
18. Academic misconduct at Russian universities: forms and acceptance

Elena Denisova-Schmidt

Academic dishonesty is not a new phenomenon in Russian higher education, but what is new is its scope and complexity as well as conflicting pressures to mitigate or ignore this growing challenge (Denisova-Schmidt, 2023). While there have been relatively few empirical studies on corruption in this sector covering the period before 1990—and those studies that were carried out typically limited themselves to specific phenomena such as admissions through personal connections or *blat* (Ledeneva 1998; Tromly, 2014)—this corresponds to the global trend. Researchers only began to pay attention to corruption in higher education in the 1990s (Heyneman, 2013; Denisova-Schmidt, 2016a), spurred on by the rise in massification and the subsequent growth in competition among all involved stakeholders. Since then, research has been carried out in Russia on almost all of the challenges relating to academic integrity so that it is possible to create a glossary of the lack of academic integrity in the style of Tauginienė and her colleagues (Tauginienė et al., 2018) encompassing more than 250 entries. Other recent studies have dealt with cheating among students (Chirikov & Shmeleva, 2020; Chirikov et al., 2020; Dremova et al., 2023; Maloshonok & Shmeleva, 2019; Shmeleva, 2016) and among faculty members and young scholars (Abalkina, 2023b; Chawla, 2020; Guba & Slovgorodsky, 2022; Kopotev et al., 2021; Makeeva et al., 2020; Rostovtsev, 2015), manipulations during enrolment (Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva, 2022) and other forms of academic misconduct and integrity (on academic collusion, Titaev, 2012; on academic tourism, Sokolov, 2009; on paper mills, Abalkina, 2023a; and more, Abalkina & Libman, 2020; Golunov, 2014; Kuzminov & Yudkevich, 2021, 2022; Mandel, 2020; Oleksiyenko, 2022; Osipian, 2012, 2020; Smirnov et al., 2017; Sokolov, 2021; Trubnikova, 2020) as well as the most recent reforms and measures for preventing and/or mitigating academic dishonesty (Denisova-Schmidt, 2020, 2021; Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2020), including some successful measures such as the introduction of the *EGE* (*Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen*) (Engl.: Unified State Exam), a test that serves as both secondary school finals and university entrance examination (equivalent to the SAT in the US). Before the introduction of the EGE, every university had its own entrance exams that created a realm for significant monetary and non-monetary corruption within higher education that reached 10.7 billion rubles (US\$455 million) per year according to some estimates (Galitskii & Levin, 2004). The introduction of the *EGE* significantly reduced the necessity of a bribe to be enrolled.

Studies on corruption in Russian higher education serve as an indicator not only of problematic areas but also—and most importantly—of the willingness and courage of many scholars and practitioners to address the topic and raise their concerns. It should be noted that corruption in Russian higher education is not an isolated phenomenon; rather, it is part of an entire system encompassing business, politics, and society at large (see the large-scale studies including Ledeneva, 1998, 2006, 2013; Shekshnia et al., 2017; Rochlitz et al., 2020). Although corruption is endemic in Russia, some positive trends have been observed in recent years. There is no longer an urgent need to bring a present (typically a premium chocolate box with or without cash hidden inside) in order to get attention from officials, obtain access to health services, or solve a multitude of other problems of everyday Russian life. What remains unchanged, however, are the structural power issues and specifically, elections. Starting with the re-election of President Boris Yeltsin in 1996, all Russian elections have been well-organized shows, sometimes with sophisticated tools and sometimes with obvious fraud (Barsukova & Denisova-Schmidt, 2023; Wilson, 2024).

In this chapter, I focus on academic misconduct with direct student involvement. I discuss many of the techniques, their frequency, and their acceptance among students, faculty members, and staff, as well as the possible reasons behind these activities. I argue that although other types of corruption with direct and indirect student involvement are present at universities, it is crucial to focus on students simply because past behaviour is a strong predictor of future behaviour. The academic literature suggests that students who cheat at university are significantly more likely to be dishonest in their professional and private lives in adulthood. Imagine a student who must buy their way into university studies, pay for exams or for a degree; how would they act when it comes time to make crucial decisions that impact human lives as teachers, physicians, politicians, or other experts and leaders?

This chapter is organized as follows—first, I describe my data sets; then, I focus on various cheating techniques among students and highlight the complexity of corruption using an example of bribery. Finally, I discuss the possible reasons behind academic corruption in Russian higher education and conclude with further developments and an outlook.

DATA SETS

The data sets used in this chapter are based on my long-term research on this topic with intensive fieldwork before the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes interviews with faculty members, staff, and students (n=52) collected between 2008 and 2012; a survey (n=485), focus groups (n=7), and expert interviews (n=23) with students conducted during the 2012–13 academic year; a student survey (n=463) conducted two years later in 2014–15; and the recent student survey (n=2,003) in 2016–17 (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016, 2021). All studies were conducted in the Russian Far East at selected public universities rated by the Russian Ministry of Education at average efficiency and above. My primary reason for choosing to conduct studies

in this region is the existence of an infrastructure for undertaking such sensitive research, as well as the presence of colleagues courageous enough to share their insights.

Additional data comes from interviews with citizens (n=115) collected in 2013 in five different regions in Russia—Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Novosibirsk, Khabarovsk, and their suburbs (Denisova-Schmidt, 2014). Additional interviews (n=640) and focus groups (n=9) were conducted with citizens in five major cities in the Russian Far East—Yakutsk (Sakha Republic [Yakutia]), Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk-on-Amur (Khabarovskii Krai), Vladivostok (Primorskii Krai), and Blagoveshchensk (Amurskaia Oblast) in 2019 (Denisova-Schmidt & Solovyeva, 2022; Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2022). In both studies, interviewees were asked about their experiences with and attitudes towards corruption as well as their trust in local institutions, the serious problems in their communities, and their social norms and values. Throughout the chapter, I attempted to back up all study outcomes with the relevant data sources.

I have examined most of the forms of academic dishonesty common in the post-Soviet context, including *shpargalka* (the Russian name for a cheat sheet) or any other unauthorized materials used by students during tests and exams, as well as plagiarism, preferential treatment, presents, informal agreements, and other more questionable practices like services and payments in exchange for grades.

CHEATING STUDENTS OF RUSSIA

In one of my most recent studies, conducted with Martin Huber, Elvira Leontyeva, and Anna Solovyeva (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2021; Solovyeva, 2020), 61% of students admitted that they cheat on tests and exams; 72% said they plagiarize from other texts when writing papers; 38% claimed they download papers from the internet and submit them as their own; 27% pay for term papers or written coursework; and one out of every three students begs for preferential treatment from faculty members. While the frequency of such activities varies—the respondents could choose between rarely, sometimes, often, or systemically—their prevalence is most concerning. Also concerning is the fact that nearly one out of every five students surveyed had experience with bribes in one way or another while studying at a university.

Do some students cheat more than others? In other studies conducted with my colleagues, I had an opportunity to compare first-year students and recent graduates in terms of their experiences with academic integrity. Rather than relying on descriptive statistics, we used propensity score matching, a statistical tool that allows for an accurate and reliable comparison of different subjects—in our case, first-year students and graduates. The results suggest that student acceptance of the use of various cheating techniques increases significantly during their university studies. Using crib sheets and other unauthorized materials during exams increased by 12%; copying during exams or tests by 25%; downloading term papers or other papers from the internet by 15%; purchasing term papers or other papers from special

agencies or from other students by 12.5%; and giving a professor fraudulent or misleading excuses for poor academic performance by 11%. Graduates claimed to have heard about bribes at universities more frequently than first-year students. Even after adjusting covariates for the two student groups, the difference in awareness across the groups amounts to 52% (Denisova-Schmidt et al., 2016).

My other data sets analysed using PLUM (Polytomous Universal Model) regression analysis, based on McCullagh's (1980) methodology suggest some trends. Students with negative attitudes towards corruption (those defining corruption as bad or as a crime) have more experience with bribes at universities and less with asking a faculty member for individual accommodation (both significant at the 1% level). Interestingly, compared to students paying for their own studies, students enrolled on *budzhetnye mesta*¹ are more likely to resort to cheat sheets or copying from neighbours or other unauthorized sources during exams and tests (significant at the 1% level), yet they purchase term papers from ghostwriters (significant at the 5% level) and copy and paste from the internet without acknowledging their sources significantly less often (10% level).

Students from poorer families (those with enough money for food only), in contrast to students from wealthy families, resort to cheat sheets during exams significantly less often. Students living with their parents or renting an apartment cheat less compared to students living in the dormitory. Additionally, students working four to six hours a week cheat less compared to students working more than eight hours (10% in all three cases).

Students with satisfactory academic achievement have on average less experience with bribes compared to students with the highest achievements (10% level), but they are more likely to download term papers from the internet or purchase them from ghostwriters (10% level); copy from unauthorized sources during exams and tests (5% level); lie to faculty members when explaining problems associated with studies (10% level); and ask for preferential treatment (1% level). They are less likely to copy and paste from the internet without acknowledging their sources, however (5% level). Again, compared to students with excellent marks, students with satisfactory to good academic achievements more often use unauthorized materials during exams and tests (10% level).

The time students spend doing homework correlates with various cheating techniques (more than three hours per day is a reference group). Students who do no homework at all are more likely to use unauthorized materials during testing (10% level) and ask faculty members for preferential treatment (10% level). Students spending less than one hour per day are more inclined to download term papers from the internet (5% level).

The financial security of the students correlates with some malpractices. In contrast to students from wealthy families, students with only enough money for food and clothing rarely ask faculty members for preferential treatment (10% level), while students with sufficient resources for food and clothing but not enough for durable clothes are more likely to lie to faculty members when explaining their academic achievements (5% level). Students spending less than 1,000 RUB (~US\$20) in a

month are less likely to write papers by copying and pasting from the internet (5% level) or use unauthorized materials during exams (10% level) compared to students spending more than 20,000 RUB (~US\$400) in a month.

Copying and pasting from the internet is more common among students from small cities (5% level); from cities with a population of 20,000 to 50,000 (5% level); and from 250,000 to 500,000 people (10% level) than students from villages. Students from big cities (with 500,000 to 1,000,000 inhabitants) use cheat sheets more frequently.

Students who do not work cheat less during exams (10% level) compared to students who work eight hours a week. Students living in dormitories copy and paste from the internet more frequently when writing academic papers compared to those living with their parents or renting an apartment (10% level).

Moreover, the results suggest that students who perceive corruption to be a widespread phenomenon have more experience with both non-monetary and monetary forms of cheating. Does social standing really determine consciousness? The study design did not allow endogeneity to be fully addressed, making it difficult to determine definitively cause and consequence. Does exposure to bribing, a real experience with corruption, influence a student's negative attitude towards this phenomenon? Do students with only satisfactory results just not know how to bribe, or can they not afford to do it to change their marks in their favour?

Nevertheless, the awareness that everyone is corrupt does indeed influence one's own corrupt behaviour. Other covariates including gender, personal characteristics (such as academic achievement before university admission), social activities, motives for getting a higher education, and study strategies do not correlate with cheating. It should be mentioned that the data set is relatively small ($n=350$) and covers only one region (the Russian Far East). More research is needed to draw broader conclusions.

Tables 18.1a–18.1j provide more details on the sample. Both genders were represented equally in all fields (male 54.3%, female 45.7%), while more female students were in humanities (81.6%) and more male students in technical sciences (70.8%). The majority of students were enrolled on *budzhetnye mesta* (61.6%) and there were some trends in disciplines: more students receiving state support were in technical sciences (87.4%) while humanities had an almost equal percentage of state-supported students (53.1%) and students paying for themselves (46.9%). Table 18.2 demonstrates the reasons students have for choosing a specific university. The level of education (4.39) provided by the school as well as professional level of the faculty (4.20) and orientation and practice for a future profession (4.19) seem to be the leading reasons. It is interesting that the possibility to participate in international programs is attractive, but not so high (2.84) in the total sample. Students probably assess their chances realistically; not all universities have a network of international partners and without a stipend, not all students can afford international study.

Table 18.1a PLUM regression estimation results—behaviour

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Perception of the issue (scale variable)	0.518*** (0.097)	0.574*** (0.077)	0.462*** (0.068)	0.292*** (0.071)	0.438*** (0.063)	0.484*** (0.077)	0.465*** (0.067)	0.445*** (0.070)
Formal ways of job searching (scale variable)	0.101 (0.084)	−0.042 (0.066)	−0.074 (0.083)	0.030 (0.072)	0.038 (0.063)	0.063 (0.063)	0.017 (0.071)	−0.142* (0.080)
Negative attitude towards corruption (dummy variable)	0.822*** (0.245)	−0.008 (0.143)	−0.060 (0.143)	−0.243 (0.165)	0.051 (0.136)	−0.053 (0.136)	−0.241 (0.156)	−0.416*** (0.156)

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Higher education helps to get a good education and a good job (dummy variable)	-0.214 (0.305)	-0.144 (0.198)	0.072 (0.199)	-0.028 (0.231)	-0.161 (0.188)	-0.226 (0.190)	-0.027 (0.214)	0.447* (0.232)
Male gender (dummy variable)	0.347 (0.228)	-0.167 (0.145)	-0.073 (0.146)	-0.118 (0.170)	0.071 (0.138)	-0.142 (0.137)	-0.065 (0.157)	-0.160 (0.153)
State stipend (dummy variable)	0.044 (0.231)	0.411*** (0.148)	0.216 (0.148)	0.396** (0.177)	-0.252* (0.139)	0.302** (0.142)	-0.165 (0.161)	-0.147 (0.155)

Table 18.1b PLUM regression estimation results—income status of the family

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Enough for food only	0.397 (0.795)	−1.685*** (0.573)	−6.231 (432.488)	−6.111 (2624.151)	0.081 (0.541)	−1.113* (0.573)	−6.886 (8052.917)	−0.791 (0.690)
Enough for food and clothing	−3.538 (11.020)	−0.256 (0.380)	−0.016 (0.371)	−0.614 (0.479)	0.452 (0.362)	0.220 (0.360)	0.001 (0.443)	−0.848* (0.473)
Not enough for durable goods	−0.627 (0.421)	−0.156 (0.238)	0.302 (0.239)	0.359 (0.282)	−0.014 (0.231)	0.121 (0.229)	0.657** (0.263)	0.125 (0.253)
Enough for durable goods	0.026 (0.291)	0.225 (0.200)	0.092 (0.198)	0.223 (0.237)	−0.113 (0.192)	−0.075 (0.190)	0.146 (0.220)	0.046 (0.213)

Note: “Enough for everything” is a reference group.

Table 18.1c PLUM regression estimation results—how much do you spend monthly (excluding housing)?

Dependent variable	bribes at university	using cheat sheets	downloading a course paper	buying a course paper	copying and pasting by writing	copying during examinations or tests	deceiving a professor	asking for preferential treatment
Less than 10,000 RUB	0.064 (0.382)	-0.149 (0.256)	-0.130 (0.251)	-0.431 (0.286)	-0.525** (0.245)	-0.456* (0.243)	-0.353 (0.271)	0.155 (0.278)
Between 10,000 and 15,000 RUB	-0.049 (0.373)	-0.034 (0.248)	-0.213 (0.242)	-0.093 (0.272)	-0.295 (0.238)	-0.127 (0.234)	-0.347 (0.265)	-0.018 (0.271)
Between 15,000 and 20,000 RUB	-0.278 (0.441)	-0.011 (0.299)	-0.111 (0.293)	-0.466 (0.347)	-0.218 (0.285)	0.016 (0.282)	0.219 (0.310)	0.195 (0.319)

Note: “More than 20,000 RUB” is a reference group.

Table 18.1d PLUM regression estimation results—where do you live?

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Dormitory	−0.127 (0.310)	0.081 (0.202)	−0.238 (0.200)	−0.174 (0.238)	0.348* (0.193)	0.039 (0.193)	−0.106 (0.215)	0.057 (0.215)
With parents/ relatives or own flat	−0.153 (0.387)	−0.863*** (0.261)	−0.186 (0.251)	0.028 (0.303)	0.342 (0.242)	−0.119 (0.241)	−0.374 (0.279)	0.028 (0.279)

Note: “Rent a flat” is a reference group.

Table 18.1e PLUM regression estimation results—what was your EGE result?

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Less than 150	0.513 (0.893)	0.693 (0.587)	0.770 (0.633)	0.899 (0.803)	0.789 (0.562)	0.877 (0.570)	0.041 (0.753)	−0.300 (0.619)
Between 150 and 200	0.471 (0.826)	0.661 (0.558)	0.695 (0.604)	0.590 (0.776)	0.823 (0.534)	0.601 (0.545)	0.021 (0.720)	−0.284 (0.588)
Between 200 and 250	0.049 (0.842)	0.671 (0.563)	0.891 (0.609)	0.804 (0.779)	0.797 (0.540)	0.570 (0.549)	0.408 (0.723)	0.075 (0.594)

Note: “More than 250” is a reference group.

Table 18.If PLUM regression estimation results—do you work, and, if so, how many hours per day is your average workload?

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Do not work	−0.172 (0.488)	0.162 (0.354)	−0.207 (0.343)	−0.103 (0.397)	−0.308 (0.346)	−0.638* (0.346)	−0.530 (0.359)	0.152 (0.367)
Less than 4 hours	−0.934 (0.656)	0.520 (0.414)	−0.274 (0.401)	−0.342 (0.468)	−0.512 (0.399)	−0.502 (0.400)	−0.313 (0.423)	−0.138 (0.441)
4–6 hours	−0.303 (0.604)	0.938** (0.410)	0.182 (0.394)	0.540 (0.444)	0.037 (0.394)	−0.137 (0.396)	−0.152 (0.409)	0.015 (0.433)
6–7 hours	−0.544 (0.636)	0.673 (0.423)	−0.116 (0.412)	0.413 (0.466)	−0.162 (0.412)	−0.475 (0.409)	−0.477 (0.445)	0.111 (0.466)

Note: “More than 8 hours” is a reference group.

Table 18.1g PLUM regression estimation results—what are the most frequent marks you get at the university?

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Satisfactory	−1.308* (0.677)	0.635 (0.424)	0.721* (0.403)	0.841* (0.468)	−0.932** (0.677)	0.788** (0.402)	0.818* (0.433)	1.143*** (0.423)
Between Satisfactory and Good	−0.570 (0.406)	0.261 (0.299)	−0.130 (0.295)	0.497 (0.364)	−0.877*** (0.406)	0.478* (0.290)	0.089 (0.329)	−0.131 (0.308)
Good	−0.538 (0.413)	−0.022 (0.294)	0.021 (0.289)	0.415 (0.353)	−0.697** (0.294)	0.227 (0.284)	0.300 (0.317)	0.218 (0.304)
Between Good and Excellent	−0.308 (0.369)	−0.022 (0.274)	−0.234 (0.268)	−0.168 (0.337)	−0.785*** (0.276)	0.091 (0.264)	0.088 (0.295)	−0.227 (0.282)

Note: “Excellent” is a reference group.

Table 18.1h PLUM regression estimation results—how many hours per day do you spend on self-study/
homework/preparation for classes?

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
None	−0.079 (0.659)	0.472 (0.515)	0.201 (0.462)	0.325 (0.498)	−0.113 (0.458)	0.850* (0.488)	0.512 (0.472)	0.835* (0.490)
Less than 1 hour	−0.117 (0.421)	0.120 (0.272)	0.615** (0.258)	0.173 (0.309)	0.232 (0.254)	0.730*** (0.256)	0.477** (0.274)	0.418 (0.270)
1–2 hours	−0.301 (0.297)	−0.242 (0.192)	0.238 (0.193)	0.178 (0.229)	0.099 (0.184)	0.125 (0.182)	−0.014 (0.210)	0.215 (0.201)
2–3 hours	−0.413 (0.286)	−0.046 (0.185)	0.190 (0.188)	0.283 (0.223)	0.030 (0.177)	−0.186 (0.177)	−0.219 (0.207)	−0.038 (0.199)

Note: “More than 3 hours” is a reference group.

Table 18.1i *PLUM regression estimation results—place of origin*

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
City, more than 1 mln pop	0.950 (0.872)	-0.882 (0.551)	-0.095 (0.552)	-0.959 (0.670)	0.806 (0.529)	0.017 (0.525)	-0.343 (0.620)	-0.189 (0.604)
City, 0.5 to 1 mln pop	0.754 (0.704)	0.775* (0.415)	0.035 (0.416)	-0.116 (0.477)	0.349 (0.393)	0.204 (0.395)	0.001 (0.444)	-0.284 (0.460)
City, 0.25 to 0.5 mln pop	0.737 (0.681)	0.346 (0.405)	-0.318 (0.416)	-0.285 (0.465)	0.745* (0.385)	0.236 (0.386)	-0.131 (0.443)	-0.523 (0.472)
City, 0.05 to 0.25 mln pop	0.170 (0.665)	0.162 (0.370)	-0.016 (0.377)	-0.040 (0.421)	0.531 (0.353)	0.309 (0.355)	0.020 (0.398)	0.024 (0.412)
City, 0.02 to 0.05 mln pop	0.066 (0.684)	0.135 (0.384)	-0.227 (0.392)	-0.279 (0.444)	0.918** (0.370)	0.131 (0.370)	-0.004 (0.411)	0.251 (0.422)
Small city	1.047 (0.656)	0.494 (0.385)	-0.040 (0.390)	-0.619 (0.454)	0.759** (0.367)	0.212 (0.369)	-0.550 (0.421)	-0.075 (0.427)

Note: “Village” is a reference group.

Table 18.1j PLUM regression estimation results—statistics

Dependent variable	Bribes at university	Using cheat sheets	Downloading a course paper	Buying a course paper	Copying and pasting by writing	Copying during examinations or tests	Deceiving a professor	Asking for preferential treatment
Constant, threshold	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Link function	Probit	Complementary Log-log	Probit	Probit	Probit	Probit	Probit	Complimentary Log-log
Goodness of fit, Pearson	0.000	0.000	0.994	1.000	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000
test p-value								
Cox&Snell	0.345	0.376	0.595	0.675	0.262	0.354	0.766	0.804
Pseudo R ²								

Note: Ordinal regression using PLUM procedure in SPSS. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1, 5, and 10% level, respectively.

Table 18.2 *When choosing a university, what is important to you? By discipline where enrolled*

Reasons	Total	Humanities	Social Sciences	Technical Science	Natural Science
Professional level of the faculty	4.20	4.16	4.23	4.17	4.44
Intellectual and personal development	4.09	4.33	4.18	3.95	4.33
Orientation and practice for a future profession	4.19	4.16	4.12	4.23	4.56
Interesting and useful classes	3.91	3.96	4.02	3.83	3.89
Level of education	4.39	4.45	4.40	4.37	4.44
The possibility to participate in international programs	2.84	3.22	2.92	2.70	2.33
Having fun	3.30	3.31	3.37	3.26	3.11
Self-expression in sport and creativity	3.23	3.51	3.17	3.23	2.67
Finding new friends	3.32	3.59	3.11	3.37	3.56
Getting married	2.44	2.33	2.33	2.55	2.33
Recommendations of friends/relatives	2.81	3.02	2.77	2.79	2.56
High university ranking	3.81	3.71	3.97	3.71	3.89

Note: 1 is not important; 5 is very important.

Table 18.3 presents students' studying strategies. Many young people use only their own notes (3.49) and search for additional information on Wikipedia (4.68). Searching for additional sources on the subject in a library (2.14) and reading textbooks (2.64) seem to be less popular strategies among students. Some students do not prepare at all (1.86).

The survey conducted among citizens in the Russian Far East in 2019 suggests that 20% of respondents pay (or have paid) faculty members for an exam; 16% pay (or used to pay) bribes for enrolment to kindergarten or a good secondary school (Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2022; Denisova-Schmidt & Solovyeva, 2022). In the next section, I demonstrate how complicated a simple form of corruption like bribery can be, for example, when offering or giving money for an illegal or unethical action. I argue that the transaction must be suggested in an appropriate way and all of the involved actors must be willing and able to proceed; moreover, the payment may not be for an illegal action at all.

Table 18.3 Studying strategies: how do you usually prepare for your lectures and seminars? By discipline where enrolled

Level of effort	Study strategy	Total	Humanities	Social Sciences	Technical Sciences	Natural Sciences
Maximum	Read additional literature recommended by a professor	2.59	2.61	2.50	2.63	2.89
Maximum	Search for additional sources on the subject in a library	2.14	2.31	2.07	2.14	2.33
Average	Read textbooks	2.64	2.71	2.61	2.61	3.22
Average	Use only own notes	3.49	3.82	3.35	3.50	3.33
Minimum	Search for additional sources on Wikipedia	4.68	4.63	4.73	4.64	4.89
Minimum	Use notes of other students	2.76	2.41	2.61	2.98	2.67
No program	Do not prepare	1.86	1.82	1.86	1.87	1.78
No program	Do not attend	1.69	1.73	1.72	1.66	1.56

Note: 1 is never; 5, systematically.

MANY SHADES OF BRIBERY

In one of my studies conducted in 2013 in Russia, one male respondent, a policeman in his early 50s, conveyed his satisfaction with local institutions by describing his experience with the higher education sector. He told me a story involving his son, a full-time student at a public university:

My son had some problems with sport [at the university] and could not pass a test in the form of a cross-country race. In the fall, when his fellow students were passing this test, he was sick. The instructor offered him the chance to pass this test in the winter during final exams week. Running in the stadium at this time of year? On the snow and ice? It was almost impossible and this was clearly understood by both my son and the instructor himself. Therefore, the instructor suggested an alternative option—purchasing a set of lamps for the department instead. My son immediately called me and requested money for the lamps. I said that I would not give him any money and called the vice-chancellor of the university. My conversation was brief. I asked the vice-chancellor to sort out this matter with the instructor. I told him, if this did not happen, then I would pay a visit, not as a father of a student but as a policeman in uniform with my colleagues from the local prosecutor's office. I did not mention the name of the instructor in the conversation, but the vice-chancellor immediately knew who I was talking about. In 15 minutes, my son received a passing grade for his test.

In my fieldwork, I was not able to talk with the university or the instructor involved, but this case seemed very common at that time. An instructor has a formal obligation to require all tests, even with an official excuse like a sickness approved by a physician. Some subjects may allow tests to be taken at a later date, but it was difficult in this case to do a cross-country run in winter conditions. Would the faculty member have behaved differently if he were not obliged to require all tests for a passing grade? Can bribery be reduced by giving faculty members more freedom in their decisions? Moreover, the purchasing of lamps was intended for the shared use of other faculty members and staff and not for the instructor's personal benefit. Would the trainer have behaved differently if there was no need to improve working conditions? Or can bribery be mitigated by knowing one's rights and fighting for them as was done by the policeman father?

That respondent went on to tell another story about his own education. After receiving his first higher degree in the field of informatics, he began to work for the police in the mid-1990s as an IT engineer. Gradually, he advanced to a high position. In order to move further up the career ladder, it was necessary for him to obtain an additional degree in his professional field. The respondent did this by studying as a part-time student at one of the institutes of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He was reluctant to obtain this second degree because he thought it was a waste of time. To begin with, only completely healthy people are accepted into the institutes of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the respondent had high blood pressure, which would be an official reason for turning him down. Upon his arrival at the university for enrolment, he had to pass the medical examination as a prerequisite for entering the institute. When the respondent went to the doctor's office at the institute, the

doctor immediately told him that he was expecting guests that evening, gave him the names of the various cognac brands he preferred, and explained how to find the nearest liquor store. The respondent said that the doctor himself could go to that liquor store, and the doctor began to threaten that he would not let the respondent pass the medical exam. In other words, the decision about the respondent's acceptance at the institute depended entirely on this doctor. The respondent was unacceptable anyway due to his high blood pressure; he did not want to study but found out that the institute could accept more students than the number of actual applicants. Thus, the situation was somewhat different; the institute depended on a large number of applicants. The respondent described his experiences to other prospective students who feared that they would not pass the medical examination. All the applicants were at that time police officers with extensive work experience. In the end, all were accepted, including those who were inadmissible for health reasons.

Does the appearance of education have more value than the education itself? Does the necessity of formal certificates for career promotions drive people to unethical behaviour? Do the ends justify the means? Bribery is a classical and much-condemned form of corruption, but the context behind it may be complex.

WHY IS CHEATING SO WIDESPREAD AMONG STUDENTS?

Secondary School Education

Some students might cheat to compensate for inadequate secondary school preparation. The inequality in access to a good secondary education has reached unprecedented levels (Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2020). Many young people are dependent on private tutoring or *repetitorstvo*: about 60% of students work with private tutors (Klein, 2018) while more research is needed on what the other 40% do. This does not mean that those students do not need tutoring; very often it means that their families cannot afford it, especially a long-term engagement. Parents in Russia spend 7.5 hours per week on average assisting their children with school assignments (compared to about 3.6 hours in the United Kingdom, about 3.9 hours in France, about 5 hours in Germany, and about 6.5 hours in the United States). About 70% of parents monitor their children's homework on a daily basis (Kuzminov & Yudkevich, 2021). The secondary school curriculum is tough, and it can be difficult for students to cope on their own without the help of private tutoring or parents.

Regimented University Structure

Most universities in Russia are not flexible enough in adjusting the state curriculum. Some faculty members report: "It's very difficult and even physically impossible to complete the academic program on my subject [Theory of Mechanics]. Besides, we don't read some lectures from the academic program, because it's impossible to master the entire course according to GOST² during the time planned by the curriculum"

(female, associate professor, 2012); “The academic program is really not ideal [in Philosophy] [...] It is overwhelming for an ordinary student. [...] If you want to kindle the students’ interest, you should skip some lectures and pay more attention to other topics to have enough time to explain something to students” (female, associate professor, 2012) (cited from Denisova-Schmidt, 2016a). Moreover, students are often not allowed to choose their courses.

Young people usually have a set number of classes to attend and be graded on during a semester. The pressure might not be manageable for some students, especially those who have a part-time job to survive. Moreover, the amount of independent study, reading, and writing assignments is enormous, and even honest, highly motivated students avoid sleeping, eating, or engaging in hobbies to meet all the demands (Leontyeva, 2010).

Common Knowledge and Academic Culture

Many students are often unaware that they are doing anything wrong, especially when they write papers by copying and pasting. Many data suggest that (partly) copying and pasting from other sources is a common way of writing academic papers generally, including papers written by faculty members. Makeeva and colleagues (2020) argue that minor plagiarism is widespread among Russian academia and compare this practice with drivers who speed in the country—many drivers would find it acceptable to go 10–15 kmh over the limit but not 50 kmh or more. This became obvious while I was editing three books with students, together with my colleague, Elvira Leontyeva (Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Even very bright students questioned the necessity of proper citation—“This is only theory” or “This is a storyline of one famous book or a plot of a popular movie. Why should I quote?” Indeed, in some academic cultures there is a different concept of plagiarism, where certain material is widely considered to be common knowledge—like the Bible—and does not need to be cited properly.

Non-academic Incentives for Attending University

Some potential students might be interested in the other opportunities that universities offer. My empirical data from 2015 show that some students attend universities for purposes other than academic study and consider self-expression in sport and creativity (48.2%), such as participation in *Universiade* (now the FISU World University Games) or *KVN*³ to be among the most important reasons for choosing a university. Those students often do not have enough time for their studies, but these ancillary activities are important for marketing universities. If students are admitted on a sport contract in Russia, they have great opportunities to perform and later launch an excellent career in sports. They also have to be good students, but only on paper—the reality might be different. Those students usually do not have time to attend classes or do any homework since they are often travelling and participating in different competitions.

Another crucial incentive for some male students is that they are usually not eligible to be drafted during their university studies. Even now, during an ongoing war, male students at Russian (and Ukrainian) universities are not being drafted.

WHY DO FACULTY AND STAFF ALLOW IT?

Faculty members and university administration often ignore or pretend to ignore academic misconduct for many reasons.

Academic Career

Teaching is becoming less important for an academic career. In 2013, the Russian government started several programs aimed at improving the country's research universities to make them world-class. This is in line with international trends in higher education. Consider, for example, the Research Excellence Framework in the UK, the Excellence in Research assessment in Australia, or some more explicit academic excellence initiatives (AEI) such as *Exzellenzinitiative* in Germany (2005), the Double First-Class University Plan in China (2015), the Excellence Initiative—Research Universities in Poland (2019) among others (Yudkevich et al., 2023). One of the programs in Russia was Project 5-100, so called for its explicit goal of placing five universities among the top 100 in the world rankings. Although only 21 universities participated in this project, the entire system has changed for more than 900 private and public universities. At the time these changes began, the majority of Russian universities were only responsible for teaching while high-level research was traditionally conducted outside of the universities at the Academy of Science or in industry (Graham & Dezhina, 2008). Moreover, the level of English proficiency among many faculty members did not allow most to participate in international collaborations, communicate on professional topics with colleagues, read most academic literature, or write academic papers (Kuzminov & Yudkevich, 2021, 2022). Suddenly, faculty members were expected to produce (sometimes) up to five academic papers per year published in international journals indexed in Scopus and WoS, preferably in the first quartile. Here, the expression “publish or perish” took on a more literal meaning. With these new pressures, nobody was interested in whether students were cheating.

Moreover, faculty members might be made responsible for many things that students do, even outside of the university, as in the case of the cadets at the Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation Institute. In late 2017, cadets at the Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation Institute prepared a video, a parody of the Italian DJ Benny Benassi's “Satisfaction”.⁴ The original video shows semi-dressed young women in erotic poses presenting several tools—a hammer, a drill, a sander, a saw, an angle grinder, a heavy-duty jackhammer, among others—as a parody of the use of sex appeal in advertising.⁵ The Russian video features semi-dressed young men, also in erotic poses, cleaning, ironing, hammering, drilling, drying, and eating a banana in their dorm rooms. The video was done as a joke, but it led to an intensive public debate, questioning student morals,

sexual orientation, and academic achievements. The rector insisted that the young men were being disrespectful in the temple of science. It is interesting to note that many other students from several different universities (and not only universities) in Russia and abroad prepared similar videos (several dozen in total) and posted them with a hashtag #Satisfaction to support the cadets from Ulyanovsk (Gessen, 2018). Neither LGBTQ+ propaganda nor well-organized flash mobs can be tolerated in an autocratic state, however. Scapegoats were found—the faculty members, adding another reason why a professorship is no longer considered an attractive job in Russia.

Financing of Universities and the Third Mission

Public universities in Russia receive their funding from the state according to the number of students enrolled in a given year. This is an old practice dating back to the Soviet era. This funding covers most of the possible costs a university might incur, such as personnel salaries, operating expenses, and other expenses.⁶ Therefore, it is very important for universities to keep their numbers stable. By expelling students for academic misconduct or underachievement, universities hurt themselves; they lose financial resources allocated per student and risk that their budgets might ultimately be cut by the government. These universities will then have to reduce their faculty and staff, close some programs, or even shutter some buildings and labs. As for private universities, many of them are dependent on the fees they receive from their students. According to their business model (with some exceptions), institutions are interested in enrolling and keeping students regardless of their academic performance.

It should be noted that decision-makers at universities have more than just financial statements in mind. Universities, together with the government, take on a kind of responsibility for young people as students cannot be unemployed during their studies or be allowed to fall into the wrong social milieu. Universities offer an interesting and vital alternative environment (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016b). This is one of the important roles that universities play around the world—to serve society at large by fostering the intellectual and cultural lives of their communities, especially in less developed regions (Altbach, 2016).

Massification

Another important explanation for the current situation is the massification of higher education or the very high enrolment at universities in Russia. The number of students attending Russian universities and finishing them on time has reached the highest point globally—about 70–80% of the 18–21 age cohort now enrolls in tertiary education. Not all are prepared to study at such a high level, however, and universities are increasingly dealing with “unteachable” students (Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva, 2015) including students with remedial needs and students who attend universities for purposes other than study. A university degree is a requirement of the job market,

and many students pursue it as a credential without regard for how they obtain it. Young people without higher education indeed have few chances at a professional life in the country. Alternative forms of education such as vocational training are available but still need to be further developed and need more widespread acceptance in society and professional communities.

In general, given the lack of academic integrity, even a minor violation might be used when universities choose to get rid of certain students. For example, political engagement on the part of young people is not welcome in Russia. I am aware of several cases where young people protested against fraud and manipulation in elections. It proved difficult to arrest them, but the authorities decided to punish them and send the message to stay away from elections by simply expelling them from their universities. Any concerns about academic integrity were just the instrument that was used against them.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

Both the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Ministry of Education, as well as universities, employers, certain agencies, students, their families, and many other stakeholders, are indeed concerned about the lack of academic integrity and seek its mitigation. Several large-scale reforms and measures have contributed to the mitigation of corruption explicitly and implicitly, including the Unified State Exam; tests that serve as both secondary school finals and university entrance examinations; doctoral education reforms; and more efficient contracts with faculty members. All are important remedies that should be acknowledged, and the reasons that led to these reforms should not be forgotten by decision-makers and other stakeholders.

In addition, recent achievements include more formalized procedures and transparency in procurement, spending, staff, and faculty promotion. Almost all universities have established commissions to monitor institutional practice and have adapted their internal anti-corruption policies and procedures. Their focus is on possible corruption without direct student involvement, however. Indeed, the consequences for financial fraud during building renovation or the purchasing of new furniture are more visible and measurable than those for a plagiarized term paper. But the person who is in charge of procurement used to be a student. He or she might be less amenable to corruption if the issue had been addressed and a more ethical attitude instilled during his or her education. By acknowledging this problem—the lack of academic integrity among students—and allocating necessary resources to mitigate academic misconduct involving students, universities might prevent corruption not only within their institutions but also far beyond. Codes of conduct and software programs to detect plagiarism are remedies that some universities apply regularly, while others are just taking their first steps in this direction. Some techniques that are meant to reduce corruption often combat only the visible symptoms and not the “disease”, however. If corruption is merely a solution to another systemic problem, then any

remedy that fails to address those deeper problems would amount to little more than window dressing.

Since 24 February 2022, Russian academia has changed significantly. The Russian higher education sector has been subject to several painful changes in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Russia is no longer a part of the Bologna system, the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey, GRECO (Group of States against Corruption), or other educational and anti-corruption initiatives. It seems that the black box enclosing the country is growing darker than ever before.

NOTES

1. There are two different groups of students in Russia: “budgetary” (*budzhetye mesta*) students, who have their tuition fees paid by the state, and “non-budgetary” students, who pay their own tuition fees. “Budgetary” students receive a scholarship from the state, depending on their performance.
2. GOST—*Gosudarstvennyi Standard*, the Russian standard, is approved and implemented by the state.
3. KVN “Club of the Smart and the Merry”, is a popular Russian TV show where Russian-speaking students compete in wittiness, dancing, and music performance.
4. This is a kind of remake of the first parody created by young British cadets in 2013; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucOhxo9ivg0> (accessed 14 October 2023).
5. Benny Benassi, “Satisfaction”. YouTube (accessed 14 October 2023).
6. Kuzminov and Yudkevich (2022) suggest that the allocation is not enough to cover, for example, dormitories, building repairs, etc. Decision-makers often have to reallocate the money at the expense of the quality of education or risk neglecting needed renovations.

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