

Democratizing Russian Higher Education

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Driven by longings for stability, prosperity, and respect, but buffeted by scandals, crises, and resentment, Russia remains a country in transition, the outcome of which is not yet clear. In many ways, the democratic character of Russia's future depends on reforming myriad social institutions inherited from the Soviet Union, including those in the sphere of higher education. The importance of education in democratic transitions is well documented.¹ But although significant and necessary reforms have been initiated at the national level in Russia, they have encountered many obstacles. Regrettably, this means that some of the worst aspects of the Soviet system have remained intact. Adding liberal theories to the curriculum while retaining certain authoritarian characteristics amounts to putting new wine into old skins. Further reforms need to focus on providing students with greater choice and enabling them to participate actively in their own learning experience. By developing generalist degree plans and encouraging active learning, Russia's system of higher education could best serve its students' interests and ensure that the country's future leaders will have developed the skills and attitudes necessary to maintain a democratic society.

To understand the need for a new approach to the reform of Russia's system of higher education, it is necessary to recall the authoritarian character of the system inherited from the Soviet Union. The Communist Party's ambitions to transform society, as well as its concerns about remaining in power and increasing production, shaped Soviet educational policies and institutions. Education was meant to serve both ideological and economic functions. Curriculum and activities were geared toward instilling the party line and teaching political passivity. Boris Nemtsov commented about his school days, "Leonid Brezhnev was still alive and . . . we would write essays about his role in the formation of the Communist Party, copying it all from cribs supplied by the teachers so that we did not write anything seditious."² The curricula of state universities and other institutes were given a highly ideological content so that higher education would serve as an integral part of a

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system of political socialization. Although communist ideology was only weakly implanted in this way, the party achieved its purpose of retaining control in places of learning.

In response to party demands, Soviet institutions of higher education developed a particular philosophy of teaching that served Communist Party objectives and conformed with the uniform plans provided by Moscow. First and foremost, it was an authoritarian approach; it demanded that students passively consume and then repeat without analysis what instructors said in lectures. The lecturer-centered system of continental Europe, which was inherited from the tsarist era, was refined by Stalin to reinforce its hierarchical character and to emphasize the passive acceptance of knowledge. Students were taught to repeat lectures on oral exams, a practice that encourages rote learning rather than critical thinking. They also were expected to become experts in particular subjects of study so that their skills might then serve the planned economy. The objective of forming experts had significant implications for curriculum. To develop their expertise, students were required to take large numbers of courses. Detailed and demanding degree plans were drawn up that permitted students little choice in courses. A final noteworthy aspect of the Soviet teaching philosophy was particularly relevant to the social sciences: abstract theory was privileged over practical details. In part, this reflected the ideological content of education, but it also reflected a bias in favor of the "scientific"³ that led to the neglect of practical behavior.⁴

Initial Reforms

As with many aspects of life in post-Soviet Russia, higher education has experienced several significant changes and crises, some of which I saw firsthand as a visiting lecturer in Russia with the Civic Education Project. From 1997 to 2000, I taught politics and economics at Petrozavodsk State University, Tyumen State University, and Omsk State University.

The Ministry of General and Professional Education has been the leading actor in reforming the system that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union. The ministry has pursued two general objectives: decommunization and democratization. More specifically, it has sought to develop a dynamic educational system, to develop a wide curriculum that meets the demands of the labor market and the students, and to ensure equity in access.⁵ To achieve these laudable goals, the ministry has implemented curriculum diversification and structural reorganization.

Reform of the university curriculum has followed three paths: decommunization of courses and requirements; expansion of course offerings, especially in the social sciences; and expansion of degree options. Decommunization has meant that the ideological bent of courses has been dropped, as have entire courses on Marxism-Leninism. The departments that once taught those courses have had to transform themselves along the lines permitted by the ministry's new guidelines. Seeking to expand the universities' offerings of degrees in the social sciences that had been taboo or strictly constrained during the Soviet era, the ministry has developed standards for both new and old disciplines. The teaching of the social sciences has increased dramatically as a result: particular disciplines that are growing rapidly are

political science, law, international relations, business, and psychology. This has led to a proliferation of new departments and programs of study. At Petrozavodsk State University, political science and sociology first enrolled students in 1996; the history department at Tyumen State University began a program in international relations in 1997. Finally, the ministry succeeded in creating two- and four-year degree plans that exist beside the standard five-year "specialist" degree in the hope of fostering a measure of commensurability with degrees in the West.

The other major area of reform has been structural reorganization. Although the bureaucracy of the executive branch has been consolidated somewhat, a great deal of responsibility has been passed down to the local and regional levels. First, the Ministry of General and Professional Education was formed by merging two previously separate bodies. Bringing together the bureaucracies responsible for "classical" universities and for teacher colleges permitted some rationalization and placed nearly 60 percent of the institutions of higher education under the leadership of one reform-minded agency.⁶ In the past, educational institutions were the property of ministries and their constituent bodies and were treated accordingly.⁷ The new ministry has sought to become a regulator rather than a dictator. It sees its role as setting policy and ensuring quality. To make degrees equivalent throughout the federation, the ministry has set standards for programs of study that are enforced through inspections and certification.

Decentralization is the second major area of reorganization. Making a break from the top-down approach is seen as compatible with the needs of a market economy, and it reflects the post-Soviet view of democracy in Russia today.⁸ It also comports with the federal character of the new state as well as the weakened power of the center. Although the ministry provides standards, it has also granted numerous freedoms to educational institutions, which vary according to their type. Among state universities and colleges, only Moscow State is truly autonomous. However, the other institutions under the Ministry of General and Professional Education enjoy significant freedoms, including the freedom to

- create subdivisions,
- develop curricula and syllabi,
- create enrollment rules,
- create leadership selection methods, and
- form enterprises and partnerships.⁹

Universities are permitted to initiate curriculum diversification at the local level within the bounds of the rules established by Moscow; these rules permit a significant amount of regional customization. Taking advantage of such newfound freedom, state universities in Ulan-Ude and Yekaterinburg have incorporated courses on regional history and culture into their curricula.

State institutions are also influenced by the decentralization of decision making. Stakeholders at the local level have increased their roles in the formation and implementation of education policy at both the local and national levels. The Communist Party no longer checks the power of rectors; deans of faculties likewise are able

to have a great deal of control over their domains. Also, a number of associations have emerged that are active in policy formation and implementation, most notably the Association of Russian Higher Education Institutions, the Russian Rectors Union, local councils of rectors, and the academic methods councils.¹⁰ While the academic methods councils have been a conservative force and the rest an aid to reform, the rectors have sought to protect and build on their autonomy.

Decentralization has also made possible local and private institutions of higher education. Legislation permitting local and regional governments to establish institutions of higher education was passed in 1996 and represented a dramatic break with the past. However, it has yet to be exploited extensively due largely to the fiscal problems that confront those governments. Involvement of the private sector was legalized in 1992. Although private institutions must meet certification requirements if their degrees are to be accepted as equivalent to those of the state institutions, there has been a mushrooming of private schools that, despite some notable exceptions, are of low quality.

Another important aspect of decentralization is funding. The decline in federal support of education has hurt state institutions. However, with freedom has come responsibility for self-funding. Besides using enterprises and partnerships to seek revenues, state institutions have been able to charge some students tuition. The state sets a quota of students to be enrolled without charge, as well as a larger maximum number of students who may be enrolled; those in excess of the state quota enter on a commercial basis.¹¹ Universities have also begun to charge students for access to technology, services, and information. Private institutions are supposed to receive assistance from regional foundations to ensure quality, but budget constraints at the local level restrict this flow.

Educational reform has been a difficult task in the countries in transition. Typical common problems in the region include resource scarcity (affecting equipment, books, and salaries), isolation from potential employers of students and from international contacts, and rigidity of course requirements.¹² Russia has suffered in all those areas.

With regard to resources, Russian government spending on education as a share of a shrinking GDP has fallen to 3 percent;¹³ state spending per student in 1997 was one-third of the amount spent in 1989.¹⁴

From 1970 to 1992 capital investments in education declined from 7 percent to 3.4 percent. From 1992 to 1995, funds allocated for education plummeted from 2.1 percent to 1 percent of the consolidated budget.¹⁵

Although federal funds usually cover salaries and stipends, they do not include maintenance, research, travel, utilities, and other costs. State universities have scrambled to compensate for the reduction in federal funding by charging rent and fees; nonetheless, necessary resources have become scarce. There are limited numbers of computers, printers, photocopiers, and phone lines, and repairs are often too expensive to make. It has been my experience that I could find and use such equipment, but it was generally in need of repair or upgrade and was very vulnerable to theft. Most libraries have stopped making book purchases, and journal subscrip-

tions are concentrated in the hands of a few universities that can continue to meet the expense. For example, one may find three current subscriptions to the *Economist* at Tyumen State University, but none in Petrozavodsk. Students are mostly left with Soviet material that they find amusingly ideological rather than helpful. There is also a shortage of office space and classrooms caused by the economic incentive to maximize enrollment. As for salaries, the state's debt to instructors reached 15.8 billion rubles in the second half of 1998; at the end of the year, the government made a one-time payment of 2.5 billion rubles toward this debt, which reached only 40 percent of instructors.¹⁶ In 2000, instructors in Barnaul were paid in toilet paper and vodka. The payment problem has aggravated an internal brain drain from acad-

emia into other areas of the service sector of the economy.

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Too often, efforts to remedy these problems have focused on squeezing funds from students, creating serious equity problems. Tuition charged to commercial students varies regionally and depends on the program of study and institution. For instance, in Omsk a student

pays annually \$160–\$360 at a college, \$280–\$480 at an institute, and \$320–\$1,360 at the state university, depending on the topic studied: The highest fees are charged in the new and popular areas such as law and business, while the natural sciences are less expensive. In Tyumen, the tuition to study international relations is \$1,200 a year; in Moscow, it costs \$6,000 per year. Tuition payments can be a heavy burden on parents. On average, salaried workers in Russia earn \$72 a month, which is only 12.5 percent above the official poverty level. Students typically take part-time positions, but their contributions are meager.¹⁷ There are other means of charging students, such as setting higher fees for courses taught by foreign or visiting lecturers and requiring contributions to pay for library subscriptions.¹⁸ Such a financial burden creates strong incentives for students to secure scholarships. The Ministry of General and Professional Education recognizes that merit does not determine who escapes payment for education in state institutions. Instead, influence and money produce unequal opportunities for students. “Because corruption in the system is still a problem, one pays less to buy his son or daughter access to free higher education through black market routes than he has to pay on a commercial basis.”¹⁹ I have seen double standards applied to admissions exams that made it easier for tuition-paying students to enter a specialization, and I know of a student whose rich father used gifts to the dean to ensure that his son could go on an international exchange, where he performed poorly. In the private sector, unaccredited institutions offer poor quality at a high price.

The problems associated with isolation are particularly pressing for Russia. Decentralization has allowed stakeholders such as rectors, deans, and instructors to

take a more important role while marginalizing students and ignoring potential employers. The emerging form of corporatist policymaking and implementation provides opponents of reform with a strong voice to defend their conservative self-interests. With regard to international contacts, a recent survey of some Eastern European countries' higher educational systems found that only 2 percent of Russia's faculty members have studied in the West, the lowest result found.²⁰ Russia likewise scored lowest with regard to conferences attended abroad (0.4 percent) and courses taught by Western visiting lecturers (2 percent).²¹ There is considerable regional variation, however. Western Russian regions such as Karelia have much lower transportation costs to travel to the West, as well as closer affiliation with Western and Central Europe, whereas most of Siberia and the Far East are geographically remote from Western Europe and the United States, making traveling there a significant expense.

Regrettably, reforms to date have yet to democratize Russia's system of higher education. In fact, decentralization has had a conservative effect, permitting some of the most authoritarian aspects of the Soviet approach to education to continue. Too often, curriculum reform in universities has introduced liberal theories of social order and progress into an authoritarian context—an irony brought to my attention by my students. Degree programs and methods of instruction that require passive consumption teach behavior that is inappropriate for the future leadership of a democracy. When reforms increase students' freedom, higher education can teach the civic skills necessary to Russia's democratic future. By developing generalist degree plans and making greater use of active learning techniques, institutions of higher learning provide students with more choices and expand their participation in the learning process.

Generalist Degrees

Russian institutions of higher education continue to produce specialists rather than generalists. The specialist character of these students' education is evident in the demanding degree plans that they must fulfill. When students enroll in Russian universities, they enter particular faculties within which they will pursue one of the specializations offered; there are no undeclared students. Generally speaking, over 60 percent of a student's total credit hours are taken within the specialization.²² In comparison, for a political science degree, students in American universities typically use 25 percent of their credit hours to fulfill major requirements.²³ Another characteristic of the Russian specialist degree is that students must complete around seventy-five courses in four years, which amounts to nine to ten courses per semester. This means that they are in class for roughly thirty hours a week for four thirty-five-week academic years. That is twice the burden that is placed on students in the United States. To reduce the students' workload, more than one-half of the credit hours are taken on a pass/fail basis. The three theses that students write under close supervision (the last of which must be formally defended during the fifth academic year) offer another indication of the unique demands of the Russian specialist degree. Also, students must pass state exams in the fifth year in their specialty to receive the degree. The large number of courses taken within the specialization,

roughly four times as many as required by an American student's major, is meant to prepare a specialist to pass the fifth-year requirements and, upon graduation, to teach courses at the university level.

With a new democratic social system in which responsibility, freedom, participation, and following rules are necessary elements, institutions of higher education could teach students such traits through flexible degree plans based on creativity and choice. In North America, the programs of study that fulfill the requirements for a bachelor's degree accomplish such civic education goals by making students the authors of their own programs and by enforcing certain rules. Although carefully structured, major and general education requirements provide significant amounts of choice. American degree programs also include a large share of elective courses, with which students may pursue their interests outside of their major subjects of study. Instead of developing a special expertise, undergraduate students in North America are trained to be generalists and are given the freedom to choose courses according to their particular interests. Besides developing civic skills, generalists also benefit on the labor market from demand for the breadth of knowledge and skills that makes these graduates adaptive and flexible. Since only 24 percent of Russia's graduates are working in the trade that they learned in school, the specialist degree appears to meet the needs of a minority.

Another problem with the Russian specialist degree is that the program of studies is too rigid and denies students freedom. Beginning with the course requirements set by Moscow, faculties add their own to create detailed plans of study that permit no choice of courses taken within or outside a specialist's faculty. All of the students whom I talked to indicated that their only choice in their program of studies was the foreign language that they would take. There is no need for specialist degree plans to be so rigid—some measure of choice could be integrated without detracting from the in-depth knowledge that students are expected to develop.²⁴

As I noted above, Russia has adopted a four-year bachelor's degree, but it does not train generalists. Instead, it reflects the specialist approach to education in Russia today and fails to offer students active roles in course choice. Also, it lacks the prestige of the well-established and recognized specialist degree, even though it requires the same heavy load of course work.

Introduction of flexible degree programs is unlikely due to the persistence of the authoritarian past and the feudal character of the Russian university in the wake of decentralization. Products of the Soviet system, many instructors and administrators in Russian universities put their faith in and practice authoritarian methods. In fact, one dean confided to me that, although he is a young man, he believes in the traditional ways. Assuming that this authoritarian culture does not prevail, the feudal character of these institutions nevertheless remains an important obstacle to reform. Decreased demands and funds from Moscow have made deans of faculties powerful actors who seek to monopolize their students to maximize funding. With state universities and institutes now permitted to enroll tuition-paying students, this new type of student represents vital revenue, and they are hoarded. Rewarded on the basis of numbers of students taught, faculties have a fiscal motive for monopolizing students, which has contributed to the high proportion of courses taken with-

in a specialist's faculty and helps to explain why outside courses are fixed rather than flexible. Faculties engage in specific reciprocity when arranging outside courses for their students. Rather than having open enrollment for courses designed for students from outside their faculties, deans exchange organized groups of students, which eliminates uncertainty over enrollment numbers and the need for a registration process. This easy solution to logistical and financial concerns works against the introduction of flexibility to the specialist degree because outside courses are dictated.

Instead of seeking to improve marginally the rigid specialist degree, which is difficult to change for cultural and economic reasons, reform to Russia's system of higher education ought to focus on introducing a new type of degree plan and a different set of students who would coexist side by side with the specialists. One means of increasing civic education is by establishing generalist programs of study that would fulfill requirements for the bachelor's degree. They could provide students with some measure of freedom in choosing courses to fulfill major and general education requirements

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as well as electives. Another way to provide students with freedom is by creating overarching institutions within which students would enroll and various faculties would participate. Structural reform could create something analogous to a College of Arts and Sciences that would include faculties teaching such subjects as law, history, art, languages, culture, and social sciences such as political science or economics, as well as engineering, math, and the natural sciences in order to maximize students' freedom to choose.²⁵ Such an overarching structure would break down the barriers between faculties, permitting an open registration process. But establishing it would require hiring new personnel to manage the alien process. In addition, special staff would be needed to advise students as they craft their programs of study.

The introduction of flexible generalist degree plans would no doubt encounter many problems. For instance, students might be reluctant to take advantage of the new degree option despite being attracted to the ability to choose courses. The “red letter” diploma of a specialist represents a distinguished academic record and is highly sought after. To bolster the prestige of the new generalist bachelor's degree, a similar (or more demanding) honors program could be created.

Structural reforms that menace the autonomy and finances of the faculties could stir up significant opposition. One means of countering such a problem would be to offer faculties the prospect of financial gains from participation—for instance, tuition paid by the generalists could be shared by providing a sum for each course taken by the new bachelor's degree students.²⁶ Other benefits could result from the

competition between faculties that a system of open enrollment would foster. Indeed, once the competition sets in and the benefits of the new degree plans are clear, efforts might be made to incorporate a greater measure of choice for students pursuing the specialist degree.

The Ministry of General and Professional Education also represents a potential obstacle to such reform because of its role in creating degree requirements and setting enrollment figures. On average, Moscow determines 59 percent of any given degree plan's requirements.²⁷ For generalist programs to be implemented in Russia, Moscow must formulate minimum requirements for the bachelor's degree that permit significant amounts of flexibility in choosing courses in major and general education and that ensure that students will have electives.²⁸ The resulting programs could not be as specific and demanding as those for specialists. Besides conventional majors, programs might be developed that would facilitate double majors or permit multidisciplinary studies.

Moscow also regulates enrollment; as I stated above, tuition-paying students were meant to compensate for reduced federal funding. Faculties may maximize revenues by maximizing enrollment, so they are understandably reluctant to see a reduction of their enrollment. Also, paying for a new administrative staff and sharing revenue among faculties would require a net increase in tuition-paying students. Therefore, creation of a new category of students will require Moscow's permission to increase total enrollment and to establish a higher ratio of tuition-paying students. Moscow's regulatory role and the potential leadership roles for rectors and deans make it necessary to rely on a top-down approach for the development and implementation of flexible generalist degree plans.

Active Learning

Reforms are also needed at the instructor-student level. Despite all of the curriculum reform and decentralization of authority in the Russian system of higher education, methods of instruction typically remain authoritarian, and the bias in favor of abstract theory prevails over practical knowledge and skills. A Soviet form of instruction is incompatible with the stated goals of democratization.

Active learning is a nonauthoritarian style of instruction that stresses the development of participatory skills and practical knowledge. Broadly defined, active learning is a means of involving students in their learning process. The objectives of active learning vary according to context, but the instructor generally seeks to achieve a deeper and more long-lasting absorption of knowledge, teach skills such as tolerance and independent thinking, and build students' confidence in their ability to participate and the positive value of doing so.²⁹ The better absorption of information no doubt is due to a combination of involving the student and varying the instructional techniques (a typical feature of active learning), which appeals to the different learning aptitudes found among students.³⁰ Active learning takes many forms. Teachers can adopt Socratic, discussion, or participatory lecture methods. Student involvement may be developed through presentations, role-play, debates, roundtables, public deliberation, and simulations. Teachers may also use audiovisual technology and the Internet. Assessment of student learning can include essays,

exams, and papers that require research, reactions to readings, or reports on exercises, among others. Active learning techniques successfully teach the skills necessary for democratic citizenship.

Are active learning techniques absent from the instruction of the social sciences in Russian higher education today? One study indicated that what it defined as active learning was used in 40 percent of advanced courses.³¹ This high number is deceiving due to the very broad manner in which “active learning” was defined: any course with a writing assignment or a presentation qualified. Instructors, however, typically give students no freedom of choice or creativity in developing paper topics. For example, a student interested in the European Monetary Union was told that it was not a serious topic and that he should write on federalism instead. Similarly, seminar courses generally require the presentation of book reports, which are then subjected to pat questions from fellow students. Even these minimally active forms of learning provide some opportunity for students to explore independently and to think critically. The student’s typical educational experience in most of the new courses taught in the social sciences entails stiff lectures on abstract theories, with no room for meaningful student participation.³² Student feedback that might bring to light problems with such old forms of instruction is limited. There are no regular student evaluations of instructors and courses; there is an official student representative who may speak at meetings, but these consultations are seen by participants as perfunctory. As a result, students may have a high capacity for learning facts and theories, but employers complain about their limited abilities to apply them or to think critically and to take initiative.

These days, a relatively small number of instructors (mostly young Russians and visiting foreigners) are seeking to employ active learning techniques to teach social science courses in Russian colleges and universities.³³ Below is a list of activities and their methods that instructors have employed with Russian university students and that teach skills relevant to civic education:

- Student conferences: students apply to present their research and opinion papers on a competitive basis. Methods: proposal, research paper, presentation.³⁴
- Human rights project: students learn practical aspects of fulfilling human rights in Russia. Methods: roundtable discussions, student essays.³⁵
- Security Council simulations: students are asked to resolve a humanitarian crisis that poses a threat to peace and security. Methods: role-play, debate, group problem-solving, tolerance rules (rules requiring students to behave in a civil manner and allowing them recourse when they are treated uncivilly; the rules encourage mutual respect and tolerance of differences).³⁶
- Moot courts: students participate in conferences that simulate international courts considering important cases. Methods: role-play, tolerance rules, debate, research.

Although these methods have met with encouraging success, many challenges await those who seek to use active learning in Russian universities today: I have

categorized these into structural limits or interpersonal issues based on their different characteristics and consequences.

I will refer here to the problems associated with inadequate resources as structural limits, because they tend to be characteristics of institutions that are outside the control of instructors. To some extent, the ongoing fiscal crisis in education underlies all of these scarcities. Although decentralization has given considerable freedom for defining curricula at the local level, few professors have the time to develop courses based on active learning techniques—even if they are familiar with such methods—since most moonlight to make ends meet. Students also lack free time. Besides being in class for thirty hours each week, many must work part-time to earn tuition or to contribute to family finances. Active learning techniques demand more effort from overburdened students. Although many of the new texts being published in Russia today encourage critical thinking and student discussion,³⁷ libraries generally cannot afford to make new purchases, reducing them de facto to archives of Soviet propaganda. Likewise, technology in the forms of photocopiers, computers, printers, the Internet, and audiovisual machines is scarce. Although these items certainly do exist in Russia, they are in short supply and can require long waits or advance scheduling for access.

Wealth in resources tends to be unevenly distributed among faculties; those with resources often erect barriers to restrict access to insiders. General libraries retain closed stacks and add few new titles, while isolated departmental libraries can become rich (or poor) information resources. Foreign contacts can contribute significantly to the development of such islands of resources: Petrozavodsk State has book exchanges and study abroad programs with universities in Tampere, Finland, and Umea, Sweden; Mari State has a development program with the City University of Manchester; Ural State has won a grant from the European Union; U.S. Information Service has a center in the library at Tomsk State. Math faculties tend to control computers, often excluding outsiders or restricting their hours of access.³⁸ Furthermore, the limited number of mobile audiovisual machines makes access to the specialized rooms in the language faculties a must. The commons can become outdated and swamped with users, and access to local resources can become a privilege accorded to members only.³⁹

These structural limits of access have varying impacts on different active learning techniques, which I have categorized into four groups: information reliant, information dependent, technology reliant, and technology dependent. Information-reliant active learning relies on students to provide most of the input for learning. Information-dependent techniques, such as research papers and research-based role-play and presentations, require access to material to be successful. Technology-reliant techniques require some access to a photocopier (for reading assignments and in-class exercises) and/or computer (typing a paper). These assignments are less vulnerable to problems than technology-dependent ones, which require access to special facilities for teleconferencing, Internet research, Web-based courses, and audiovisual machines. Each lecturer can work within the constraints that he or she faces to maximize use of appropriate techniques while minimizing headaches. Although some techniques may be rendered

impossible by inflexibility and lack of access, most generally can be modified to fit the context.

Whereas problems of inflexibility and access confront lecturers as obstacles to work around, interpersonal factors present a challenge at once more profound and more manageable. The impressions of people within the same faculty can be the key to successful development of active learning or its cause of death. Participatory learning differs significantly from what Russians are used to and may be misunderstood as a sign of poor training or laziness in the instructor. Therefore, it is crucial for a lecturer to manage the impressions of students, peers, and superiors to avoid being seen as “not serious.”

The reaction of faculty members to these different teaching methods largely depends on attitudes, which

vary geographically and reflect the uneven impact of the democratic transition. Moscow and St. Petersburg tend to be the most liberal in outlook, while the hardest-hit parts of the north and one-industry towns in Siberia are the least welcoming of reform. Even within the same region there is variety: In Petrozavodsk a young lecturer

“Established departments are often headed by old professors with Soviet educations, and that . . . can strongly influence the approach to teaching in the department.”

in the pedagogical institute employs active learning successfully, while a department head in the neighboring state university frowns on such methods.

Whereas reformers are liberal in outlook and seek to change education for the better, conservatives are those who for reasons of ideology (communism, nationalism) and/or rational mini-max behavior oppose changes in education.⁴⁰ There is an imperfect but strong correlation between age and attitudes in Russia today: those who are products of the Soviet system and prefer its practices are often from older generations. Those attitudes in turn predict the reaction of faculty members to active learning techniques introduced by a lecturer. Conservatives will tend to be hostile and reformers will tend to be supportive, although such reactions are not automatic and depend on elements of context. Two influencing factors are a faculty member’s familiarity with western methods of instruction (which tends to be low in Russia because of limited foreign contacts) and the way the methods are introduced. If active learning techniques are properly introduced, an instructor may expect to receive the encouragement of superiors, access to privileged resources, and even monetary rewards.

This points to the importance of leadership in introducing active learning. Established departments are often headed by old professors with Soviet educations, and that type of leadership can strongly influence the approach to teaching in the department. When reform-minded leaders take control, they can seek to shape attitudes toward teaching within their realm. Two examples illustrate this. Mari State University’s School of Law has made the transition to western methods of instruction

by reforming the curriculum, discussing teaching methods, and offering pay incentives to encourage lecturers to adopt new methods.⁴¹ Buryatia State University is a newly founded institution that is starting from scratch and thus is free to seek to provide students with equal access, freedom of choice, and a dialogue with instructors and administrators.⁴²

Impressions are not purely subjective; they have an inherently social character because they are the products of interaction. For that reason, successful introduction of active learning depends greatly on the interpersonal skills of the instructor. Instructors introducing active learning in Russia are most successful in creating positive impressions when they carry themselves in a professional manner to convey the seriousness of their work and chosen methods. Also, maintaining open lines of communication is important. Being seen as an outsider or part of a faction may bring criticism of one's unconventional approach to teaching. Indeed, sharing information on the effectiveness of active learning may win acceptance among faculty members unfamiliar with such techniques. This leads to a third ingredient for success: instructors need to network with those interested in reform so that they can support each other's efforts.

As for the reaction of students, some may wish to make a cultural argument that Russians are passive observers who prefer to be led by elites. If such a generalization were true for Russian students, it would raise serious doubts about the efficacy of introducing teaching methods that depend on participation. Although the experiences of myself and my colleagues indicate otherwise, they do not amount to scientific studies. However, solid scientific evidence offered by a series of public deliberation exercises strongly contradicts assertions that active learning cannot be successfully used with Russians for cultural reasons. From 1994 to 1996, Sheri Frost and Denis Makarov conducted exercises with Russians of various ages in which participants discussed common problems and options for resolving them within a moderated forum environment.⁴³ Active learning aspects of the exercises included group discussions, role-play, and debate; the rules of the exercises were constructed to ensure democratic participation and tolerance. Results of a poll of subjects prior to participation found that the majority already held activist views, while one-third were passive. After the two-hour exercise, there was a shift from passive views to a middle ("transitional") outlook. They also indicated that the exercise had increased their understanding of the issues and the views of others. This indicates that active learning can be successfully employed in Russia despite real differences in cultural context.

Despite their distinctiveness from western students, Russian university students can (and do) readily adapt to active learning techniques. Two characteristics of students help to determine just how successful introduction of these methods will be: attitudes and familiarity. Generally speaking, Russian students are reform-minded, which makes them more receptive to new methods of instruction. In fact, recent attitudinal research shows that the average Russian university student has a set of values quite close to those of the average American.⁴⁴ This makes them more liberal in outlook than their elders. They are not enamored of the past and wish to see their society change for the better. Russian students also like active learning for its

practical (rather than abstract) character and the opportunity it allows them to express themselves.

Russian students on the whole lack familiarity with these novel means of instruction. But exposure leads to cumulative adaptation: new forms are readily accepted when there is experience with other forms of active learning. It is in the initial exposure that a student is most likely to treat active learning as “not serious.” From my experience, role-play and simulations are the most vulnerable to such views. But the fact that students adapt over time is well illustrated with two examples. An instructor noted that it took roughly half of the semester for students to adapt to her different method of instruction; presumably this was their first exposure and was not supported by parallel efforts. In another case, an entire law school shifted to the use of active learning techniques, transforming all courses: Students adapted within three semesters to the jarring change.⁴⁵

Because much has been written elsewhere on managing western students' impressions of active learning, I will only note in passing those points particularly relevant to Russia. When introducing active learning to Russian students unfamiliar with its techniques, one may best begin with group activities that cater to the collectivist (as opposed to individualist) aspect of the Russian culture. Again, an instructor's professionalism helps to convey the seriousness of his aims and methods. A line needs to be maintained between students and the instructor in order to avoid misunderstandings, since the more equal and friendly relations inherent in active learning contrast with the traditionally aloof attitude. Also, the instructor needs to be clear about what is required of students and to repeat the requirements throughout the semester (due to the large number of courses they take, students can forget).

The Impetus for Change

Before I conclude, it is important to note another potential source of opposition to the steps to democratize Russian higher education that I have outlined above. Some critics may wish to argue that borrowing foreign ideas and practices (such as generalist degree plans and active learning techniques) amounts to participation in cultural imperialism. It is clear that globalization spreads western culture and challenges local customs. But it seems that the worst or least beneficial elements of western culture spread the most readily. Also, democracy is what the vast majority of Russians want for their country, to the chagrin of some ideologues. The lingering authoritarianism in the educational system needs to be addressed to ensure the country's democratic future. In fact, educational reform began during the perestroika period. The consolidation of bureaucracies responsible for higher education began under the rule of Mikhail Gorbachev: Some Russian academics (VNIK-shkola) advocated what was called “education of cooperation,” which called for fundamental changes in the style of instruction to focus on the individual student, to encourage creativity, and to adopt more flexible programs of study. Many of their proposals were adopted as reforms were tested locally.⁴⁶ With decentralization, these advocates have been freer to develop new learning strategies. Thus moves to democratize education are neither new nor foreign—they are indigenous.

Also, there is no reason to expect Russian students to accept the values of the West in whole and unmodified form. They are, with few exceptions, patriotic and proud of their country's distinctive qualities. Indeed, the student-centered aspect of the proposed reforms leads one to expect Russian students to use their newfound freedom to craft their own set of civic values and skills. The context-sensitive character of active learning means that no one should expect Russian students to become exactly like some (nonexistent) ideal, stereotypical western student. One reason why I offer no specific plan for implementing these proposals is that I recognize that foreign practices can only offer ideas that will need to be molded to local concerns and needs to offer contextually appropriate solutions. Indeed, American colleges and universities (and their students) could benefit from borrowing appropriate ideas from the Russian system, such as the specialist degree.⁴⁷ Also, no one should expect active learning to replace lectures, and the new generalist degree ought to coexist with the established specialist degree. The changes that need to be made to this system of education are significant, but not revolutionary.

Although the Ministry of General and Professional Education set the democratization of education as one of its primary goals, much remains to be done to achieve it. Top-down reforms have been limited in scope, and local efforts have been isolated; at both levels, significant obstacles have been encountered. Russia's system of higher education has yet to make a break with its authoritarian predecessor. I present active learning and generalist degrees as means to do so. By providing students with greater freedom and responsibility, the educational system can encourage them to develop civic skills and attitudes that will support the country's nascent democratic system. Students in Russian higher education today are tomorrow's social leaders. If Russia is to have a mature democratic future, its students need civic education today.

NOTES

1. For two of the best known scientific assessments of the role of education in democratic transitions, see Seymour M. Lipset, Kyoung-Ryung Seong, and John C. Torres, "A Comparative Analysis of the Social Requisites of Democracy," *International Social Science Journal* 136 (May 1993): 155–75; and Henry S. Rowen, "The Tide underneath the Third Wave," in *The Global Resurgence of Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

2. Boris Nemtsov, as quoted in "Russia: Nemtsov Quizzed by Students," *Transitions* 4, no. 7 (1997): 13.

3. Marxism-Leninism, after all, was said to be a scientific theory of socialism.

4. For more on Soviet education, see George Bereday and Jaan Pennar, eds., *The Politics of Soviet Education* (New York: Praeger, 1960); Michael David-Fox and Gyorgy Peteri, *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 2000); Delbert and Roberta Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999); Seymour Rosen, *Higher Education in the USSR: Curriculum, Schools and Statistics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1963).

5. Elena Lenskaya, "Russia," in Civic Education Project, *Education for the Transition, Part III: Higher Education Policy in Central and Eastern Europe, Country Reports* (Budapest: CEP, 1997), 80.

6. The remaining institutions, which are more specialized, remain under the control of

fifteen different ministries—with the notable exception of Moscow State University, which enjoys real autonomy.

7. The faculty of political science at Moscow State University has retained those ties in order to place graduates.

8. For another example of decentralization being seen as democratization in the realm of educational reform, see: Howard Lehman, "The Crisis in Higher Education in Slovakia: Recent Experiences in a Post-Communist Society," *International Studies Notes* 22, no. 1 (1997): 6–7.

9. Lenskaya, "Russia," 84.

10. These are also known as professional educational methods councils, or UMOs. They assist in forming the standards adopted by Moscow.

11. Tuition may be paid by a student's family or by a future employer.

12. Civic Education Project, *Education for the Transition, Part II: Social Science Teaching at Central and Eastern European Universities, A Needs Assessment* (Budapest: CEP, 1997).

13. This compares unfavorably with figures in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where education spending is about 5.5 percent. World Bank, "Russian Federation: Education Restructuring Support Project," <<http://www.worldbank.org/pics/pid/ru50474.txt>>.

14. Susan Pelton, "The Pre-Crisis Condition of the Russian System of Education and the Search for a Way Out," *Polemika* (winter 1999), <<http://www.irex.org/acad/journal/3/>>.

15. Long and Long, *Education of Teachers in Russia*, 94.

16. World Bank, "Russia: Education Innovation Project," <<http://www.worldbank.org/pics/pid/ru8825.txt>>.

17. Figures are based on interviews with Russian students.

18. One faculty at Omsk State has employed these tactics, but some students have reacted by avoiding the courses with higher fees and by not returning borrowed magazines.

19. Lenskaya, "Russia," 81.

20. The average rate was 16 percent. Civic Education Project, *Education for the Transition, Part II*, figure 3.1.

21. The averages were 1.7 percent and 6 percent. Civic Education Project, *Education for the Transition, Part II*, figure 3.2 and 3.3.

22. As in the United States, academic hours in Russia are roughly fifty minutes long.

23. Michael V. Deaver, "American Generalists and Russian Specialists: Recommendations for Reform," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, 2000.

24. Although some might argue that full knowledge of the field would necessarily be compromised, it is questionable how much students actually learn in pass/fail courses.

25. Should two separate bodies be created to cover these different areas of study, general education courses would need to be arranged through specific reciprocity. Within each new institution, diffuse reciprocity would be the norm.

26. One consequence of such revenue sharing would be that the ratio of tuition-paying to scholarship students would rise in order to increase the size of the pie.

27. Lenskaya, "Russia," 81.

28. The Ministry of General and Professional Education might also consider reducing the total amount of credits required, which would permit a reduction in pass/fail courses.

29. See David Stern and Gunter Huber, eds., *Active Learning for Students and Teachers: Reports from Eight Countries* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); David Lampert and Xavier De Souza Briggs, *Escape from the Ivory Tower: Student Adventures in Democratic Experiential Education*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996); Harvey Foyle, ed., *Interactive Learning in the Higher Education Classroom: Cooperative, Collaborative and Active Learning Strategies (Excellence in the Academy)* (Washington: National Education Association, 1995); Richard Kraft, *Experiential Learning in Schools and Higher Education* (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 1994); and David Johnson, *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*, (Edina, MN: Burgess International Group, 1991).

30. For a study of the different learning styles found in political science courses in a small liberal arts college, see Richard Fox and Shirley Ronkowski, "Learning Styles of Political Science Students," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 30, no. 4 (1997): 732–37.

31. Civic Education Project, *Education for the Transition, Part II*, 43.

32. Other former Soviet states suffer from similar teaching style problems. For an example, see Anne Clift Boris, "Teaching History in Belarus: Differences in Teaching and Learning Strategies," *American Studies International* 36, no. 2 (1998): 44–57.

33. For the following discussion, I draw on my experiences as a Civic Education Project visiting lecturer in Petrozavodsk, Tyumen, and Omsk and on a May 1999 survey of colleagues teaching in various faculties across Russia.

34. See <<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Cyprus/4344>>.

35. See <<http://www.human-rights.net/hrei>>.

36. See <<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Congress/6264>>.

37. See Albert Weeks, "Russia Goes Back to School," *Transitions* 6, no. 1 (1999): 62–65.

38. This has been a problem at Ural State University, where the math faculty monopolizes the computer facility funded by George Soros with the goal of providing open access to the Internet.

39. I owe special thanks to Janet Helin for these remarks on access and territoriality. Survey response of CEP Visiting Lecturer Janet Helin, Department of History and International Relations, Ural State University.

40. No doubt a great many fall into a third category of indifference, but they are neither a problem nor a source of aid to the introduction of new techniques.

41. Survey response of CEP Eastern Scholar Oleg Sidorov, deputy dean, Mari State University School of Law. He also notes that some older instructors have yet to adapt to the changes.

42. Larisa Kovaleva, "Buryatia State University—A University of a New Type," *Polemika* (winter 1999), <<http://www.irex.org/acad/journal/3/>>.

43. Two-thirds of participants were female, and most were college students. Sheri Frost and Denis Makarov, "Changing Post-Totalitarian Values in Russia through Public Deliberation Methodology," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31, no. 4 (1998): 775–81.

44. Anatoli Kulik, "Political Education and Perspectives of Consolidation of Democracy in Russia," *Polemika* (winter 1999), <<http://www.irex.org/acad/journal/3/>>.

45. Survey responses of CEP Visiting Lecturer Elizabeth Letcher, School of Law, St. Petersburg State University, and CEP Eastern Scholar Oleg Sidorov.

46. Jeanne Sutherland, *Schooling in the New Russia: Innovation and Change, 1984–95* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1999); and Ben Eklof and Edward Dneprov, eds., *Democracy in the Russian School: The Reform Movement in Education since 1984* (Boulder: Westview, 1993).

47. Deaver, "American Generalists and Russian Specialists."