also the members of the board of trustees who seem to perceive the idea of boards of trustees ambiguously.

The university still has some problems providing specialists for the local oil and gas industry. The creation of the board of trustees does not have obvious impact on the success of the university. This is evidenced by the statements of those interviewed.

This situation can be used for discussion at trainings on how to attract regional industrial companies to the process of improvement of the university activities, as a whole.

A start for a successful discussion with the audience can be a discussion of the efficient functioning of the board of trustees at University B. With this discussion in the spotlight, the following facts from the case may arise:

1. The board of trustees consists of 14 people, and it includes only the heads of companies and government agencies.
2. The board of trustees has no obvious working bodies such as committees or commissions.
3. The regulations stipulate that the composition of the board of trustees changes every year.

4. Chairmanship on the board of trustees was carried out by the university rector for some time.
5. In fact, according to the documents, from the very beginning, the BoT chairperson changed annually due to alterations in personnel fluctuations at the board of trustees members' work places.
6. The board of trustees de facto became a deliberative body of the university, thus it differs from the conventional Academic Council only in composition.
7. The board of trustees has no significant effect on the financial condition of the university.

The results of this discussion can serve as a basis for further discussions, which will offer an opportunity for the audience to better understand how a board of trustees should operate. Such a discussion could also begin with a question what the board of trustees can do in order to accelerate the university development.

On the basis of this case study, some of the answers could address the following points:

1. The board of trustees, except for the discussion of strategic issues, should assess the achievements of the main indicators of the strategic development policy.
2. The university has a fine peculiarity, and fully fits in the domain of the main production in the region, which is the oil industry. The majority of the board members are representatives from the industry. But this has not resulted in creating cutting-edge educational programs mostly adapted to the oil industry.
3. Being merged with another institute in the 1990s strengthened the potential of the institution. However, later it had to reduce its post-graduate programs after the Law "On Education" was adopted in 2007.
4. Members of the board of trustees are ready to provide financial assistance to the University by one-time actions. However, the board has not initiated any systematic work to search for sources of financial support or the formation of the university funds.
5. The members of the board of trustees, as well as representatives of the administration of the university, do not understand fully how the board should operate and what functions it shall see as a priority.

The final discussion on perceiving the work of the board of trustees may be found in the following questions:

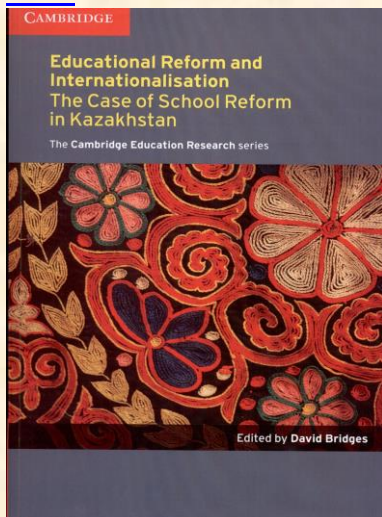
1. What fundamental changes in managing the university do you think should happen in connection with creation of the board of trustees?

2. What are some of the main obstacles to the successful functioning of boards of trustees can you name?
3. What are some ways to improve the perception of shared governance in university environment?

## NUGSE Selected Recent Publications

- ❖ Hartley, M., Gopaul, B., Sagintayeva, A., & Apergenova, R. (2015). Learning autonomy: higher education reform in Kazakhstan. *Higher Education*, 1-13, DOI: 10.1007/s10734-015-9953-z
- ❖ Sagintayeva A. & Kurakbayev K. (2015). Understanding the transition of public universities to institutional autonomy in Kazakhstan. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 5:2, 197-210, DOI: 10.1080/21568235.2014.967794

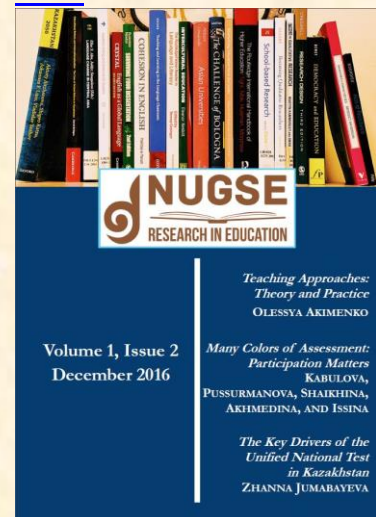
[Here](#)



[Here](#)



[Here](#)



## Forthcoming publications

- ❖ Book on Kazakhstani higher education reform & development published by Cambridge University Press
- ❖ Monograph on autonomy in higher education in Kazakhstan



**Authors:**

*Aida Sagintayeva, Matthew Hartley, Murat Orunkhanov, Fatima Zhakypova, Darkhan Bilyalov, Renata Apergenova, Peter Eckel, Dina Gungor*

Teaching Cases. Advancing Models of Best Practice in Academic Governance and Management in Higher Education Institutions in Kazakhstan. Astana, 2016. – 20 p.

*Electronic edition only*

© Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, 2016

53 Kabanbay Batyr Avenue  
Astana, Kazakhstan  
Phone: +7 7172 70 64 38, 70 65 76  
E-mail: [gse.research@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse.research@nu.edu.kz)  
[www.gse.nu.edu.kz](http://www.gse.nu.edu.kz)