

## Development of Differentiated Higher Educational Systems in Moldova

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Enrollment in higher education in Moldova, which stood at 10 students per 10,000 inhabitants in 1940, numbered 125 per 10,000 in 1990 and rose to 162 in 1997. As of 1997, there were 4,400 professors working at 24 universities, of which 22 were situated in the capital city. Higher education was established as a public system, and public universities still predominate—with an enrollment of 54,000, versus 4,000 in the private sector.

Public expenditures on higher education represent 1.4 percent of GDP. Budget constraints have affected the status of professors and researchers in the public higher education sector. Despite efforts to protect funding for education during times of budget cutbacks, real expenditures in the higher education sector dropped significantly during the political transition period (17 percent between 1993 and 1996). Low levels of remuneration and constant salary arrears diminish the incentives to work in public education, increase the opportunities for corruption, and affect the overall quality of education. Salaries, school maintenance, and food expenses account for close to 90 percent of education expenditures, leaving minimal amounts for textbooks, teaching materials, and capital repairs.

The declining quality of teaching stems from the poor background of the professors, the lack of adequate library facilities, outdated syllabi for courses, old approaches to learning, and the absence of democratic traditions for evaluating professors, courses, and students. Teaching is mainly authoritarian and direct, organized into lectures, during which the professor dictates, and seminars, during which the students are expected to answer questions based on the dictated material. This approach eliminates opportunities for active learning, class discussions, group work, and problem solving. The system makes truly effective education impossible and will result in a future labor force ill-prepared to enter an increasingly flexible but demanding labor market.

There is a lot of room for patronage and corruption in the prestigious specialties (international economic relations, law, finance and credit, English language, etc.) at the entry level and later, when bribes may be required for each exam or test ranging in the amount from \$20 to \$100 per student. Young lecturers come under very heavy pressure from

higher-ups in the academic hierarchy—they may, for example, be asked to give certain grades to specific students. At the exit level, there is much less protectionism now than in centrally planned times because the private sector values the knowledge of young employees over their connections. The situation is different in the field of medicine. An oversupply of doctors, combined with the decline in the number of jobs, makes it difficult for young MDs to find positions. Consequently, the bribe for a residency amounts to several thousand U.S. dollars.

Discrimination by social background and sex in public education is another issue of great concern. Students from rural areas are discriminated against in getting into higher education, compared to their urban counterparts, because urban students are likely to be well informed and enjoy greater logistical support from their parents. Urban students have a better educational background, especially in foreign languages, given the lack of or poor quality of teachers in the countryside. Housing is also more of a problem for rural students, only 66 percent of whom are able to obtain housing in the substandard dormitories. As for discrimination by sex, though 55 percent of students are female, there are extremely few women in academic and administrative positions, with the exception of some disciplines (e.g., philosophy and psychology).

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Since the early 1990s, differentiation has been introduced into the higher education systems of Moldova along several lines:

- Duration of studies—with colleges offering shorter two- to three-year degrees and universities offering four- to six-year programs, at universities, academies, and institutes.
- Level of studies—the system encompasses undergraduate and graduate education. The latter includes specialized master's programs, doctoral, and postdoctoral studies.
- Language of instruction—the proportion of students instructed in Romanian rose from 58 percent in

1992 to 68 percent in 1997. This is related to the introduction of Romanian as a state language in 1989. The number of students whose language of instruction is Russian decreased by the same percentage (10 percent). Several universities have departments that offer instruction in English, French, or German, especially in the fields of business, economics, and law.

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- Ownership type—out of the 24 universities, 13 are public, 9 are private, and 2 are “mixed.” Public universities account for 90 percent of all the students in the country.

- Enrollment status—while 73 percent of students are enrolled full time, 27 percent are part-time students.

- International linkages—in conjunction with former Soviet republics, Romania, Turkey, Syria, and Western developed countries some student exchange programs are being developed, with the involvement of international donors, national ministries, and the respective universities themselves.

A more differentiated higher educational system better serves the public interest because it will:

- force public educational and research institutions to become more competitive;

- help bring the educational system in line with world systems by having a large array of modern curricula, developing more relevant programs at the master’s level, etc.;

- adapt the labor force to new economic conditions given that the transition to the market economy will increase demands for people trained in certain specialties (e.g. economists, lawyers, English translators, programmers); and

- increase flexibility by allowing students to choose the language of instruction and type of enrollment, to specialize in more than one major subject, to reduce the period of higher educational studies. ■

**Internet Resource**

For more information on issues related to international and comparative higher education, visit the Center’s website, located at:

[http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/)

## Recent Developments in Higher Education in Singapore

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Amid the recent economic turmoil in East and South East Asia, the Singapore government continues to press ahead with its plans to review the higher education system. The primary motivation for doing so is the maintenance of national economic competitiveness in the global economy. These changes in higher education are being undertaken in tandem with reforms in the primary and secondary sectors of education.

One of the major policy aims announced by the prime minister in 1997 was the development of the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University into “world-class” institutions. Singapore was to be turned into the “Boston of the East,” with Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology serving as role models. An international team of 11 prominent academics from prestigious Japanese, U.S., and European universities was invited that same year to advise on how this aim might be achieved. Among the team’s recommendations was that undergraduates be exposed to a multidisciplinary and broad-based curriculum. A second recommendation was the establishment of national research institutes with strong links to both universities as well as to industry. A third proposal was that undergraduates and postgraduates be recruited from outside Singapore in order to meet the economy’s demand for university graduates.

At the same time as this general review of the two universities was being undertaken, a team of 20 professors from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology reviewed the engineering curricula at the two universities. They recommended reducing bureaucratic red tape that might impede research work. In addition, they suggested conducting admissions interviews to identify students who did not have excellent grades but who were intelligent and creative. A third recommendation was that both universities actively search for world-class faculty.

Over the last two years, the two universities have announced a series of curricular reforms. First, undergraduate curricula will be revised to enable students to pursue courses outside their immediate fields of specialization. Second, there have been moves to implement a wider range of assessment modes instead of relying solely on written examinations. Third, efforts