higher education? Experience suggests there are as many definitions as there are American academics considering the question—maybe more.

Another key question, and one to which Altbach alludes, is whether regional accreditors have the capacity to accredit institutions of higher education in other countries. Language is one issue; I would argue that regional accreditation ought not to consider institutions other than those using English as a principal language of instruction and operation. Even if visiting teams can be composed to work in another language, commissions and their staff will have incomplete access to the information about the institution.

Capacity issues must also include the ability to help the team visitors and the commissions deal with local regulations and local culture, at least at some level. To what extent should the system accommodate—or even encourage—adapting an American-style institution to local conditions? Inherently, having the capacity to address considerations will make the process more expensive, and the cost must be borne largely by the institution seeking accreditation or some beneficent third party.

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Accrediting institutions abroad is not the only international activity of American accreditors—and arguably not the most important. Hosting international visitors who want to learn from us as they build their own system is one useful way that American accreditors work internationally. We also help build capacity elsewhere by serving internationally on accreditation boards, participating in the on-site visits, and working with colleagues in their locations while they create an accreditation system to serve their country. National systems of accreditation (government systems all, unlike the United States) are developing throughout the world. And, as Altbach suggests, the ability of countries to work together regionally through their quality assurance systems has great potential to support the mobility of students and scholars, the cooperation of institutions, and a multidimensional international agenda for higher education.

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Russian Private Higher Education: Alliances with State-Run Organizations

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Russian private higher education is about a decade old. While it shares many features of private sectors of higher education worldwide, one of its prominent traits is hardly addressed in the private higher education literature: considerable public involvement in the creation of Russian private higher education institutions and continued association of private institutions with various state-supported organizations and public resources.

There are currently over 500 private institutions (as compared with 620 public ones), accounting for roughly 10 percent of enrollments in higher education. Generally located in metropolitan and large urban centers—such as Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, and Novosibirsk—these institutions mainly offer market-related programs in economics, law, psychology, sociology, social work, business administration, and other fields that do not require much investment in equipment and research infrastructure. They are characterized by responsiveness to the needs of the labor market, flexibility of course offerings and curricula, frequent use of learner-centered instructional methods, heavy reliance on part-time faculty, tuition dependence, loose admissions requirements, limited concern about research, and many other features typically ascribed to private institutions worldwide. Only a handful of Russian nonstate institutions have acquired a reputation for high-quality education, with the majority offering degrees that are still questioned by employers and the general public. Like private higher education elsewhere and unlike the privatization in industry, Russian nonstate higher education institutions were not created by turning public institutions into private but rather by organizing new institutions, virtually from scratch.

Russia's private higher education institutions are commonly referred to as "nonstate" institutions in legal documents and in public discourse, connoting the state's limited role and its separation from the private sector.

While nonstate institutions are not funded by the central government, they receive considerable support and resources from other state-run organizations and agencies, and their connection to the governmental structures is much closer than they declare it to be. In fact, various state-related organizations have been actively participating in the process of founding private institutions. Their participation was particularly pronounced in the early years of Russian private higher education development. According to the law, nonstate institutions can be established by organizations, individuals, or the mixture of the two. At present, roughly half the institutions have mixed founding entities, while a quarter come from organizations alone, and only the remaining quarter are founded by private individuals.

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Various central government structures are involved in founding private institutions. Among their founders and cofounders, particularly in Moscow, it is not unusual to encounter state ministries and committees and subcommittees of the state Duma (parliament). In the provinces, regional and local administrations and city authorities are also frequent founding organizations. While some of these governmental organizations are necessary for nonstate institutions in symbolic terms, others bring real, palpable assets. The assistance from the government does not typically involve direct funding but rather provision of access to other resources, such as physical plant and buildings. Institutions created in such a way usually are very willing to publicize their connection to the government to gain stability and social acceptance.

Perhaps the most active actors in the founding of nonstate institutions are the state-supported, public colleges and universities, and specialized research institutes and academies, including the Russian Academy of the Sciences, the Russian Academy of Education, and academic, research-oriented institutions operating under the auspices of various ministries. According to the Association of Nonstate Institutions of Higher Education, over half the nonstate institutions of higher education include these academic public institutions as founding or cofounding entities.

Considerable variation exists in the kind of interaction between public and private institutions and in the influence of the founding public universities and research institutions over governance affairs of the private ones. A sizable number of nonstate institutions were created based on decisions of public universities' academic councils or of motivated high-ranking administrators—particularly rectors, deputy rectors, and deans. In such instances, the newly established private institutions have a public university and private individuals (e.g., rectors) among their founding entities, and they are typically housed within public institutions, sharing all the resources of the founding public university—including libraries, sports facilities, dormitories, research laboratories, and other assets. Although they are separate statutory bodies legally, many nonstate institutions established in this way are quite dependent on their founding public counterparts, informally governed by rectors of public institutions, and in effect operating as branches of these public institutions. Other nonstate institutions are administratively independent and are engaged in mutually beneficial relationships with their parent public institutions.

The fact that many institutions are established by private individuals or businesses may often give a misleading impression of independence from state-run organizations. In reality, many of these institutions are closely linked to governmental structures through networks of formal and informal connections and seek to take a share of public resources. Indeed, the informal involvement of government officials in the governance of private companies, including higher education institutions, is very common in Russia. Private businesses often seek closer ties to officials and coopt them into closer association with their companies. Additionally, these linkages manifest themselves through nonstate rectors' connections with the government in cases when the rectors are former public officials who still retain extensive contacts in the government.

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Thus many "private" or "nongovernment" higher education institutions in Russia are heavily dependent on interlocking relationships with the government and various publicly run organizations. In a country with extensive statist traditions, this nexus may be a necessary condition for the legitimacy and survival of nonstate higher education institutions.

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