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Three universities in Georgia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: the struggle against corruption and for social cohesion

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Abstract Universities may contribute to a nation's social cohesion through both direct and indirect means. In their syllabi they may include techniques necessary for understanding complex social problems. Faculty may model good behaviour in terms of listening and understanding points of view that may contradict their own. University administrators may illustrate ways to lead honourably, which can enhance the chances for achieving consensus with respect to future dilemmas. This project assessed typical areas of university tension, including academic freedom, equity of participation and academic honesty. Three different universities were chosen as sites for faculty interviews—a foreign private university in Kyrgyzstan, a flagship state university in Georgia, and a regional teacher training college recently upgraded to university status in Northeast Kazakhstan. Results suggest that the single most important arena wherein universities can influence social cohesion in these countries is the manner by which they address education corruption. The paper reproduces the statements of those faculty members who participate in corruption as well as those who refuse to participate. It concludes with some predictions about the future of the relationship of higher education to social cohesion.

Keywords Education policy · Education in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union · Education and corruption · Education and social cohesion

Higher education and social cohesion

It is axiomatic to think of higher education as a social good, with many of its benefits and costs affecting the public at large. But what specific effect higher education may have, and how those effects can be defined, measured, and calculated, has been a subject of long debate. With the emergence of many "new" nations in the 1960s, the debate tended to center on issues of nation building, including the general educational role of broadening outlook, increasing tolerance, and cultivating the desire to participate in the political

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process (Lipset 1959); the connection between education and democratic stability (Almond and Verba 1963; Puryear 1994); and the degree to which education was associated with greater voluntary political participation (Gintis 1971; Verba et al. 1978). Higher education specifically was thought to add to a nation's technical manpower, its ability to participate in political and economic debate, and, at the highest level, its ability to generate new knowledge (Harbison and Meyers 1964).

This article is one piece of a larger project that seeks to understand the nature of higher education as it relates to social, rather than economic objectives (for other aspects of this project, see Heyneman 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2003c). In many parts of the former Soviet Union, higher education has descended into what is now thought of as "corrupt" practices. Earlier papers on this topic have helped to define education corruption in general terms (Heyneman 2001, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b), to think up ways to research the problem (Heyneman 2002/3), manage it (Moiseyenko 2005), calculate its costs (Heyneman et al. 2008), and manage interventions intending to ameliorate its more problematic effects (Heyneman 2003a, 2004c).

The larger question, however, has to do not just with corruption, but with the wider set of mechanisms by which higher education might affect a community's social cohesion. If one can accept social cohesion as an indicator of social performance (such as a nation like South Africa or Ukraine, which emerges from a threat of civil war without bloodshed; Heyneman 2002/3), then the question is how might this indicator be affected by various organizations?[1] The question falls within the purview of institutional economics—the study of how laws, norms and administrative policies affect behaviour (Task force on Higher Education and Society 2004; World Bank 1994, 1995, 2000, 2001; Ravitch 2003; Psacharopoulos et al. 1986; Bowman 1962; Anderson 1952, 1956; Coleman 1987, 1988; Berger 1999; Colatrella and Alkana 1994; Center for Civics Education 1994; OECD 2001; Perkin 1984; Sen 2005, 2006; Scott 2001; Powell and DiMaggio 1991; North 1990; Putnam 1993; Olsen 1965, 1982; Durkheim 1997; Mansbridge 1989), and educational institutions play a uniquely important role (Puryear 1994; Hyman and Wright 1979; Dreeben 1967; Inkeles and Smith 1974; Feinberg 2000), especially higher education institutions (Ehrlich 2000; Gutmann 1987; Moiseyenko 2005).

The task of forging social cohesion today diverges from how nation building might have been conceived in an earlier era. In the 1960s the major focus was on how graduates conducted themselves. Today the focus includes how universities, as organizations, conduct themselves. It includes their participation in what might be thought of as an international standard for economic and political behaviour (including social inclusion of minorities and gender equity among students and faculties), transparency of budgeting and governance, tolerance in academic endeavours, and the direct teaching of the lessons of citizenship in what is often a tense and unsettled social setting. Universities are expected to maintain their sense of professional autonomy, but with the passing of the party/states in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, state ideological dominance is no longer acceptable. This left universities to fend for themselves professionally and to establish their own standards of integrity.

This project asks how universities are doing so far. In what ways have universities in the former Soviet Union been successful at establishing their own standards of integrity? Are the perceptions of this success shared equally among faculties and students? Equally across

[1] There are four categories of organizations that might affect social cohesion: profit-making organizations, not-for-profit voluntary organizations, governmental organizations; and schools and universities (Heyneman 2004c).

disciplines and schools? And perhaps more importantly, given the considerable pressures for economic survival, how have universities maintained their traditional standards of equality and fairness in their treatment of students and faculty?

The three university sites were not chosen because the institutions necessarily represent the country in which they were situated but rather because each site represents a different category, with different university purposes, traditions, and challenges. One university was a foreign-supported, private liberal arts college; a second was the national flagship public university; and the third was a regional pedagogical college recently converted to a university.

With the assistance of the university administration, e-mail messages were sent to faculty, students and administrators asking for volunteers for an hour-long interview with them. The individuals interviewed volunteered to participate and were not randomly selected. With administrators, the interview protocols emphasized the macro issues of academic freedom, language of instruction, professional conduct, and equity of representation. With faculty more emphasis was placed on issues of pedagogy, history, civics, and academic honesty. With students emphasis was placed on how each of the eight issues affected them directly. Unless English was their preferred language, an interpreter was present. The interpreter signed a confidentiality agreement, and this agreement was shown to the respondent. Interviews took place in a private office or empty classroom. If the respondent gave permission, the interviews were audio- recorded. This project was *participatory* in its nature, and I had no hesitation in declaring myself a "friend" to higher education and universities generally.

Kyrgyzstan

I was invited by the Rector of the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) to interview anyone I wished. I requested that an e-mail be sent by the vice president for international affairs inviting any student or faculty member to have an interview with me. Twenty-one volunteered. These consisted of 15 faculties and students and six administrators. The AUCA was chosen as a site because it is a local university (accredited in Kyrgyzstan but not in the US), with a great internal international influence. AUCA is financed largely by grants from the US government and the Open Society Institute (The Soros Foundation). Its 1,187 students (499 men and 688 women) come from 16 countries. 40% of the classes are conducted in English by the 227 part- and full-time faculties. The ratio of students to FTE is about 10:1. The university portrays itself as a liberal arts college with a wide-ranging curriculum and, contrary to local higher education tradition, significant breadth requirements to as to avoid the over-specialization common in the former Soviet Union.

Interviews were conducted in a room on campus but isolated from all other activity. With one exception, interpretation was not necessary. Because these interviews were the first, an effort was made to cover all eight proposed topics: (i) on how Kyrgyz history should be taught; (ii) which languages of instruction should be allowed; (iii) what areas of civics and leadership responsibilities the university should undertake; (iv) whether there was a required pedagogy; (v) how the university should lead in the higher education community; (vi) the equality of representation (of ethnic minorities and from low income families) among students and faculty; (vii) the degree of academic honesty demonstrated by the faculty and the administration; and (viii) the degree to which the university supported academic freedom. Although these topics were raised on each site, it became obvious that some issues were of critical relevance and others were not. Over time, more emphasis was placed on the former.

Georgia

In Georgia, the chosen university was its flagship academic institution, Tbilisi State University (TSU). Founded before the Russian Revolution the university used Georgian (a rare exception in the former Soviet Union) as the medium of instruction since the beginning. It has produced many important scholars and research institutes. The university today has over 35,000 students and 3,275 faculties including 55 academicians. During the period of my stay, TSU was in the midst of a major shake up. For reasons of inefficiency, the university had been ordered by the government to undertake a restructuring roughly equivalent to a private corporation. It reduced the number of faculties from 22 to eight and requested that all 3,275 faculty members resign their positions and reapply as candidates to a far smaller university structure and more modern university curriculum. Interviews were conducted in a small private room on the main campus. In about 25% of the cases, interviews were conducted in English. In the other cases, interviews were conducted in Georgian. The respondent was invited to choose the language in which he/she felt most comfortable. In addition to the eight prescribed topics, new issues arose concerning the administrative reforms and the general direction of higher education more generally. In addition, interviews were conducted with the rectors of three other universities, a member of parliament, and several senior education administrators in government.

Kazakhstan

The site in Kazakhstan was East Kazakhstan State University (EKSU), located in Ust Kamenogorsk, a small industrial town in the north east of the country, far from the capital and the nation's largest city. Before 1991, EKSU had been an institute for teacher training, and not one of the more prestigious institutions. Since many of the faculties received their degrees where they now teach, the institution is heavily influenced by its earlier purposes. EKSU has about 10,000 students studying 60 specializations. There are about 700 faculty members. The average student: faculty ratio of 14:1 hides the fact that the demand for many specializations is low, yet faculty remains permanently in their positions. The university has had three rectors in the last 3 years.[2] The new rector has not yet established his reputation,[3] and there was considerable nervousness about the possible directions he might favour. Interviews with faculty and students were conducted in an empty classroom, and interviews with seven others were conducted in offices elsewhere. With rare exceptions, all interviews were conducted with the assistance of an English/Russian interpreter. Respondents were chosen by the deans of the colleges. I was concerned about the degree of representation, but there was no apparent effect on age, seniority, gender or opinion of the respondents I interviewed. They appeared to represent a broad cross-section of the faculty, and when I asked for more junior faculties and more students, my request was quickly complied with. In addition to EKSU, interviews were conducted at a local private university (Table 1).

[2] Rectors are not elected by the faculty, but appointed by the government and moved regularly.

[3] In fact we joked that I should show him around the university since, after four visits to Usk Kamenogorsk, I might know more about where things were than he did.

Table 1 Interviews and their locations

	Number
American univ. of C. Asia	24
Tbilisi state university	41
Others in Georgia	13
East Kaz. state university	29
Others in Kazakhstan	4
Total	111

Interview results: the teaching of history

All 15 republics from the former Soviet Union are "ethnically based" in that each takes its name from an ethnic group (The Russian Federation, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Latvia are all nations named for a local ethnicity).[4] Hence, each has to balance a natural tendency to establish national pride in historical accomplishments of that ethnic group with the fact that many citizens of their country have other ethnic identities. As might be expected, there is political pressure to re-instill a sense of honour from times past for their particular ethnic group. On the other hand, it is widely recognized that there needs to be a sense of fairness to all citizens in the presentation of the nation's history.[5] In all three countries new requirements had been put into place for the teaching of national history. One had to pass a test designed by the Ministry of Education to obtain a degree from either public or private universities in Kyrgyzstan. The governments of both Georgia and Kazakhstan had also instituted new requirements to study national history as a course requirement. I was curious as to how faculties and administrators might view these requirements. If they felt that there was undue emphasis on ethnic identity, what might they think a university should do about it? In essence I was asking two kinds of questions: whether the Ministry requirements represented a "professional" view of history; and if not, what the role of the university should be in teaching history "properly".

Inter-disciplinary associations are rare; hence many faculties in departments other than history had little idea of the new history requirements. Many found the question uncomfortable because they "were not a specialist in history". When assured that what I wanted was their "personal opinion", most respondents opened up and some became quite animated about the subject.

A few respondents spoke in favour of having national history identified with the history of the dominant ethnic group. One said *I am in favour of having the history of Kazakhstan be a history of the Kazakh people. It is the same in Russia. If I were a Russian citizen living in Russia, I wouldn't want Russian history to include a history of the Kazakh people, so why should a Russian here in Kazakhstan complain about having to learn about the history of the Kazakh people?* (65:22).[6] But agreeing with an ethnically exclusive view of history was rare. Most respondents emphasized the long interaction in their territory across groups and the extensive sharing of cultural traditions, poems, laws, and governments. Said one faculty member at Tbilisi State, *Our whole history is one of mixture. Our nationalism is*

[4] In regional languages the common term is "nationality". I choose to use the term "ethnicity" so as to not confuse group membership with national citizenship.

[5] The difference can be expressed with specific terminology: "Kazkah" pertains to the ethnic group; "Kazakhstani" pertains to all citizens in the territory of Kazakhstan.

[6] References refer to Tape and Minute number.

multicultural. One of our first queens was a Jew. We have been interacting with Turks, Russians, Armenians, Jews, and Azeris for centuries. We have no need of "defensive nationalism'" (in which a nation needs to defend its honour by preaching a jingoist view of its history) (17:44). Another Georgian reiterated this: *Our history is regional history. Georgian history has no enemies in that our culture has been determined by the culture of our former enemies from whom we have learned* (21:52).

Some professors expressed professional outrage at the attempt to use history to support state-sponsored ideology. There has of course been ample precedent in the Soviet Union, and the sad history of these ideological efforts was frequently raised along with a call to make history professional. *They leave out anything that would be uncomfortable about the past, things which would be uncomfortable about themselves. One cannot teach history as if one group had lived in a vacuum. We need to change the teachers. The teachers today are the same ones that taught history of the Communist Party. We need to have real historians, professionals who do real research in their subject* (73:18).

But what should a university do if it is felt that the history required from the Ministry of Education was unprofessional and biased? Here responses represented a wide range. Many felt that a university could do nothing because it "belongs" to the state, and all faculties have the responsibility to carry out state policy. But many others said that the university had a "duty to resist" on a topic on which its professional integrity was at stake. Said one faculty member at EKSU: *If the university is told by the Ministry to teach a course which was unprofessional, it should resist. The university needs to look at a global set of traditions and sources of knowledge, not just local ones* (65:8).

The key was *how* a university should resist. No one argued for demonstrations or strikes or public protests of any kind. Subtle methods were preferred. These included university-based request for students to take an additional course in which a nation's history could be more balanced, to the assignment of books and readings that might present a more balanced and "professional view". Would resistance to unprofessional requirements from a government be successful? One professor at EKSU replied by restating a proverb: *the dog barks, but the caravan keeps on moving* (71:17).

Civics, citizenship and moral values

It was widely thought that the ideology of the Soviet Union was generally reprehensible and should have been quickly replaced.[7] But there was no consensus on what to replace it with. There were often concerns about the "nihilism" of current students. One faculty member at EKSU said: *For many years we lived under the ideology of the USSR. When the country fell apart there was nothing to replace it. Young people today fill that emptiness with what they call "values". But I don't call them values. The students have a consumer mentality, even in their relations with each other* (75:21).

The issue of how to combat nihilism and transmit new values is especially complex in a foreign university. One administrator in AUCA remarked: *One can't build a democracy by force. The (national) goals are fine, but there has to be a transparent mechanism to merit those goals. We should make patience and tolerance among the goals of our society. We are a private university and can build our own history curriculum, but we should be very careful not to disturb* (1:29).

[7] The exception: the principle of equality of opportunity.

Despite the Soviet agenda to vocationalize higher education, many faculties, particularly the older ones, retained the conviction that higher education serves broader purposes. One senior faculty member at EKSU remarked that *the university has two jobs. One is to teach skills. The other is to set an example…. They are supposed to be an inspiration to youth, to give them skills but to also give them traditions* (55:8).

One faculty member at EKSU focused on patriotism as a central value: *To me, patriotism means treating all people equally. It means respect for all nationalities. It means an equality of opportunity in life. It means that everyone is proud of this land. Russians. Kazakhs. Everyone. Patriotism is a matter of moral honour over and above family and friends* (75:38). Importantly, he links patriotism to honesty and egalitarianism, rather than a "chauvinistic" exaggeration of the virtues or vices of certain ethnic groups.

In what way should a university influence values? Should it have a specific course on ethics? Should it have a written code of conduct for students and faculty? Many argued that would be too blunt an approach. One EKSU faculty member said that "students should learn professional integrity by the way we teach" (75:15). That is, students should learn the norms and ethos of inquiry from example, rather than didactically. There was no sympathy for installing sanctions and punishments. Braxton and Bayer (1999) argue that there is an informal code of conduct which pertains to university teaching. Of the three universities, only AUCA had the equivalent of a written code of conduct. Despite the absence of an explicit code at TSU and at EKSU, many norms paralleled those outlined by Braxton and Bayer. For instance, regarding teacher–student dynamics, one faculty member remarked a *faculty member must never intimidate people, especially those who are dependent on you. Whenever I talk to students, I always use the respectful form of Russian. When I talk to them about things which bother me, or which worry me, I am especially polite* (75:19).

Academic freedom

Academic freedom, including curricular freedom, is the issue most critical to the future of higher education in this region. The Magna Charta, the central document structuring the European Union's Bologna agreements, places academic freedom as an inviolable principle (Daxner 2004; Gibbons 2005). It states:

> To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power… the autonomy must be guaranteed by governmental law and its potential exploited by the governing bodies of the universities and by academia (Blasi 2005, pp. 172–173).

I was curious about the extent to which political control was exercised over research interests, and the extent to which constraints on academic freedom are considered a problem.

Under the Soviet Union there were many examples of state harassment of academics and the abrogation of principles of academic freedom. Access to foreign publications was restricted as a matter of course, with most higher education institutions not cleared for such privileges. On some occasions, particular theories, interpretations, and even fields of study were considered heretical or subversive. Among these were psychotherapy, genetics, and certain education polices, such as offering multiple languages of instruction. One respondent at TSU stated that psychology was *considered to be a dangerous science because it considered the subconscious*. He continued, *all the social sciences were limited*

by the state ideology….From 1920 to 1970 most of the efforts to study psychology were confined. Now there is zero capacity in psychotherapy. A professor of genetics at EKSU related a similar story: *Russia [the USSR] was once progressive in genetics. But it fell behind because of the stupid mistakes of the government. Who knows where we would be today if these mistakes had not been made* (65:22). And with respect to controlling education policy, one faculty member recalled that, *Under the USSR the rector gave an order saying that some of the subjects need to be taught in Russian….I was the only dean who said that the order was unacceptable….Today everyone can say whatever they want, but in that day (my statement) was like a bomb* (67:36).

The question is whether the new governments can manage the urge to control opinions in the university that contradict their own. According to one faculty member at TSU, the new government intervened for political reasons, just like the Soviets: *our first rector in the new government was asked to fire certain professors who were not liked by the government. He refused, and instead he was fired….We are still in a situation when we are under stress for our opinions, and these could be a threat to our lives* (67:26).

Not all faculty members support academic freedom. Asked if a faculty member at EKSU should be allowed to criticize the record of the country's president, one respondent said no: *…our president has had so many achievements. He has built so many things. He has helped in so many ways. I am so proud of him. Why should a faculty member be allowed to have opinions about our president which are not true?* (book 3: p. 24).

There are, however, visible displays (or perhaps celebrations) of academic freedom. For instance, at AUCA it is common for academics to "sound off" against US foreign policy, even though one of its sponsors is the US Department of State. The fact that open criticism from some of the professorate does not in any way threaten the purpose or functions of AUCA is at first curious, and then an important precedent. Several senior administrators and faculty are involved in political parties and participate in national debates; several faculty members are being considered as candidates for the rectorship of major governmental universities. AUCA faculty and students had taken the lead in sponsoring an inter-university exposure of educational corruption. They did it by sponsoring a mock trial in which professors "accused of corruption" were on a docket. There were prosecuting attorneys, defense lawyers, a judge, and an audience of students from many universities, all of whom seem thrilled to participate. When asked about the event, one faculty member mentioned that it was a way in which AUCA could help "lead" other universities to see a problem, but not in a way that would appear egocentric. This seems to add to the university's reputation rather than threaten it. At TSU, with significant reforms occurring throughout the higher education system, similar characteristics pertain. Many faculty and administrators were in line for promotions or political appointments and were well known to the electorate. This seemed to add to its reputation, too. In essence, for those nations (including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia), hoping to replicate the standards of the European Union, academic freedom is slowly but steadily becoming a reality.

Honesty of university administration and faculty

Although many point out that under the Soviets, advancement into and within universities was subject to political and personal manipulation, by and large, the process aspired to meritocracy. Since independence it has been difficult to maintain this tradition. I was

interested in how the challenges to meritocracy were seen by the faculty and administrators themselves. Some respondents were honest and confident enough to describe incidents in which they had participated in dishonest acts. They also included detailed answers to the question "how did participating in that act make you feel?" Although some were clearly nervous about that question, only three respondents refused to allow a tape recording of their answers.

One senior professor at TSU laid out what he considered the recent history of corruption at his university: *Admissions were a way to make money, huge money. But once inside the university, corruption depended upon the department. It was worse in law and business and economics*.[8] He added, *No one in his right mind would study math or physics if he is corrupt. If you go into math or physics there is no work, no jobs, so we get only highly motivated students* (44:27).

Coercion seems to flow both from students to professors and from professors to students. One professor from EKSU recalled: *When I was a student I did not know what corruption was. But then I got to Almaty and I found out….When I wrote my thesis I faced many difficulties. It took me 7 years to defend my thesis. I had to go back again and again and again to get the signature of the committee chair. I did not pay, but I know that it would have been expedited if I had paid a bribe* (75:1).

Why is corruption so prevalent? One TSU faculty member attributed it in part to the mentality of today's students. *We have to change this mentality….Students still think of employment as they did under the Soviets; many of them have already been promised jobs. These jobs depend on their obtaining a diploma. So they come to university focused not on learning but on obtaining a diploma* (79:29).

Do the faculty understand the "macro-implications" of corruption? Some do. One Kazakh professor mentioned that: *Corruption will affect our economy. If we produce a foolish agriculturalist, and he chooses a bad crop, a bad seed, the result will affect all of us. We have suffered before from famine. We can again* (79:39).

Educational corruption is not solely defined by bribery. As problematic, and certainly as common, is the commission of an illegal act for reasons of loyalty to family and friends. This was described as "moral terrorism" and comes in the form of phone calls and special pleas from intimate family members, sometimes older and more senior than oneself. One faculty member from TSU: *I am an honest person and I don't have a bad name among students. However, if "protection" is considered to be a part of corruption, I am also corrupt. We have big pressures from relatives and friends, and society; and we can't hide it. Even if we try to point out that protection hurts their daughters and sons, they say we are "the enemy". I get calls very often….The new (exam) system helps…. Before the new system, the teacher was over-whelmed with special requests. The new system helps me to be more objective. It is very difficult to not take account of friends and family, but the result will be a (nation of) semi-professionals* (36:13).

The worst occasions of "moral terrorism" occur when faculty colleagues or senior administrators request that one change a grade for a particular student. From TSU for instance: *The worst are my colleagues who put pressure on me….And the worst are colleagues who were our former teachers….Even the dean puts pressure….It makes me feel pretty bad….The most corrupt are the most influential. It is very difficult* (44:28).

[8] The tendency of corruption being worse in subjects with the highest labour market demand appears to be common elsewhere (Heyneman et al. 2008; Teixeira and Roacha 2006; Hrabak et al. 2004; Kerkvliet 1994; Nowell and Laufer 1997).

And from EKSU: *Once the dean called me about a grade for the daughter of the vice rector. The vice rector had been removed from his position and was in the hospital. The dean said that the vice rector had already suffered and let's not make him suffer any more, so give his daughter a good grade. After I gave her a good grade I suffered* (62:1).

When faculty admitted to changing grades illegally, I sometimes asked how it made them feel.

Many described it as making them feel terrible. Several respondents ended up in tears, and the interview had to be delayed. One woman suggested that it "made her feel violated". But often there were rationalizations. One faculty member at EKSU said that when she changed a grade she knew *that someone else benefited; I did something good for someone else even though I suffered* (62:10). Another said: *For a while I had a firm position about changing grades. But I was making a lot of enemies. Now I try to meet the requests half way. I still make the student study, but I will give him a good grade. I will give a student an easy assignment to complete and then give him/her a good grade. I get phone calls and direct requests. On the inside I know I am not doing the right thing* (82:12).

Education dishonesty (corruption) is a universal concern and perceived to be pervasive. It is also the case there are numerous faculty members who remain adamantly resistant to participation. For instance a professor from TSU mentioned: *When I get a call from a student, do you know what I say? I say, do you know what I love? I love to see you study hard. I don't get angry. I say you don't need to call me. You will do just fine. It is absolutely clear that their call means nothing* (40:2). In an environment of deep personal poverty, massive general disrespect for the law, and ferocious pressures from senior administrators and important public figures to illegally alter grades for personal and protected relatives, there is adamant resistance among the faculty. It may be true what Burton Clark and others have suggested about universities, that they do in fact try to uphold their own definition of moral order.

Although it was widely acknowledged that the problems of corruption were pervasive, there was also evidence that in some instances they were on the decline. All three countries had recently instituted standardized, computer-graded admissions exams with the explicit purpose of addressing the problems of corruption in university admissions. One professor at TSU assessed the results in this way: *Because of the exams… many things have changed. Students from rural areas and from poor homes are more numerous. When bribery was necessary to enter the university, these students had no chance to enter* (35:10).

Does access to a standardized examination eliminate the problems of corruption? Not completely. Said one professor at EKSU: *After 2 years, each college student takes an internal exam designed by the ministry of education. For the first several years it operated fairly. But now it too has become corrupted. Cell phones and cheat sheets (for a price) are allowed into the test* (73:36).

Summary

It is not possible to support a conclusion on the basis of empirical evidence from this project. Interviewed subjects were not chosen at random. Nor is it possible to portray them as representative of national trends. Still, it might be possible to draw some impressions.

Each university among those chosen appears to have different characteristics and challenges. At AUCA the challenge is to live up to its claim of providing an American liberal arts educational experience. In many ways it is already successful. Among the students and faculty interviewed there was a surprising consensus: they would not prefer to be anywhere else. For local faculty, the salaries were significantly in excess of what other

universities could pay (although less than a typical American university). All enjoyed academic freedom and bright, highly motivated students. Academic honesty was considered a principal selling point, in stark contrast to other local universities. Time and again respondents mentioned the rigourous code of conduct and the internal structures for managing breaches of the conduct code, either by students or faculty. Because the reputation of academic honesty is so rare in the region, the precedent may be of importance for all local universities and for any students, whether at AUCA or elsewhere. How else is a Kyrgyz student to know what a normal university looks like if there are no honest local universities?[9] TSU is struggling to rid itself of three past characteristics: corruption, inefficiency and intellectual lethargy (based on Soviet employment principles of an "iron academic rice bowl"). It is undergoing this adjustment with a surprising degree of cooperation and support from among its faculty, despite the fact that many of their positions have been threatened. On the other hand, EKSU is struggling. It is impoverished in resources and handicapped by crippling government regulations and administrative decrees. Because of low mobility, faculty—along with their old beliefs and habits—remain in place for decades. The struggle at EKSU to emerge as a "normal" university will be long and difficult.

There are similarities across all three universities. Faculty leaders exist, even in the most austere and debilitating of environments. There are some who lead by virtue of moral principle. There are others who rise to the occasion and lead on the basis of practical assessment. Regardless of the source of their strength, given this commonality there is a universal standard of the professorate. The standard is parallel to the characteristics identified by Braxton and Bayer (1999). It includes the promise to treat all students with fairness and impartiality. And it includes selecting a common hierarchy among differing moral principles. In particular it requires that faculty choose the principle of fairness (to students and colleagues) over the principle of loyalty to family and friends. In this small but important way, certain faculty in Central Asia and the Caucasus may be leading the way for other local organizations in government, business and the not-for-profit sector. These "quiet heroes" of the university classroom, those who stand up for their principles without legal or administrative support, in their own way these resisters are upholding the principles associated with development and freedom. They do this without the possibility of reward; on the contrary, they do this in spite of making enemies and enduring the criticism of their corrupt administrative superiors. They do this for one reason: that it is right and that it is consistent with what their mothers and fathers taught them.

The future for these universities and for these faculties is not simple. In terms of pedagogy, they will work out standards of excellence and adhere to them gradually but steadily. In terms of teaching history, there are deep problems ahead, stemming particularly from the requirements handed down by ministry authorities. The principal problems are the lack of balance among heroes and villains, exaggerated claims to uniqueness and wisdom, and an omission of the alternative stories of neighbouring groups (including early Russian settlers), an absence which is obvious to all neighbours and many of their own citizens.

In terms of civic values, under the circumstances, many faculties are doing an excellent job. The problem, particularly in EKSU, is that there is little support from the administration underpinning the moral principles in need of reinforcement. There are neither written standards of conduct nor empirical data on corruption. Instead, there is silence and rumor. To uphold standards when the standards are not even written, much less clear, may

[9] In a corruption ranking, a student survey in Kyrgyzstan has listed foreign universities (Turkish and American) as being more honest than any local university (Heyneman et al. 2008).

be too much to expect. In terms of academic freedom, except at AUCA, there is little testing of the water. With the new international connections to universities in Europe, the issue can be expected to become more important and more common at TSU. This would be true of all universities which have close relations with Europe.

In general it can be said that in spite of the considerable differences in precedent and local conditions, that the faculties in each of these three universities were very concerned about having a moral and attitudinal effect on their students. It is possible to conclude that they understood that their effect was expected to be broader than the provision of technical skills. And it is fair to conclude that part of the way in which they see their responsibility is to make social cohesion in their society more possible.

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