Publications as the Route to High Rankings

Since the publication rate is a key ingredient across most international university ranking systems, pushing faculty members to publish in top-tier international journals was viewed as an important strategy to high rankings. In Malaysia's research universities, the pressure to publish in top-tier international journals is intense. Universities have sought to raise publication rates by modifying accountability and incentive systems. The government, working through the universities, has introduced a system of key performance indicators, aimed at specifying the level of productivity—number of publications, amount of teaching, grants and public services—expected of each faculty member.

Research universities in Thailand also emphasize publications in top-tier international journals but with more nuance. Some faculty members are concerned that if they publish in top-tier journals in English language, the results will be largely inaccessible to the wider Thai society, most of whom do not understand English. There was a strong view that it was important for universities to give back to Thai society. Moreover, a frequent observation was that some faculty members may be less comfortable writing in English language at the level required for top-tier international journals.

Graduate students are viewed as important contributors to publications, both as they assist in conducting faculty members' research and as they publish as part of their graduate program requirements. In Malaysia and Thailand, PhD students in selective universities are required to publish their research in journals as a condition of graduation. Perceiving graduate students being valuable to help move their institutions up in university rankings, research universities involved in this study are in the process of reducing their undergraduate enrollment—while increasing their graduate enrollment, with a target ratio of 1:1 for undergraduates to graduates.

In summary, in both Malaysia and Thailand, the initial rationale for expanding graduate education was to provide qualified instructional staff to serve expanding undergraduate enrollment. In both countries, this rationale was eclipsed, to a large extent, by the view that graduate education would help fuel national economic development. The focus on economic development triggered an intensified emphasis on universities placing high in international rankings, which led to pressure for more research. This pressure led some faculty members to focus more of their time and energy on research, sometimes at the expense of their teaching. In short, "expanding up" has changed organizational dynamics and the nature of faculty work in important ways.

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The Unified State Exam in Russia: Problems and Perspectives

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Russian universities have undergone two significant changes since the collapse of the Soviet Union: the dramatic cuts in state financial support that accompanied the adoption of a market economy and integration into the European higher education system through the Bologna process. Both reforms remain incomplete. Universities are still dependent on the state. There are more universities than necessary, and the level of education they offer is sometimes questionable. Corruption in many forms and in large volumes in the university admissions process and during university studies is the other challenge, with which many universities still have to deal.

Corruption in University Admissions

The university admissions process has been one of the most problematic issues in Russian higher education in terms of corruption. Until 2009, each university in Russia held its own entrance examination. The level of corruption in this area was the highest of all kinds of corruption in education. By 2004, it had reached 10.7 billion rubles (US$455 million) per year. In order to solve this problem, university admission is now awarded on the basis of the EGE (Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen—Unified State Exam) tests that serve as both a school final examination and for university entrance. The EGE gives potential students the opportunity to apply to several universities simultaneously, which had not been possible before. With the EGE replacing the previous entrance examinations, there is no longer a need to visit a university during the application process and spend a few weeks on campus—expenditures that not all families could afford. Now, however, corruption has moved largely from the universities to other areas—including the processes responsible for conducting the EGE itself.

Public Opinion and Empirical Results

The sociological surveys conducted regularly by the Levada Center, one of the best-known Russian opinion research institutes, show that a majority of respondents believe that,

with the introduction of the EGE, the number of bribes—*blat* (the use of informal networks to obtain goods and services)—and other violations in the university admissions process have remained the same (34%) or even increased (30%). Only a small group of survey participants (13%) believes that the EGE has helped to decrease those violations.

Our own research, conducted in 2013 at selected universities in the Russian Far East, shows similar results: 31 percent of the survey respondents observed some violations during the EGE; 14 percent of them observed these violations personally, while 17 percent referenced their relatives or friends. These violations include disseminating exam questions before the examination, using mobile phones (for Internet searches or SMS), receiving help from the onsite proctors, and reopening sealed test envelopes to correct mistakes.

Besides the EGE, there is another opportunity for cheating and corruption in the university admissions process. In our survey, 12 percent of the participants had heard about other types of violations during the university admissions process from their friends and relatives, and only 4 percent had any personal experience with them. These violations include monetary and nonmonetary payments, for example, to gain admission to a budgeted place—a place for a student that is paid for by the state and not by individual tuition. Another possible violation involves bribes or preferential treatment, such as receiving a special contract—preferential conditions for students, such as a contract between industry and university.

There are a few recent tendencies worth noting: the number of orphans, students with disabilities, and students with diplomas for achievements in academic competitions (*olympiady*) has increased significantly. Those three categories also receive preferential treatment during the university admissions process. The approach here is selective, however: one the respondents in our study mentioned that a real orphan was not considered, and other students complained that not all results of *olympiady* were counted.

Who Benefits From High EGE Scores?

The first group of beneficiaries is school graduates—the potential students. High scores might open the doors of elite universities to them and increase the chance for getting a state-budgeted place. The second group is the universities. The Higher School of Economics monitors almost all Russian universities according to the average EGE scores of their applicants. Freshmen with more than 70 points (out of 100) are considered to be high-performance students, while freshmen with less than 56 points are the opposite. Universities that accept students with a score of less than 56 might be singled out by the Russian Ministry of Education and Research for negative sanctions. The third group of beneficiaries is the secondary schools: the more graduates with high EGE scores they have, the better the schools' reputation. This interdependence of all involved actors—students, universities, and secondary schools—might make remedying the various forms of corruption at this level difficult. These forms of corruption might not even involve money: During the EGE, a school teacher might leave a class for a few minutes and thus give young people an opportunity to take out crib sheets or ponies. The teacher might be guided only by his/her concern for the professional future of the students.

The question for the future is whether this new system will hinder or actually promote corruption. In Russia, where corruption is endemic, it might not disappear completely. Nevertheless, the introduction of the EGE has been a very important step in the Russian education system, encouraging universities to work more transparently and permitting the students' mobility to increase significantly since its introduction. The data from Rosstat, the Russian Federal State Statistic Service, shows a high influx of students in regions (out of 85), which since 2009 have the highest educational standards. On the other hand, regions with low standards are suffering. Our data from the Russian Far East prove this tendency: every year, the major universities in urban areas enroll more and more students from small towns and villages. ■

Survey of *International Higher Education* Readers

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For the first time, we surveyed our readers concerning their views and perspectives in order to improve this publication. We are quite gratified by the very positive views expressed in the survey. Nearly 20 percent of subscribers from 86 different countries completed the survey. Of these, an overwhelming majority expressed satisfaction with *International Higher Education*'s article length and geographic coverage. Respondents also indicated very clearly their sense that our content is of consistent quality and provides accurate and reliable information on the range of topics presented.