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AZERBAIJAN

FIRST PERSON A True Test of Character

A public health student receives a master's degree from Tulane

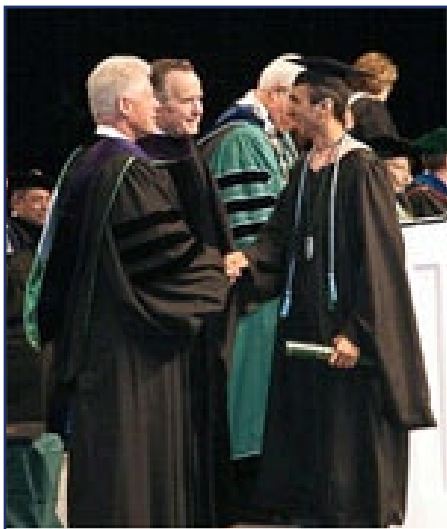


Photo: Kazimova Gulkhanum

Former presidents Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush congratulate Shirin Kazimov for his master's degree at Tulane University's 2006 graduation ceremony.

"I was honored to receive congratulations and shake hands with two presidents of the US: Bill Clinton and George H. W. Bush. I was the only student from the entire School of Public Health who got that opportunity! That was such an honor and award!" said Dr. Shirin Kazimov.

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It was clear from the outset that Shirin Kazimov would thrive in a challenging university environment. It was also clear that he was deeply committed to improving Azerbaijan's public health. So it was no surprise when a USAID training program chose him as one of eight Azerbaijanis to study at a U.S. graduate school.

In 2003, Shirin applied for a master's degree program announced by USAID. After a rigorous, year-long selection process, Shirin was chosen and admitted to Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine. That's when the challenge really began. Thinking that the hardest part was behind him, Shirin left for the U.S. excited for the challenges and opportunities ahead. The first semester was intense, and Shirin studied even harder than his peers to keep up with native English speakers.

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, Shirin had no choice but to evacuate, not knowing how or when he would continue his studies. But he persevered and found himself completing his third semester at Ohio State University. In January 2006, he returned to Tulane for his final semester.

As he completed the degree, it was evident that Shirin had impressed his peers and teachers. In fact, to honor his resilience, perseverance, and positive attitude, the public health program chose him as a representative at Tulane's graduation ceremony. Another surprise awaited him when he went to the podium: former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton were there to personally congratulate him as an outstanding Tulane student.

Shirin is now facing his next challenge: improving Azerbaijan's health sector. Upon returning home, he joined the International Medical Corps's Emergency Medicine Development Initiative. Reflecting on how his degree has influenced his professional goals, Shirin said, "The degree made me more knowledgeable and experienced, and I am confident that one person can make difference. I consider myself a product of two systems and my role is to use all of the advancements in management and care from the U.S. system and adjust them in Azerbaijan." Having proven that he tackles tough challenges with success, Shirin can be confident that his work will indeed make a difference.