pan, of course, houses a substantial population of foreign diplomats and business people, some of whom also choose to send their children to universities in the country—especially ones that have courses in English, as a few do.

It has occurred to the Ministry of Education that an equally good form of aid is the provision of scholarships that bring foreign students to Japan for extended periods of time and provide education to those students of use to them at home that will also tie them to Japan linguistically and emotionally.

With this diversification of sources of funding and opportunities within the universities, the national balance among foreign students is also shifting. The majority of those in full-time study are still from the Kanji Area—parts of Asia where Chinese characters are used in writing. Large numbers are also coming from Southeast Asia—especially Malaysia and Thailand—and Latin America, with a smaller number from Africa, North America, and Europe. European and American students still tend to come for shorter periods—usually one year. These patterns reflect both Japan's geopolitical significance and the diversifying subjects that foreign students study, which now include almost all the fields taken by their Japanese peers. In some cases in graduate programs, the number of foreigners equals or exceeds that of Japanese, reflecting the fact that among developed nations, Japan has the smallest graduate school enrollments. This fact is partly a reflection of the labor market—which does not greatly reward the years spent in graduate school—and also that much fundamental research in Japan is carried out in research institutes connected to large corporations that in the West would be in universities.

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With this expansion of numbers, some fairly severe problems have become apparent. These include adaptation to culture and language, the absorption of the very high cost of living in Japan, and access to housing. Many landlords are still unwilling to rent to foreigners—especially poor ones like students. While the government has responded by building dormitories for a proportion of the government scholars and while most universities have some housing, the supply is still far short of the demand, and a depressing number of foreign students end up living in remote, expensive, and substandard accommodation. The absorption of foreign students and their acceptance as social equals is one of the great tests of the "internationalization" that the Japanese claim is happening as one of the most positive features of social development in this—in many ways—introverted nation. With more foreigners graduating from Japanese universities, the international educational system stands to benefit as more becomes known about this large—but still quite unknown—sector of higher education, its distinctive practices, and the role it has played in Japan's phenomenal postwar development. ■

Virtual University Exchange Program

Students from Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union in the United States

Iveta Silova

Iveta Silova recently completed a masters degree in international education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Since the collapse of communism and the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the number of students from Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union coming to the United States to study has rapidly increased. According to the *Open Doors Report* (1996), enrollment of students from these countries in American colleges and universities has tripled from 4,780 five years ago to 18,032 today. New opportunities for study abroad are provided by a growing number of international exchange programs supported by the American government, private foundations, and higher education institutions. Assuming that education is a powerful tool for political, economic, and social development, many of these exchange programs aim to encourage transformation of the former communist bloc. An undergraduate exchange program—the Virtual University, initiated by the Open Society Institute and a part of the Soros foundations network—attempts to support educational development in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union by exposing grantees to multicultural academic settings, a liberal arts curriculum, and different models of classroom instruction.

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The Virtual University (VU) was conceived at Bard College in 1990. Initially, it focused on international student exchanges between 7 Central and Eastern European countries and Bard College. Because of its growing popularity among Eastern European and American students and professors, the program expanded and was implemented on a national scale by the Open Society Institute in 1994. By the 1995–96 academic year, 14 Central and Eastern European countries and 11 American higher education institutions were involved in the VU program. As a result, 53 undergraduate students from Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine came to study in the United States that year. Among participating American institutions was a diverse spectrum of private and public, coed and single sex, large and small colleges and universities, including: Bard College, Duke University, Florida Atlantic University, Montana State University, Randolph-Macon Women's College, Roosevelt University, Rutgers University, Trinity College, Westminster College, the University of Arizona, and the University of Arkansas. Each institution agreed to waive tuition for one year in order to participate in the program.

Unique characteristics of the VU exchange program reflect its attempt to redefine the traditional concept of international student exchange in Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union. These characteristics include (1) program activities aimed at strengthening the sense of community and shared experience among student participants; and (2) strong emphasis on the liberal arts rather than professional development.

Sense of Community and Shared Experience

Unlike other international exchange programs, the VU aims to provide a lasting sense of community and shared experience among student participants, hence the name "Virtual University." This is achieved by providing regular opportunities for VU students to share their experiences in the United States, discuss issues of interest and concern in the region, and establish academic and professional ties that would also last after the program. For example, the VU students meet for a one-week preacademic orientation session in Budapest, Hungary, and a three-day winter conference in Washington, D.C. In addition, the program participants keep in touch through e-mail and newsletters both during and after the program. In this way, the program activities are expected to build a community of "future leaders" who will support each other in their academic and professional careers. The results of the VU evaluation study (1997)[1] illustrate that the majority (93 percent) of the respondents maintain academic, professional, and personal contacts—developed from a shared experience in the United States—after returning to their home countries.

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Liberal Arts Curriculum

Taking into consideration that most higher education institutions in Eastern and Central Europe focus on professional training in a single discipline, the VU provides a unique opportunity for international students to engage in interdisciplinary education stressing liberal arts. In other words, the VU students do not necessarily have to pursue a profession. Instead, according to VU's founder Karen Greenberg, they have a possibility "to pause from their lives to think." The findings of the VU evaluation study indicate a change in students' academic and professional plans that occurred as a result of their participation in the VU exchange program. For example, more than half (53 percent) of the VU alumni indicated that their career plans became more concrete or accurate after returning from the United States. Interestingly, some students responded that their professional plans changed completely after having the possibility to explore different career opportunities while in the VU program.

The program participants keep in touch through e-mail and newsletters both during and after the program.

However, the VU's attempt to expose the participants to liberal arts curriculum oftentimes has an immediate negative impact on the academic lives of students. Until recently, most higher education institutions in the region focused on professional and vocational training aimed at reproducing the labor force required by the government's economic planners. Unchanged from the soviet times, many Eastern European universities continue to devalue the liberal arts approach to education. As a result, credits from the academic year spent in the United States are not accepted by many Eastern European higher education institutions and do not count toward degree requirements in students' home universities. Thus, many VU alumni have to study one year longer for their bachelor's degrees than their peers who did not participate in the program.

The VU's attempt to expose the participants to liberal arts curriculum oftentimes has an immediate negative impact on the academic lives of students.

Failure to recognize liberal arts education reflects a heated debate in Eastern and Central European academe regarding the value of liberal arts as opposed to professional preparation. The opponents of the liberal arts approach argue that it prevents students from being successful in the labor market, whereas the proponents emphasize its value for strengthening Eastern Europe's fledgling democracies by instilling civic values, critical thinking, and reflective action in young people. The VU exchange program brings this debate to the classroom by providing student-participants with the possibility to experience American liberal arts education, compare it to traditional education in their home countries, and share experiences with their peers and professors in their home universities.

NOTE

[1] The VU evaluation report (Silova, 1997) examined the academic and professional development of VU alumni after their return to home universities. For a free copy of the report, please write to lstrashko@sososny.org.

Latin American Jesuit University Education Is Alive and Well

Charles J. Beirne, S.J.

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Twenty-one Latin American universities and their branch campuses share a common heritage: the Society of Jesus has some responsibility for them. This relationship varies from one institution to another; some are pontifical universities; others describe themselves as universities of Christian inspiration. But they all belong to the *Asociación de Universidades Confiadas a la Compañía de Jesús en América Latina* (AUSJAL) whose rectors or presidents meet every two years, most recently (April 14-16, 1997) in Guatemala.

Each rector put aside the usual concerns of keeping the institutions open and turned to wider questions such as the effects of neoliberalism on the vast majority of Latin Americans, how to translate and integrate into their institutions the decrees of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Jesuit Order—its highest legislative body—and the integral formation of faculty and students to prepare them to transform societies in crisis. In this regard, the delegates cited their 1995 seminal document, "*Desafíos de América Latina y Propuestas Educativas*" (Challenges of Latin America and Educational Proposals) which called attention to the irony of the "individual success of many of our alums within shipwrecked societies."

In the 1960s many universities felt they had to "protect" themselves from the advocates of the "social apostolate" who pointed the finger at institutions that they blamed for failing to react to the plight of the majority who live in misery.

In the 1960s many universities felt they had to "protect" themselves from the advocates of the "social apostolate" who pointed the finger at institutions that they blamed for failing to react to the plight of the majority who live in misery. Then in the mid-1970s the Thirty-Second General Congregation singled out the "service of the