



College Quarterly

Winter 2004 - Volume 7 Number 1

▲ Home

◀ Contents



Building Possible Eastern European Higher Education Linkages: A View into Eastern European Higher Education Systems during the Transition Period: the Example of the Ukraine

by *Elena Skliarenko*, Ph.D (Economics)

Abstract

This paper provides a perspective on post-secondary education systems in the countries of the former USSR with the objective of building potential linkages for North American Colleges with the higher education institutions in Eastern Europe.

Introduction

The process of globalization of world economies emphasizes a new role for Colleges and Universities in the preparation of young professionals. They need to have a good understanding of international business, of different conditions, cultures and systems. Presently, many North-American Universities and Colleges are working towards building linkages with higher education institutions worldwide. Knowledge of currently undergoing processes in the education system of emerging markets, such as Eastern and Central Europe will help Canadian institutions in developing successful strategies for joint international programmes, joint education centers, research projects, as well as faculty and student exchange programmes. Using the example of the Ukraine, this article will provide insights into current changes occurring in the Eastern European higher education system during the transition period to a more market oriented economy. It will also suggest potential areas for collaboration.

As economies in all countries become actively involved in the process of globalization, businesses are beginning to search for a labour force, which is skilled in international trade, with a good understanding of the peculiarities of business development in different geographical regions, international business systems and environments. Universities and Colleges are the higher education institutions which are starting to play an increasingly dynamic role in the preparation of such professionals through different types of activities, such as exchange programmes for both faculty and students, international educational tours, international co-op placements, increased foreign student enrolments, participation in international research projects and conferences. These processes are reflected in many publications and articles.

Building Possible Linkages

Recent research, described in an article by Dr. Edward Harvey and Mr. Richard Liu, shows that there is a clear increase in interest relative to international linkages between Colleges and Universities (Harvey and Liu, 2003). According to the authors, in the North American university sector, in the recent years foreign student enrollment has increased by 21.3%, faculty exchange has grown by 28.8%, student exchange by 29.2% and joint research programmes increased by 66.0%. Colleges in Canada are behind in this trend. However with their progressive orientation toward the business needs of the Canadian economy, and their extensive and successful use of co-op programmes, they provide a solid foundation for growth and development in both international education and applied programmes.

Seneca College is one of those Canadian colleges, which is actively developing linkages with international higher education institutions in different regions of the world. The main thrust is presently focused on the quickly growing emerging markets, such as China. The College has signed more than 80 agreements with universities and colleges there and is presently developing and implementing joint programmes for students. The next point of interest and attention is likely to be Eastern and Central Europe.

Eastern and Central Europe have a joint population of approximately 100 million, and their traditional interest in higher education is presently stimulated by conditions of the transition to a market economy. The young generation is very keen on a Western style education and the present system of education is oriented towards international linkages. Eastern European higher education institutions are looking for partners among Western colleges and universities. One of the bright examples of such cooperation is the opening of an office of Edmonton's Grant MacEwan College in Kyiv, Ukraine, a project which was supported by Canadian International Development Assistance (CIDA). As a result of this, students in the Ukraine study at the Ukrainian Institute (MIM) of International Business according to Grant MacEwan College's programmes and the most successful of them do their co-op programme in Canada. According to the MIM administration, upon graduation students receive diplomas from Grant MacEwan College. The College monitors the quality of the education and teaching process as well as supports its Ukrainian partner with educational materials. This example may serve as an encouragement for other Canadian colleges.

Better knowledge of current processes of the higher education systems of CIS countries may help North American community colleges and institutions with differential status to develop successful strategies for joint international programmes, joint education centers, research projects, faculty and student exchanges.

In this article we will discuss several trends in the new education system in Eastern Europe using the example of the Ukraine (48 million in population). The present education system in CIS countries differs from the previously existing system of the former Soviet Union.

Traditionally completing higher education was a necessity for many young people. Graduates from high schools had a very solid comprehensive knowledge in areas of science, language and literature, as well as good learning skills to continue their education in institutes, universities and academies. Education at every institution was free for the population and was subsidized by the government. To get into a university or into any other higher education institution, a student had to compete with other students on the following criteria: high school diploma average, marks of three or four entrance exams and extra curricular activities. Usually, the competition was as high as 4-5 students per spot in a programme. In order to obtain a degree, a student had to study 5 years at a university and complete about 30-40 courses. Upon completion of the programme a student had to prepare and defend a diploma project and to pass two graduation exams. Upon graduation, students had a choice of either working or continuing their education and completing a Ph.D. degree. All programmes were designed and approved by the Ministry of Education of the former Soviet Union and had very high passing criteria. That is why university diplomas from the former Soviet Union have worldwide recognition and a good reputation.

During the transition period to more market oriented conditions, education systems in CIS countries, as well as the whole economy, faced a variety of changes. Presently, students have a lot of new opportunities to select programmes as well as obtain and pursue their education in different ways. In the Ukraine, high school graduates can continue their education at different levels of higher education, which is represented by specialized schools of applied arts and technology, called Technicums and Uchilischas, by Colleges, Institutes, Academies, Conservatories and Universities. In order to be recognized and to be allowed to provide such higher education, these institutions must pass state accreditation and will obtain the status of an higher education institution of one of the following four levels of accreditation according to the existing education system:

1st level – technicums and uchilischas (no equivalent in North America);

2nd level – colleges and other institutions of equivalent rank (in North America they are equivalent to community colleges and institutions with a differential status).

We will conditionally call these two levels the entry level of higher education in the Ukraine.

3rd and 4th levels – academies, universities, institutes, conservatories. The highest and the most respectable level is 4th level, which is equivalent to Western universities.

Higher education institutions in the Ukraine prepare specialists according to the following educational-qualification levels:

- **junior specialist** – a diploma degree, which is awarded to graduates of technicums, uchilishas and other equivalent institutions of the 1st level of accreditation (no equivalent in the North American education system);
- **bachelor (BA)** – a diploma degree, which is awarded to graduates of colleges and other post-secondary education institutions of the 2nd, 3rd or 4th levels of accreditation (equivalent to a BA degree in North America);
- **specialist** – a diploma degree , which is awarded to graduates of BA programmes, who specialized in an area of interest. Institutions of 3rd level award this degree. Such a degree is not offered by institutions of 4th level, which offer MA programmes instead;
- **magister (MA)** – Masters degree can be obtained only from post-secondary education institutions of 4th category (equivalent of an MA degree in North America)

In order to get a BA degree in the Ukraine, a student must successfully graduate from a 4-year degree programme from one of 2nd, 3rd or 4th level institutions. For a specialist or an MA degree, a student must do another one-year degree at an institution of 3rd or 4th level. At the end of each programme the student must present and defend his/her diploma thesis.

There are different options for Ukrainian students to obtain higher education. The term of the programme depends on the level of academic education. Students, who join higher education institutions of 1st level of accreditation from grade 9, will have to pass a full four-year programme in order to get a diploma of a junior specialist. Then a student may continue his/her education in a 3-year BA programme at an institution of 2nd level of accreditation and graduate with a Bachelor's degree. However a student, who joins this BA programme right after grade 12 must complete four years.

The term of education in an institution of the 3rd level of accreditation is as follows:

- A student, who joins the institution right after school will be able to get a Bachelor's degree in four years, and then in a year's time – a Specialist degree and a diploma.
- A student, who enters the programme after graduating from a technicum or an uchilishcha and already has a diploma of a junior specialist, will be able to receive a Bachelor's degree in three years and a year later, a diploma of a specialist

The term of education in an institution of the 4th level of accreditation is similar to the term of education in the institution of the

3rd level. The only difference is that a year after graduation from a Bachelor programme the student may obtain a Masters degree (MA). The term of education in distance learning programmes is a year longer than in full-time programmes.

During the transition period to a market economy education system is facing changes. Analysis of data from Statistics Ukraine (Statistics Ukraine 2002) shows interesting trends in the education system in the Ukraine during the period 1985-2002.

Table 1

Number of Higher Education Institutions of 1st and 2nd Levels and their Students during the Period of 1985-2002 in the Ukraine

Institutions of 1 st and 2 nd Levels	Academic Year				
	1985/1986	1990/1991	1995/1996	2000/2001	2002/2003
Number of institutions	731	742	782	664	667
Number of students (thousands)	808.9	757.0	617.7	528.0	582.9
Full time (day time classes)	517.5	510.7	455.6	400.8	432.7
Part-time (evening classes)	74.0	44.9	17.1	3.4	3.0
Distance Learning	217.4	201.4	145.0	123.8	147.2

From the data shown in Table 1, we can see slow growth in the number of higher education institutions of 1st and 2nd (entry) levels of accreditation during the period 1985- 1996 and then a drop, which has stabilized at 664-667. Overall, the number of institutions in this category has decreased by 9% during the period of 1985-2002. This is mainly caused by the reduction of governmental funding of such institutions.

The number of students in this level of higher education has declined significantly as well, from 808.9 thousand in 1985/1986 to 528 thousand in 2000/2001 (i.e. by 33%), and slightly increased by 10% in 2002/2003. However, due to a decline in industrial output and a decrease in demand for junior specialists, the overall number of students in this category has decreased by some 28% during the period of 1985-2003.

The biggest decline in the number of students in this category of higher education is observed in the part-time learning group. During

the period of 1985-2002, the number of students in the full-time group decreased only by 17%, in the distance learning group by 33%, whereas in the part-time group it declined from 74 thousand to only 3 thousand (i.e., by 96%). Present economic conditions in Eastern Europe require that most of the young people be employed fulltime in order to support themselves and their families. They are unable to find time to attend classes in part-time programmes and that is why part-time programmes have become very unpopular. Most of the students, who want to combine higher education with fulltime employment transfer to distance learning programmes, however this category also has declined.

Table 2 represents the number of students accepted to and graduating from degree programmes in the higher education institutions of 1st and 2nd levels of accreditation in the Ukraine during the period of 1985-2002. Please note that the represented number of students includes students from the Ukraine and from other former Soviet Union countries only. International students from other foreign countries are not included here, they are listed under the category "Other".

Table 2

Numbers of students accepted to and graduating from degree programmes in the higher education institutions of 1st and 2nd levels of accreditation in the Ukraine during the period of 1985-2002.

Institutions of 1 st and 2 nd Levels	Academic Year				
	1985/1986	1990/1991	1995/1996	2000/2001	2002/2003
Accepted in (Thousands of students)	264.6	241.0	188.8	190.1	203.7
Including Full-time (day-time classes)	166.3	155.8	142.2	141.2	148.2
Part-time (evening classes)	20.4	13.6	4.6	1.4	1.0
Distant Learning	77.9	71.6	42.0	47.5	54.5
Graduated from (Thousands of Students)	236.9	228.7	191.2	148.6	155.5
Including Full time (day-time	146.7	143.9	131.5	109.5	113.6

classes)					
Part-time (evening classes)	18.5	14.3	6.4	1.0	0.7
Distance Learning	71.7	70.5	53.3	38.1	41.2

The general declining trend in industrial output has its reflection in the number of students accepted in and graduating from entry level of higher education institutions (1st and 2nd levels of accreditation).

From Table 2, it is possible to note that during the period of 1985-2002, the number of students accepted to these institutions declined by 23%. The number of full-time students dropped by 12%, number of distance learning students by 30% and part-time students nearly disappeared. The number of graduates during the same period has dropped by 33% with the following breakdown:

- The number of students in full-time programmes decreased by 23%, in distant learning by 43% and in part time programmes practically disappeared.
- The number of students in higher education institutions of 1st and 2nd (entry) levels in Tables 1 and 2 include 0.4 thousand of students from CIS countries, which were part of the former Soviet Union, 4 thousand disabled, 3.3 thousand orphans. At the beginning of the 2002/2003 academic year these institutions had 51.2 thousand professors, including 2.2 thousands professors with Ph.D. (4.2%).

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 allow us to conclude that during the transition period in the Ukraine, the number of students accepted to and graduating from the entry level higher education institutions (1st and 2nd level of accreditation) declined substantially in all forms and categories of learning programmes. Analysis of data related to the higher education institutions of 3rd and 4th level accreditation show opposite trends.

The number of Higher Education Institutions of 3rd and 4th Levels and their Students During the Period of 1985-2002 in the Ukraine are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

The number of Higher Education Institutions of 3rd and 4th Levels and their Students During the Period of 1985-2002 in the Ukraine.

Institutions of 3 rd and 4 th Levels	AcademicYear				

	1985/1986	1990/1991	1995/1996	2000/2001	2002/2003
Number of institutions	146	149	255	315	330
Number of students (thousands)	853.1	881.3	922.228	1402.9	1686.9
Full time (day time classes)	457.6	520.0	616.3	859.5	990.5
Part-time (evening classes)	97.0	66.5	24.1	10.7	13.2
Distance Learning	298.5	294.8	282.4	532.7	683.2

The data in Table 3 clearly exhibit an increase in the number of institutions of 3rd and 4th levels and in the number of their students during the period of 1985-2002. The number of institutions increased by 2.3 times from 146 in 1985/1986 to 330 in 2002/2003; the number of students grew by 2 times from 853.1 thousand in 1985/1986 to 1,686.9 thousand in 2002/2003, with the following breakdown:

- The number of students in fulltime programmes increased by 2.2 times, in distant learning grew by 2.3 times, in part-time programmes by 7.3 times.

A general trend is observed in increase of interest among students in advanced higher education in all forms and programmes, as well as in the growth in the number of higher education institutions of 3rd and 4th levels to meet the market demand during the transition period.

The education system in the Former Soviet Union is undergoing significant changes, related to the transition to a market economy. The approach to teaching in the higher education institutions has also been reviewed and a lot of positive changes are observed. Students must work hard to obtain their degrees. Many college and university professors welcome the following innovations in the system: increase in number of hours assigned for the individual studies by two-three times, introduction of co-op programmes, international student and faculty exchanges, joint research programmes, more and more students are involved in research activities, development of special publications for student research papers, participation in conferences and international contests.

To enter a higher education institution at any level of accreditation, a student must pass two examinations: in language and in specialization. Competition for subsidized (free of charge) programmes at state education institutions is very high. It is much easier to get into the commercial stream: a student must simply pass entry exams and pay tuition fees. Competition in these programmes is

very low, if any at all. The level of education fee in national currency differs in relation to the rate and popularity of the institution ranging in the equivalent of U.S. \$ 500 to U.S. 1,500 per year.

Some people are concerned that introduction of a commercial stream might cause some drop in the quality of education. Easy accessibility to programmes might generate these numbers in enrollments and associated tuition fees might take priority in selecting students for programmes and affect the quality of future specialists. The other present difficulty, which is observed in the current education environment, is the obvious lack of up-to-date textbooks as well as translations or adaptations of the Western education materials. The majority of higher education institutions have to use local education materials. Administrators of universities and colleges are welcoming opportunities for collaboration in creating textbooks in marketing, management, business mathematics and other areas, together with Western professors.

In conclusion it is possible to say that the education system in Eastern and Central Europe is facing a lot of positive changes; it is rapidly evolving to meet market conditions and there are obvious positive trends in its development. The majority of higher education institutions are welcoming opportunities of linkages with North American colleges and universities, of which positive examples already exist. The main forms of cooperation might be seen in the following areas:

- creation of joint programmes;
- faculty and student exchange programmes;
- joint research projects;
- conferences and contests;
- joint ventures;
- collaboration in creation of textbooks and education materials

Such collaboration of North American colleges with the Eastern and Central European higher education institutions will definitely help to mutually better understand the processes currently occurring and undergoing in the economies, in preparation of highly competitive young specialists with deep understanding of international businesses, cultural differences, as well as market needs in these geographical regions.

References

Harvey and Liu, "Building North American Education Linkages: Canadian Universities and Community Colleges Compared", *College Quarterly*, Fall 2003 – Volume 6 Number 1

Statistics Ukraine Yearbook, 2002, Printing House "Consultant", 2003, Ukraine, Kyiv.

Elena Skliarenko, (Ph.D in Economics) is currently a professor at the School of International Business at Seneca College. Over the last twenty years she has held appointments with The World Bank, Morgan Grenfell, Deutsche Bank and other multi-national corporations, working on international assignments in Eastern, Central, Western Europe, North America and South East Asia. She may be contacted at or 416-491-5050, ext.6014

◀ [Contents](#)

• The views expressed by the authors are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of The College Quarterly or of Seneca College.

Copyright © 2004 - The College Quarterly, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology