

Higher Education Corruption in Ukraine: Opinions and Estimates

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The Constitution of Ukraine guarantees the right of education. The law says “the state guarantees free access to preschool, secondary, professional, vocational, and higher education in the state and municipal educational institutions.” In reality the positions of the free, state-funded higher education have been seriously undermined by the growing corruption in admissions, grading, and graduation.

The president of Ukraine, Victor Yushchenko, pointed out corruption in education in his address to the students at Kiev National University on March 9, 2007: “We are talking about the way to eradicate corruption in higher education institutions, starting from the entry examinations; how to create an independent system of conducting competitive examinations; how to make it possible for the state funds that now extend to 54 percent of all students in higher education institutions to support those specialists requested by the state who come through truly transparent and honest competition.” Symbolically, in June 2007 the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine hosted a conference in Kiev titled “the major corruption schemes in the education system and the ways to eradicate them.”

ESTIMATES

In July 2006 the head of the Department of Economic Crimes Prevention of the Ministry of the Interior reported 210 cases of bribery registered in higher education institutions in that year, of which 11 were in Kiev. He mentioned a departmental chair in Lugansk who demanded that students pay his bills from the electronics and construction stores, and he accepted cash as well. The corrupt chair was arrested while receiving a bribe of \$2,000. In yet another case, the deputy director of the Kiev National University's college was arrested while receiving a bribe of \$6,000. The number of investigated cases appears to be the tip of the iceberg as corruption in education is believed to be widespread.

The minister of education refers to the survey conducted by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in 2006 targeting students in the leading educational centers of the country—including Kiev, Kharkov, Donetsk, Lviv, and Odessa. Around 20 percent of the

respondents reported that they know cases of bribery, but the number of such cases has declined; around 27 percent of students said that bribes were accepted by faculty members at about the same level as in previous years; 7 to 8 percent think that bribery is now flourishing. The number of students who admitted paying bribe for entering the college or university declined from 19 percent in 2005 to 13 percent in 2006.

Private tutoring is thought to be a form of corruption in admissions as well. A payment of \$2,000 to \$4,000 to a private tutor who is also a professor at a leading university may help in gaining admission to the program where he or she teaches.

The head of the Department of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education says that the survey of freshmen conducted in 2006 showed that two-thirds of them did not face bribery, nepotism, or protectionism. He apparently misses the point that one-third of all freshmen entered higher education institutions either by paying bribes or with the help of their relatives and other acquaintances. Moreover, half of all freshmen in public higher education institutions pay full tuition and enter without competition or bribes. Thus around 60 percent of all students who entered state-funded programs did pay bribes or used their personal connections.

Corruption in higher education is not limited to academic corruption. Facts of embezzlement, fraud, gross waste, misallocation of resources, and other corrupt activities are found throughout the country. One of the latest investigations reports that former president of the Lugansk branch of the Inter-Regional Academy of Personnel Management, the largest private higher education institution in the country, embezzled \$200,000. The State Attestation Commission withdrew licenses of 116 educational programs, branches, affiliates, and colleges in 2006 alone.

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INDEPENDENT TESTING

The standardized computer-graded test is introduced gradually to reform college admissions. The head of the Department of Higher Education considers independent external testing as a good and effective tool to fight corruption in admissions. He confirms that the test is intended to provide independent estimates of high school graduates' knowledge and that test scores should be the major criterion in admissions decisions in colleges. The head of the Center of External Evaluation thinks that by 2008 it will be possible to run admissions to higher education institutions based on the test results.

The majority of rectors of colleges and universities are against the test. The president of Kiev-Mohila Academy anticipates clear sabotage carried out by some of the rectors to compromise the test. He does not believe that the test will somehow reduce corruption in higher education. The test may need several years to prove successful.

OPINIONS ON CORRUPTION

The minister of education and science of Ukraine acknowledges the presence of corruption in the system and points out corruption in obtaining good grades in secondary and higher education and good results in college entry examinations. He claims to have developed a set of organizational, economic, and legal anticorruption measures.

The official position of all the rectors remains intact: there is no corruption in higher education institutions, and the highest consideration is given to the knowledge of applicants. The head of the Institute of Journalism of Kiev National University says that only parents whose children are not strong enough academically seek illegal ways of gaining admission for their children.

According to the minister of education, many students either create a potential for corruption or would not miss a chance of improving their grades in exchange for bribes. The leader of the Peoples Democratic League of Youth agrees. The survey shows that the number of such students comprises 21 percent in the Donetskaya oblast, 29 percent in Kiev, 28 percent in Lviv, 25 percent in Odessa, and 30 percent in Kharkov. Another 15 percent of the respondents said that they would not

take advantage of such an offer but would inform their friends of the existing opportunity. Only 21 to 26 percent of all students, depending on the region, would not advise such unfair tactics. Finally, only 3 to 8 percent would inform the police of corruption.

CONCLUSION

The widespread corruption in higher education in Ukraine is a proven fact. It has plagued academia and includes bribery and nepotism in admissions, grading, and graduation, as well as diploma mills, fraud, embezzlement, and gross waste of the state funds. Many believe that the standardized test will not solve the problem of corruption in admissions. An academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine says that "corruption in our country is not a narrow phenomenon confined to a particular branch or an industry. This is a country-wide problem. Hence, the fight against corruption should start with the independent testing of state bureaucrats and politicians." Further democratic reforms are needed along with the restructuring of the higher education industry and the nationwide independent testing. ■

New Publications

Albornoz, Orlando. *Academic Populism: Higher Education under State Control. Vol. 1: the Roots of Academic Populism; Vol. 2: Academic Populism in the Making: The Venezuelan Case.* Caracas, Venezuela: Bibliotechnology Ediciones, 2005. 947 pp. (pb). ISBN 980-00-2248-1. Address: Bibliotechnology Ediciones, Apdo. No. 50.061, Caracas 1050-A, Venezuela.

Albornoz, one of Latin America's senior sociologists, has provided a two-volume compilation of some of his essays on higher education, mainly focusing on his country of Venezuela. The broad theme is academic populism and how it is playing out in the context of contemporary Venezuela. There are discussions of academic freedom, the Venezuelan revolution and its impact on education, the role of ideology, elites, and higher education, and other topics.

Alemneh, Teshome Yizengaw. *The Ethiopian Higher Education: Creating Space for Reform.* Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Teshome Yizengaw,

2007. 247 pp. 60 birr (pb). ISBN 978-99944-4-6. E-mail: ekrena@ethionet.et.

One of the first full-scale analyses of higher education in Ethiopia, this book provides discussion of such topics as the basic structure and direction of the higher education system; challenges such as governance, equity and access, quality, research; and others. A discussion of relations with donor organizations, a key issue for African higher education, is also included. Current statistics are provided.

Bacchetti, Ray, and Thomas Ehrlich, eds. *Reconnecting Education and Foundations: Turning Good Intentions into Educational Capital.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007. 501 pp. \$55 (hb). ISBN 0-7879-8818-9. Web site: www.josseybass.com.

A discussion of the role of philanthropic foundations in the United States and their role in helping education at all levels, this book features a section on higher education. Specific foundation-assisted projects are analyzed as well as relevant broader issues.

Baumgartl, Bernd, Fatma Mizkaci, and Dean

Owen, eds. *From Here to There: Mileposts of European Higher Education.* Vienna: Navreme, 2007. 191 pp. No charge (pb). ISBN 978-9989-50-049-5. Web site: www.navreme.net.

Focusing in part on trends in higher education development in eastern Europe, this book also includes chapters on e-learning in Europe, the role of women, entrepreneurial education in Latin America, the accreditation of experiential education, and others.

Fisher, Donald, et al. *Canadian Federal Policy and Postsecondary Education.* Vancouver, Canada: Center for Policy Studies in Higher Education and Training, University of British Columbia, 2006. 191 pp. C\$30 (pb). ISBN 978-0-88865-747-3. Web site: chet.educ.ubc.ca.

A short but reasonably comprehensive overview of Canadian higher education policy, this book focuses on the relationship between the provinces and the central government in Canada's complex federal system. Specific attention is given to Quebec as an exceptional case.