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[Winners of the First Stage of the Junior Research Fellowship Program-Azerbaijan Announced](#)

In August 2010, the Fellowship Selection Committee of the Junior Research Fellowship Program (JRFP)-Azerbaijan had the difficult task of selecting the three best policy papers submitted by program participants. The voting, which was held by secret ballot was extremely difficult because these three papers had minimum differences between scores. Thus, the distribution of the top three winners was unknown until the very last moment. CRRC-Azerbaijan is proud to present the winners of the JRFP policy paper competition: Aynur Ramazanova (first place), Shabnam Agayeva (second place) and Gulnar Mammadova (third place).

The competition for best policy paper was open to students or recent graduates of Azerbaijani Universities between the ages of 18 and 24. Before working on their papers, participants were invited to become members of the CRRC Moodle Platform and to take two courses: Introduction to Public Policy Analysis and Academic Writing for Policy Analysis. These courses provided participants with the basic knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete their papers. All of the projects conducted by students were remarkable and touched upon various significant social issues ranging from control over genetically modified products to e-government, and from programs for juvenile offenders to respiratory diseases among children.

The winner of the contest, Aynur Ramazanova, discussed the challenging issue of corruption in Azerbaijani Universities using Azerbaijan Medical Universities as her case study. Her findings indicate that 89.3% of students surveyed in the project had paid cash bribes at least once. Among the indicated causes of corruption were low teaching wages, a weak system of control over corruption in the higher education system, and the incompetence of management staff at universities. Results also found that students were often reluctant to learn and invest their energy into education since chances for a decent occupation on the labor market usually depend on the ability to pay bribe, rather than on their level of professionalism. The research also discusses the relationship between corruption and the general climate in society. When corruption and nepotism are a norm, students become socialized to it from early childhood. The author concludes that this negative socialization should be challenged through “positive propaganda” in the mass media and educational programs that will promote alternative values and show that corruption can easily suspend a country’s development.

The second place winner, Shabnam Agayeva, discussed the problem of inadequate services for survivors of marital physical abuse. She interviewed workers at NGOs that provide services for battered women. She also examined secondary sources to conclude that the absence of cooperation between key institutions such as hospitals, legal advice centers, crisis centers, shelters and police significantly hinders adequate responses to domestic violence. Therefore, the development of policy mechanisms to address this must be considered.

The third winner, Gulnar Mammadova, discussed the issue of education in her paper “Challenges of General Secondary Education at Public Schools in Azerbaijan: How to Turn the ‘Quality of Reality’ into the ‘Reality of Quality’?” In her paper, Gulnar recommends expanding the size of public financing in education and ensuring effective budget distribution in order to confront important issues such as poor quality schooling in Azerbaijan.

The winners of this competition will be awarded iPods and the other participants of the JRFP competition will be awarded book vouchers. These are only the results of the first stage of the JRFP program. We anticipate many more interesting and challenging projects from our participants in the next two stages. The program will conclude in June 2011 with a conference where participants will publicly present their research projects.

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