students. George Mason, for example, was predicting nearly 200 students at launch but had less than 40. Paris-Sorbonne's growth has similarly been modest, with only 235 students in the bachelor's degree program after three years and the offering of a master's program to a single student.

Once a branch campus is opened, the next phase consists of denials that the low numbers of students registered and the extremely high percentage of new registrants in language-training programs are negative or unexpected. The numbers, if publicized, are actually championed as evidence that standards are being upheld and the institution is steadfast in its commitment to slow and steady growth of benefit to the students and the region. Both Michigan State and the Paris-Sorbonne have recently made these claims. Given that so many other institutions have opened branch campuses, competition for students has increased sharply and there are never as many as originally anticipated. The financial realities at a branch campus begins to erode the initial exuberance that led to its ill-fated conception. Pledges had been made that the branch campus, while not driven by profit, would certainly not drain resources from the home campus.

Branch campus supporters claim that the large number of institutions in Dubai and Ras Al Khaimah are beginning to create a culture of academia and that some are transitioning to a more comprehensive model, including research.

Pressures mount to increase enrollments because tuition-paying students are the foundation on which the branch campus is built. A foreign partner who was subsidizing a branch campus might begin to pressure the university to attempt such an increase as losses continue to mount. However, the university needs to maintain its entrance requirements to remain credible and accredited in the eyes of the skeptical faculty and the regional accrediting body back home. Eventually the weight of the expanding debt and poor enrollment levels destines the branch campus to the pages of the history books.

The home institution's administration argues that issues beyond its control such as a dispute with an unruly partner or even the global financial crisis made closure unavoidable. The University of Southern Queensland and George Mason put forth these respective arguments. It was not that they did not exercise their due diligence, were blinded by the bright lights of Dubai, or feared missing the branch-campus gold rush. Theirs was a noble attempt couched in the belief that they were offering an olive branch to the people of the region, only to have a force majeure halt the program's progress. They are truly sorry that an opportunity for students to receive an accredited foreign degree, while never leaving the region, has been removed a few years and thousands of dollars later.

Conclusion

The rapid growth of higher education in the United Arab Emirates has brought about an explosion in the branch-campus phenomena. Like other gold rushes, the hurried expansion of branch campuses will lead to a few successes and a number of failures. Though George Mason is by far the most-high-profile casualty in the current system, it was not the first and will not be the last. Failures cause reverberations throughout the region. Skeptics revel, students suffer, and the United Arab Emirates is worse off than when it opened its doors. ■

Turkmenistan: Fixing Decades of Damage

Martha Merrill

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For 18 years, until the death of its dictator Saparmurad Niyazov on December 21, 2006, Turkmenistan had been one of the most isolated countries in the world. Yet, in 2008, an audit of the natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan indicated the amount available as substantially larger than most observers had anticipated and could put Turkmenistan among the top five sources of natural gas in the world. With businesses and consumers around the globe clamoring for energy, such reserves give Turkmenistan substantial political and economic clout, but only if the gas is sold abroad. However, doing so, perhaps more than is broadly understood in Turkmenistan, would involve major changes throughout the society. The new president, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, confronts many challenges and choices in deciding if and how to restructure that society. One critical field is higher education.

The Niyazov Years: Decimation

During the Niyazov years, the educational system in Turkmenistan was decimated. As David Lewis, the former director of the International Crisis Group's Project in Central Asia has written, "Turkmenistan is one of the few states in which a deliberate policy of reducing education has been used to produce a politically compliant and educationally backward population."

Niyazov cut the number of years of elementary and secondary school from 10 to 9, thus ensuring that no locally educated students were prepared for higher education outside of Turkmenistan. Given that students had to spend hours memo-

rizing the *Ruhnama*, Niyazov's eccentric vision of the Turkmen past and Turkmen virtues, and that they were regularly taken out of school for weeks and even months at a time to help with the cotton harvest, less than 9 years formed the actual time spent on academic subjects. University studies were reduced from 5 to 2 years, followed by 2 years of practical work required before the degree was awarded. Recognition of degrees earned abroad was rescinded, meaning that holders of such degrees could not work in their fields in Turkmenistan. The Academy of Sciences and other research institutes, the sites of graduate education, were closed. Thus, the only people available to become university faculty had attained just 11 years of education, much of which was dogmatism.

In addition, Niyazov interfered directly with university governance. At times, he himself would name rectors and vice rectors and set enrollment numbers for universities. Under this regime, the number of seats available was reduced to less than half the number during Soviet times—one reason that admission and degrees themselves reportedly are for sale. Turkmen was required as the language of instruction in most schools and universities, even for citizens who were ethnic Russians or Uzbeks.

These actions have not only undermined education during Niyazov's presidency but will also do so into the future. People who attended school during his era are ill-prepared to teach the next generation the skills needed for international integration in the 21st century.

Reforms Now Under Way, but . . .

Given this destruction of the education system, as well as other forms of repression, observers of Turkmenistan watched with both trepidation and hope when Niyazov died in 2006. His successor, Berdymukhammedov, promised reforms, and although some have taken place, substantially more is needed, particularly in the areas of faculty development and access to information.

The reforms of the last two years include returning elementary and secondary education to 10 years and higher education to 5 (i.e., the Soviet model for higher education). The two-year work requirement for receiving a higher education diploma has been eliminated. (The extent to which this requirement has permeated the consciousness of the younger generation, however, was evident in the questions posed to a Harriman Institute delegation during a March 2009 visit; students regularly asked if work experience is one of the requirements for admission to Columbia University.) The number of first-year places has been increased by 825 nationwide, but the demand for university admission exceeds capacity by a factor of five; by the Ministry of Education's own estimates, 20,000 applicants competed for 4,000 openings last year.

Lack of Resources and Faculty

However, adding back years of education and additional first-year places makes the problem of adequate teaching materials and knowledgeable instructors even more acute, especially outside the capital. Additionally, universities have announced new specialties, in fields ranging from international law to Chinese, although the resources and professors to teach these fields barely exist, especially since most students speak only Turkmen. Given a lack of knowledge of the world outside or an abundance of political caution, current faculty are unable to prepare students for international interactions. For example, a political scientist from Barnard and a law professor from Columbia explained to an auditorium of students and professors the global ranking systems that various organizations employ to evaluate business opportunities and the international legal agreements that Turkmenistan must join to sell its gas.

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In response, an elderly professor rose and implied that while the ideas presented were interesting, in Turkmenistan they did not apply, because international businesses would have guarantees from the president and nothing else was needed.

Additionally, although Berdymukhammedov signed a decree on June 12, 2007, restoring the Academy of Science, the extent to which it is functioning is debatable. Without it and other research institutes, no higher education beyond the newly resurrected five-year diploma exists, and, thus, no graduate training for future faculty is available. The current president also has directed the minister of education to draft a resolution recommending how diplomas earned abroad might be validated in Turkmenistan. Restrictions on education abroad have been loosened somewhat, and thousands of students reportedly are seeking higher education in Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and elsewhere. However, due to the prior 9-year elementary and secondary system, those seeking higher education outside of Turkmenistan almost invariably must start at the preuniversity level.

Substantial Problems Remain

Although the tentative steps Berdymukhammedov has taken to reform higher education may move in the right direction, they are not sufficient to provide the country with graduates who can interact on a world stage. Progress will require much more extensive reform—including substantial attention to faculty development, graduate education, and academic freedom issues. ■