quence of federal and state policies that emphasize access and minimize the goal of success. Under federal student aid policies, students only need demonstrate "satisfactory progress" to maintain their eligibility for student aid, and the length of aid eligibility often far exceeds the usual time to complete most programs. States are more vocal than the federal government in espousing the importance of success as well as access, but state funding formulas typically are based on the number of students enrolled, not whether they complete their term and receive a degree.

Despite oft-repeated concerns about the growing imbalance between grants and loans, public policies continue to encourage increasing amounts of borrowing. For the past two decades, the growing reliance on loans as a source of financing higher education has been a persistent concern in U.S. policy debates. While student debt burdens continue to mount, the policies in place allow or even encourage more borrowing. Congress has been unwilling to raise loan limits much for subsidized borrowing because of the cost to the government, but it created an unsubsidized loan program in 1992 that now accounts for nearly half of all federal student loans, adding greatly to overall student debt burdens. State policymakers have had less to do with this issue because states play a small role in student loans. But to the extent students at public institutions are the most frequent users of unsubsidized loans, it is doubtful whether public tuition and other charges could have grown as fast as they did in the 1990s without the ready availability of this new form of loans.

The diversity of American higher education and the level of resources devoted to it have enabled the United States to have high levels of participation and generally high quality despite having a relatively inefficient and non strategic approach to financing. American colleges and universities have come to depend on enough money being available to meet the many demands placed upon them and to make up for inefficiencies in the system. But the resources available to higher education in the future are unlikely to be sufficient to meet the constantly growing demands on the system. The lesson here is that if American higher education is to meet the real financial challenges that lie ahead, we should consider the experience of other countries that have been more strategic in their approach to funding higher education rather than simply relying on the brute strength of having enough resources to do the job. ■

The Goals and National Policies of Higher Education Reform in Belarus

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The higher education system in Belarus has been undergoing a sluggish but steady process of change since 1991. In the last few years, the goals of reform have drifted from those initiated after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, to new goals of overcoming the shortcomings of the Soviet system and bringing Belarusian higher education into line with international standards.

After declaring its independence, Belarus initiated steps to adjust its educational system to reflect the new realities of being without the support and structure of the Soviet system of higher education. The goals of higher education reform were discussed broadly in both academia and society, and the main problems facing Belarusian higher education were summarized by the minister of education of Belarus at that time:

- institutionalized and centralized organization, planning, and management;
- uneven regional distribution of institutions;
- the absence of academic freedom and university autonomy;
- absence of educational standards, assessment, and accreditation systems;
- the politicization of and lack of diversity and flexibility in curricula;
- inadequate content of the social science curricula;
- ineffective pedagogical methods and faculty training;
- lack of leadership skills and training;
- outdated means of access to information and information technology;
- the lack of international recognition of academic degrees;
- the isolation from the international academic community; and
- the gap between education and research.

The Belarusian authorities believed that, if not addressed, these problems would have negative consequences for the potential of Belarusian society in as few as five to ten years. Thus, the systemic reforms of this period were aimed at overcoming these deficiencies as quickly as possible. Some practical steps were taken: the new law on education was adopted in 1991, and the average salary of university professors increased, exceeding (for the first time in Soviet and post-Soviet history) that of factory workers.

Unfortunately, in the years since, the official goals and principles of higher education reform have drifted significantly from those originally stated. Though the authorities do not proclaim these changes to be explicitly related to an anti-Western stance, the attitudes are implied and can be inferred in state documents and in the pronouncements of state officials.

Points of Difference: 1991 versus the Present

The changes in the goals and directions of higher education reform are striking. First, there is an evident shift related to the international dimension. At present, higher education officials emphasize that, along with considering the experiences of other countries, "Belarus has to proceed first of all from its internal conditions and opportunities." According to the report of the minister of education at the World Conference on Higher Education, the Belarusian educational system is pursuing reform by "modifying the existing system, not breaking it." A similar idea was restated in the officially approved "Concept of Higher Education Development in the Republic of Belarus." This document does not mention even briefly any aspect relating to the international dimension of higher education.

Today, the state has reverted to maintaining control over higher education.

It is evident that the approach of the current state authorities is contrary to that of 1991. At the same time, there are some signs that Belarusian authorities are interested in maintaining a certain level of dialogue with their Western counterparts. For example, the minister of education of Belarus participated in a conference in April 1999, promoting the principles of the "Joint Declaration on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System" that was signed by the ministers of education of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom.

The second radical difference between the official direction of higher education reform today as opposed to that of 1991 is the extent of the state's involvement in and control over the administrative and other aspects of the system. In 1991, the authorities considered centralization and the lack of autonomy in higher education as drawbacks. Today, the state has reverted to maintaining control over higher education. For example, the Belarusian authorities have established new controlling and supervisory agencies, such as the State Inspectorate of the Educational System and the Interinstitutional Council on Coordination of Preparation of Highly Qualified Academics; they have also introduced state higher education standards.

The Belarusian authorities are placing private universities in particular under a great deal of pressure. In 1998, the republic had more than 20 private universities. Today, this number has dropped to 13, due partly to financial hardship (universities pay 37 percent of their income in taxes) and partly to the increasingly restrictive policies of the government.

The 1991 education law did not foresee the strict state regulation of private education policies and practices. The Ministry of Education has recently issued decrees that limit the development of and exert control over the private sector, including accreditation and degree certification. For example, the ministry requires that private universities own their facilities and that at least 50 percent of their instructors work full time. Another requirement is that private universities grant diplomas that are different from those granted by state institutions—in contradiction with the 1991 law.

The state has also interfered with admissions policies. This year a quota was placed on the number of law students admitted to universities on the pretext that "the republic does not need such a large number of lawyers." Actually, over 93 percent of all law students at the International Institute of Labor and Social Relations stated that they did not wish to become lawyers but instead needed a legal background to be successful in business.

A serious problem for nonstate institutions in the future might be caused by Presidential Decree 39 of 7 October 1999, requiring that "commercial organizations" pay their employees salaries equivalent to those offered for the same positions by the corresponding state-run organizations. Simultaneously, the state has given a green light for state-run universities, which are supposed to provide free educational services, to charge tuition. As of 1998–1999, the state universities of Belarus were allowed to recruit up to 60 percent "paying" students (as opposed to 15 percent in 1995–1996). The content and the quality of the education offered remain the same.

The third change between the visions of higher education in 1991 and today relates to the development of administrative and leadership skills of education leaders. Virtually nothing has been done to implement this previously stated goal. The 1998–1999 master list of specializations of Belarusian universities does not include educational administration, leadership, or policy. Belarus still maintains practices from the Soviet era, when educational administrators were appointed by Communist Party bodies based on the "political maturity," loyalty, or other (perhaps nonrelevant) qualities of candidates. The only difference is that Belarus now has what are called "presidential executives"—authorities with almost unlimited rights, personally appointed by the president to all levels of the state hierarchy, instead of by Communist Party committees.

A fourth divergence of reform goals concerns the lack of diversity and flexibility in curricula. Belarus introduced state curriculum standards in 1998 for all specializations. The curricula are approved by the Ministry of Education, which specifies the content and the structure of training specialists in great detail. In particular, the standards list disciplines that the student must study and the sequence, term, and number of contact hours for each subject.

Some national programs in the area of higher educa-

tion address specific goals—examples are "Textbooks for University Students," "Foreign Languages," and "Teachers." Although there are no reliable data as yet concerning the effectiveness of such programs, their success already seems doubtful. Most respondents to a survey conducted for this report were unaware of the existence of any active national programs in these areas. This demonstrates that the programs were developed in the traditional "secluded" Soviet bureaucratic manner without the involvement of the academic community in either the development or implementation. This, in turn, implies that the programs most likely will remain on paper only.

In general, the situation is much more encouraging at the university level. Many deans, department chairs, and faculty members are reform-minded and hope to introduce curriculum changes for their faculties. This may be facilitated by introducing new courses, updating the content of old ones, establishing links with Western universities, inviting lecturers from abroad, etc. These efforts face many objective and subjective obstacles and restrictions caused by rigid state educational laws.

To summarize, the goals of Belarusian authorities and their policies for higher education reform remain complex and contradictory. There are some signs that the authorities understand the need for reform in the context of the political, social, and economic changes in Belarus and in neighboring countries. The officially proclaimed goals of reform, however, have been strongly affected by the anti-Western stance of the current Belarusian authorities and have drifted away from those accepted soon after Belarus's independence. The international dimension of higher education reform priorities has almost completely disappeared. The state is increasing its pressure on universities and exercises strict control over virtually all aspects of university policies and practices. ■

Widening Access and Raising Fees: Can These Policies Be Reconciled in the UK?

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The internal contradictions of U.K. higher education policy have recently been paraded for all to see in two separate but connected events. The first, in May, was when the chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, an Edinburgh graduate, accused Oxford University of elitism in denying an undergraduate place to study medicine to a candidate from a state comprehensive school in the North East, an impoverished part of the country. The candidate concerned, who was excellently qualified, subsequently turned down offers of entrance to a number of other well-known universities, including Edinburgh, in favor of a place at Harvard. The accusation of elitism in admissions policies was then leveled at a group of "top" universities by a succession of government ministers, including the prime minister, and the Parliamentary Select Committee launched an inquiry into the whole question of access to higher education.

On examination the case that provoked the accusation turned out to be a particularly bad example in that the college concerned (selection is by colleges not by the university, at Oxford) had interviewed 23 candidates, all very well qualified, for five places, and the candidates admitted included two candidates from state schools and three who were from ethnic minorities. Students at the college who had come from state schools went on television to defend the college's selection policy, and the vice-chancellor who had in the past been congratulated by the secretary of state for education, David Blunkett, for the university's efforts to broaden its intake, accused Gordon Brown of setting back the university's plans for widening access by reinforcing a stereotyped image it was trying to lose. The university went into a successful media overdrive to show that offers to candidates from state schools had increased from 48 percent to 53 percent over the past five years at the expense of the independent schools, that it had recently completed a major review of its admissions arrangements designed precisely to broaden the entry, and that it had more than 30 schemes already targeted on attracting candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds. "Oxford is committed," said the vice-chancellor, "to recruiting the best students it can identify whatever their background" but he wanted Oxford to continue to "have a reputation for being fiercely meritocratic."

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