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# The US Government-Sponsored Graduate-Level Exchange Programs: The Goals of the Major Stakeholders and the Students' Academic Interests

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*The US Government-Sponsored Graduate-Level Exchange Programs:  
The Goals of the Major Stakeholders and the Students' Academic Interests.*

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

of the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

by

Ekaterina Kharlamova

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iv
INTRODUCTION .....	1
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> .....	2
<i>Purpose</i> .....	4
<i>Research Question</i> .....	5
<i>Hypothesis</i> .....	5
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	6
<i>Student Academic Needs</i> .....	6
Language proficiency .....	6
Cultural patterns of learning .....	7
Applicability of skills and knowledge .....	7
Information available for pre-sojourn students .....	8
<i>Institutional Dimension</i> .....	8
Services .....	9
Curriculum .....	9
<i>Summary</i> .....	11
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....	12
<i>Interest-Focused Approach</i> .....	12
<i>Two-Dimensional Approach to Analysis</i> .....	13
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN .....	15
<i>Students' Academic Interests</i> .....	15
<i>U.S. Foreign Policy and Educational Exchange</i> .....	15
<i>Universities: Institutional Response to International Students' Enrollment</i> .....	15
<i>Research Design</i> .....	16
<i>Population and Sample</i> .....	16
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	17
<i>Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire</i> .....	17
<i>Analysis</i> .....	18
<i>Limitations</i> .....	19
ANALYSIS OF DATA .....	20
<i>Educational Exchange as the U.S. Governmental Policy</i> .....	20
<i>Public diplomacy and soft power</i> .....	20
Educational exchange as democratic aid and public diplomacy tool .....	21
<i>Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program</i> .....	23
<i>Universities: Institutional Response to the Processes of Internationalization</i> .....	27
Economic sociology about modern universities .....	27
Organizational sociology about universities and the processes of internationalization .....	29
<i>Academically Focused Interests of Graduate Students-Participants of the U.S. Government Sponsored Programs</i> .....	31
Student Summaries .....	32
<i>Leta</i> .....	32
<i>Vera</i> .....	34
<i>Boris</i> .....	37
<i>Oleg</i> .....	40

<i>Peter</i> .....	42
<i>Slava</i> .....	44
<i>Ana</i> .....	45
Language proficiency and services available .....	47
Other services related to academic activities .....	49
Cultural patterns of learning and style of teaching .....	50
Systematic versus practical approach .....	52
Decision to go to the US and academic interests.....	53
Relevance of new knowledge and skills for the future educational and professional activities .....	55
Courses available .....	60
Cultural content of courses .....	61
Academic advisement .....	62
Pre-sojourn familiarity with academic programs.....	63
Familiarity with graduate educational system .....	65
CONCLUSIONS.....	68
<i>Interests of the Major Stakeholders of the U.S. Government-Sponsored Educational Exchange: Contradicting or Mutually Complimentary?</i> .....	68
IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY.....	70
<i>Host Universities</i> .....	70
<i>Information Available for Students Prior to Enrollment</i> .....	72
APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	73
APPENDIX B: REFERENCES.....	75
APPENDIX C: ENDNOTES.....	79

## ABSTRACT

A steady increase in student mobility levels has become a widely recognized component of general globalization trends in the modern world. Yet, internationalization of education is not merely a product of bigger globalization processes. Educational exchange, in many instances sponsored and administered by national governments, is an effective tool in governmental foreign policies. The shift of focus in governmental policies towards the political rather than educational purposes of educational international exchange could lead for lack of attention paid to the issues of foreign students' academic interests. At the same time, universities, although prompted by the globalization tendencies to internationalize their campuses might not have capacities to meet all specific academic needs of the graduate exchange students.

Is it possible to provide exchange program participants with education that would both match their career goals and address the policy goal of inspiring change in the participants' home countries? Do the universities have capacities to meet these needs? To search for answers to these questions, the current research studies academic interests of graduate-level international students participating in government-sponsored educational programs, as formulated at the conjunction of interests of the major stakeholders (US foreign policy, host universities, and students) of their academic experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

A steady increase in student mobility levels has become a widely recognized component of general globalization trends in the modern world. By the latest estimations, the number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions constituted a total of 572,509, according to Open Doors 2004, the annual report on international academic mobility published by the Institute of International Education (IIE) with support from the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.<sup>1</sup> According to the report on international education presented by the National Association of International Educators, foreign students and their dependents contributed more than \$12.87 billion to the U.S. economy during the academic year 2003-2004.<sup>2</sup> This brief analysis of educational international exchange highlights several problems it poses on policy and administration levels.

Internationalization of education is not merely a product of bigger globalization processes. Educational exchange, in many instances sponsored and administered by national governments, is an effective tool in governmental foreign policies. Public diplomacy, called to promote better understanding and trust among different cultures, has a long history of effectively utilizing educational exchange. Most recent moves of President Bush's administration demonstrate that the United States chose to revive their diplomacy efforts. President Bush's Fiscal Year 2006 budget calls for an increase for educational and cultural exchange programs at the Department of State. Budget supporting documentation from the Department of State emphasizes that "exchanges promote a better appreciation of the United States abroad and provide a greater receptivity for U.S. policies among foreign publics."<sup>3</sup>

From another perspective, the recent emphasis on internationalization of education compels universities to work for an increase in international students' enrollment and to develop

their own international exchange programs. First, the international job market creates a demand for education preparing students to work in the global space. Second, university programs gain credit providing American students with the opportunities to either obtain international experience while studying abroad or benefit from the international perspective presented by international students and faculty hosted by American universities. International students contribute to vital research activities and build lasting ties between their home countries and the United States. Last, but not least, foreign students contribute to their host universities' revenues and strengthen the local economies they live in.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The shift of focus in governmental policies towards the political rather than educational purposes of educational international exchange provides for lack of attention paid to the issues of foreign students' academic interests. Large-scale government-sponsored educational exchange programs bringing foreign students to study in the US pre-define major enrollment procedures for these students, thus minimizing the students' ability to exercise personal choices in educational programs.

Economically, government-sponsored exchange students do not serve as the direct investors into the host universities' budgets. As mentioned above, the financial input of international students is an important incentive for the universities to invite international students. A recent study of student mobility in European countries shows that the importance of the monetary aspect of educational exchange has risen through the last several decades, advancing the commodity-like understanding of education provided by host institutions (CEC Report, 2000). This trade-oriented approach allows introducing the international students' academic interests as a customer's demand, affecting the service providers' efforts to meet those

needs. Unfortunately, government-sponsored exchange students may lack the ability to directly state and defend their interests, as they do not represent the immediate financial partner of the host universities.

Nonetheless, however important for defining the major trends in educational exchange, governmental policies have had little influence over the contents of educational programs available. The institutions of higher learning hosting foreign students continue to play the major role in shaping educational experiences of international students.

Generally, universities having extensive experience in working with international students do recognize some of the specific student needs in adapting to new academic environments. These universities may offer a range of supplementary educational programs in language and computer proficiency, along with special services to help students adapting to life in a foreign community.

However, previous students of educational exchange have observed that international students are often more concerned with the relevance of course work offered by the US universities to the academic requirements and labor market demands of the students' home countries. It is important to note that the educational exchange programs and policy evaluations tend to focus on the positive influences of international experience on the advancement of participants' personal characteristics, such as enhanced cultural awareness and better understanding of international issues, leadership and communication skills, higher levels of foreign language proficiency, and the like. In other words, the usefulness of program academic contents often remains overlooked in determining what shapes the academic experience of foreign students.



Personal factors play a significant role in the adaptation of the educational environment to students' personal needs. Research has revealed that, if in some instances professors working with foreign students attempt at modifying academic expectations and course contents for internationals, others either do not recognize this to be a problem or are convinced that universities do not have a responsibility to solve the difficulty (Sowa 2002, Trice 2000). An additional aspect is the limited flexibility of curricula at US universities. Even if modification is attempted, there are often insufficient opportunities to revise the programs to meet foreign student needs.

Furthermore, some students of the globalization processes in higher education caution against overly enthusiastic attitude towards the internationalizing practices in higher educational institutions, as there is a possibility of the contradiction between the local and international educational goals. In other words, experiencing considerable pressure from tendencies of internationalization and massification, a contemporary university faces the need to reconcile these potentially contradicting demands (Scott, 1998).

### *Purpose*

The current research studies academic interests<sup>4</sup> of graduate-level international students participating in government-sponsored educational programs, as formulated at the conjunction of interests of the major stakeholders (US foreign policy, host universities, and students) of their academic experiences. To appreciate the range of interests converging over the proposed focus of study, a variety of sources were explored. The list of data sources includes programmatic and report documentation of the governmental agencies administering educational exchange programs for graduate students; previous research in the globalization trends in higher education; and interviews conducted with students. Investigating the goals of the major stakeholders, the

present study: (a) seeks out the ways of recognition, prioritization, and provision for meeting academic interests of the target population; (b) looks for the possibilities of better addressing students' needs while not compromising the other parties' interests.

*Research Question*

Why are the academic needs of the graduate students, coming to study in the US as participants of government-sponsored programs not fully met?

*Hypothesis*

The expressed academic needs of the graduate students, coming to study in the US as participants of government-sponsored programs are not fully compatible with the officially stated goals of the programs and host universities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the voluminous research of international education, few studies single out the academic adaptation of international students for investigation. More often, the questions of cultural adjustment serve as the focus of research. The current research seeks to isolate issues pertinent to academic adaptation and to study both students' academic needs and institutional response to the challenge of international student enrollment in the US universities.

### *Student Academic Needs*

Though the vast majority of studies devoted to adaptation processes experienced by foreign students tend to focus on psychological, cultural, and social adaptation<sup>5</sup>, several studies single out issues relevant specifically to academic adaptation. Here, specific learning needs of foreign students receive most of the scholarly attention (Huxur et al. 1996, Schoorman 2000, Lee 1999). These needs may be put in three categories: (1) language proficiency; (2) differences in cultural patterns of learning; and (3) social skills relevant to learning.

### Language proficiency

Language proficiency on the skill level incorporates commonly identified issues of language fluency in speaking, writing, and reading (Lee 1999). However, this rather mechanic concept of mastering language might not be enough to describe the level of understanding needed for successful academic performance in a foreign language country. On a more advanced level, language proficiency integrates more sociologically and psychologically complex processes of understanding language within social, cultural, and academic contexts. Understanding culture-specific references used in class, fluent teacher-student exchange during in-class discussions, ability to recognize styles and expressions appropriate for specific types of academic activities – these capabilities, often essential for students' academic success go beyond

mere foreign language classes. Thus, the study of international students' experiences by Huxur and others emphasizes that socio-cultural knowledge of the host society "is important for avoiding the misunderstandings between international students and faculty (1996: 8).

### Cultural patterns of learning

Cultural patterns of learning differ significantly in relation to historically and culturally contingent development of educational systems. For instance, a considerable portion of the foreign student population comes from academic settings which emphasize oral, tradition-oriented, group based learning. Similarly, social skills employed in the context of academic activities vary. Thus, a predominantly professor-oriented teaching approach would require less initiative on the part of the student, as opposed to the usual student-oriented approach found at US institutions. Professor-oriented teaching approach often corresponds to lecture-based style of instruction and closer supervision from educators over the process of learning. Student-oriented approach, on the contrary, tends to favor seminars as the preferred form of instruction and overall lesser supervision over the educational process. (Huxur et al. 1996:9).

### Applicability of skills and knowledge

Students' academic interests are often contingent on demands of the academic agenda and labor markets in their home countries. Several researchers point out that international students are concerned with the relevance of course work to their home country needs (Trice 2000, Seeger 1993, Wobbekind and Graves 1989). This is especially important for the government-sponsored exchange students who are obliged to return to their home countries upon completion of their programs. They are compelled to try all skills and knowledge they receive in their home universities in regards to their applicability to current situations in their home countries.

Cultural content of course material and assignments provide for another concern facing foreign students (Pardue 2003, Huxur et al. 1996). Researchers stress the general tendency of academic instructors to illustrate grounding concepts with the examples derived from the host culture. Furthermore, culture-specific examples may be used as checks for comprehension of general concepts (Huxur et al. 1996).

#### Information available for pre-sojourn students

It has been recognized that pre-sojourn expectations may influence international students' academic adjustment (Dillon and Swann, Huxur et al). Although contingent on multiple personal conditions, these expectations are reported to be shaped by information available for students before enrollment.

#### *Institutional Dimension*

Most of the studies devoted to foreign students within the US educational system concentrate on student interactions with the host school or department, or upon the even more immediate student-instructor level. Indeed, these are the levels of institutional authority regulating the majority of academic decisions for foreign students. Moreover, some researchers point out that graduate schools and departments are gradually undertaking a more dominant position in recruitment and admission policies as well (Lambert: 1995). However, the challenge introduced by increasing numbers of international student enrollment appears to be a part of larger processes demanding a more organized response. For example, Australian studies of this question suggest that the higher educational institutional response to the demands of expanding educational exchange should undertake a form of national educational policy (Morris: 1995).

The lack of national regulatory efforts in this field can be considered appropriate for the less centralized US educational system. It is doubtful, however, that this gap can be narrowed by

efforts on the individual instructional level. While some studies conclude that recognition of the problem of international student adaptation on the departmental level stimulates instructors' awareness of this issue (Trice 2000), the scope of the problem would seem to require that it should be addressed on the institutional level<sup>6</sup>.

A number of studies of international education incorporate foreign student enrollment into a larger process of internationalization of education. This process pertains to the contents and practices of pedagogy as well as to the educational institution's organization and practices. In his study of university internationalization, Schoorman (2000) studies institutional response to the demands of foreign students enrolled in US universities and distinguishes three major organizational strands involved in the process of internationalization: services, curriculum, and social events.

### Services

Student services include tutoring, mentoring, and counseling, and are designed to be accessible for students of all national backgrounds. General student services, however, may lack understanding of special needs of international students (Schoorman: 2000).

Some studies emphasize the role of academic advisors in the process of students' academic adaptation (Schoorman: 2000, Trice: 2000). However, others point out that academic supervisors may lack information of specific cultural backgrounds and languages. A plausible recommendation would be special arrangements for foreign students that would help to recognize and respond to their specific academic needs (Huxur: 1996).

### Curriculum

Adjustments of curricula in response to foreign student needs present one of the most debatable issues for universities. Comparative studies of curricula demonstrate that they are

cultural artifacts, reflecting the history of different educational, philosophical, and other influences (Reid 2000, Cogan, Houang, and Wang: 2000). Some other studies stress that student interests should be of paramount importance in designing a graduate curriculum (AAU Report: 1998) and emphasize that curricula should be responsive to the international students' needs (Huxur et al.: 1996).

Most of the requests to introduce international context to curricula organization and individual course content come from the intentions to internationalize education within universities (Jenkins: 2003, Schoorman: 2000, Hayward: 2000, Anderson: 1999, etc.). Here, the policy measures undertaken as attempts to meet the goals of internationalization (cross-cultural or international courses, global studies, internationalizing the contents of individual courses) indirectly meet certain needs of international students. Additionally, specific formal policies regulating the direct response to international students' needs (internationalizing courses contents, individual academic assistance) should be established (Trice: 2000).

The present study focuses on investigating the ways the academic needs of international students—participants of the government-sponsored graduate-level exchange programs are recognized by the policy makers, host universities, and students. Building upon previous studies of international students' academic experiences and institutional response to their needs, this study focuses on the following issues:

- (1) language proficiency
- (2) cultural patterns of learning and social skills relevant to learning
- (3) language and other academic-related services provided
- (4) courses available
- (5) applicability of skills and knowledge received

(6) academic advisement

(7) pre-sojourn expectations and information available to students prior to enrollment

The current study aims at studying these issues from the perspective of students, universities, and program sponsors.

*Summary*

The present study focuses on investigating the ways the academic needs of international students—participants of the government-sponsored graduate-level exchange programs are recognized by the policy makers, host universities, and students. The major attempt would be to examine the dimensions of the academic adaptation process and the forms of institutional provisions (both reactive and proactive) as they are identified by the major stakeholders of this process.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Interest-Focused Approach*

The recent tendency to treat education as a saleable commodity makes the key participants of educational process stakeholders, interchangeably performing the roles of customers and suppliers (CEC Report: 2000). This approach makes theories of production organization applicable to the educational organization. The Total Quality Management theory, developed for the purposes of a better production management, has been modified to assess and advise on the educational management, treating educational institutions as the service providers (Bonstingl 1992). Among the key elements of this approach are the customer-supplier focus and the process/systems approach (Chance and Chance 2002).

Treating the contributors to the educational process as stakeholders allows addressing the notion of interests, which is stated as one of the major foci of the current study. This approach makes students viewed as agents entering the higher educational institutions to pursue specific goals and expressing specific demands to the process of education.

This approach is consistent with the more general demand to regard the students' learning objectives as the primer definer of the educational process, stated in a programmatic work in higher education quality assurance by Elaine Al-Khawas (1998). Based on the international research conducted under the aegis of the World Bank, this work summarizes the endeavors to investigate major challenges that higher education institutions experienced at the end of the 20th century. Here, growing student mobility is presented as one of the key challenges to the contemporary higher education, conveying the demand for change in the approach to the institutional quality assessment. The major programmatic proposition made in this work requires shifting the focus of the assessment to the capability of the educational institutions to meet the

learning objectives of their students. In their turn, students' interests are influenced by the contemporary labor markets' demands, which bear the impact of the globalization processes. Proposing to make quality assessment procedures more relevant to the contemporary educational demands, Al-Khawas (1998) raises questions of students' learning objectives and expectations about educational programs offered, and of the ability of higher education institutions to meet these expectations.

Recognizing that this interest-focused, learning objectives approach might be limited in the sense that it does not fully describe or explain the complex nature of students as social agents, current research intends to take advantage of its focus over academically related exchange between students and universities.

#### *Two-Dimensional Approach to Analysis*

Interests of students as service receivers, or clients have received considerable attention on the part of student satisfaction assessment research. Franklin and Shemwell (1995) in their study of the applicability of the disconfirmation theory to the student satisfaction assessment specifically emphasize the importance of incorporating students' expectations into the service quality evaluation tool<sup>7</sup>. This two-dimensional approach allows for studying both the ways the students' interests were formulated before enrollment and how these interests were addressed and modified through the period of studies. Franklin and Shemwell, highlighting the importance of studying the issue of student satisfaction as process suggest measures are made in two separate points of time. Using analogous sets of questions, it is proposed to make measures prior to enrollment and by the end of the first year of studies.

Time constraints of the current research, however, limit the possibilities of using a two-step measurement tool. As an alternative, Noel-Levitz (2002) in his Student Satisfaction

Inventory (SSI), utilizing the two-dimensional approach proposes to make both measures simultaneously. The same method is employed in current research, where questions to students are formulated to address their pre-sojourn expectations as well as their later evaluations of their experiences.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

### *Students' Academic Interests*

To study students' personal opinion on academic expectations and their evaluations of academic experiences, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the current participants of the Programs were conducted. Interviews were taped and transcribed.

Academic aspects of the students' interests were defined by the major issues of concern expressed in the previous research pertinent to the learning process and adaptation of the international students in US higher educational institutions: information on academic programs and educational system available prior to enrollment; language proficiency; cultural patterns of learning; style of teaching; relevance of course work for the future educational and professional activities; the cultural contents of the course material and assignment; attention to research and academic interests on the part of professors and academic advisors; quality and accessibility of academic advisement; curriculum offered; quality/accessibility of the language and academic skill services; and ability to utilize prior experience, generally of the cultural character.

### *U.S. Foreign Policy and Educational Exchange*

Policy makers' interests are considered to be the goals expressed in the official documentation of governmental bodies related international educational exchange, as well as in the programmatic, report, and other types of documentation, publicized via Internet by the agencies administering government sponsored educational exchange initiatives.

### *Universities: Institutional Response to International Students' Enrollment*

Previous research in the university internationalization trends and institutional response to the international students' enrollment was analyzed to represent the assessment of the

institutional response to the globalization trends in the higher education as the host universities' interests.

### *Research Design*

For the purposes of the current research, investigation in the materials pertaining to the students' academic interests was conducted. Aiming to study how interaction and possibly contradiction of the interests of the major stakeholders may influence the ways of recognition, formulation, and provision for responding to the unique students' academic interests, the three types of interests were explored separately.

Consequently, a comparative analysis was conducted to investigate the possible points of conversion, tension, and contradiction between the distinct interests. Ultimately, the proposed study will attempt at creating an integrated picture of the stakeholders' interests, mutually influencing the Students' academic experiences.

### *Population and Sample*

For the purposes of current research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight graduate international students – participants of government-sponsored exchange programs. The sample was built with the help of snowballing technique, with most of the interviewees been identified through personal referrals of other international students.

Most of the students interviewed for this research, were graduate students of University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) and Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) participating in the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program (Muskie). Most likely, this homogeneity is caused by the sampling method chosen for this research. Snowball sampling by its description targets hidden populations or population networks, bonded by some common features. However, as current

research does not list examining a representative sample of international students among its stated goals, it appears safe to regard this limitation as acceptable.

#### *Data Collection*

(a) Policy makers and agencies (Public resources available via Internet):

Alliance for International and Cultural Exchange

American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS)

Association of International Educators (NAFSA)

Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)

Institute for International Education (IIE)

International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX)

US Agency for International Development (USAID)

(b) Previous research in institutional response to the globalization trends in higher education

(c) Semi-structured interviews with students participating in graduate-level government-sponsored exchange initiatives at the time of interview.

#### *Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire*

Based on previous research on issues related to academic experiences of foreign students in US higher educational institutions, these questions were grouped to address the following areas of importance: information on academic programs and educational system available prior to enrollment; language proficiency; cultural patterns of learning; style of teaching; relevance of course work for the future educational and professional activities; the cultural contents of the course material and assignment; attention to research and academic interests from the part of professors and academic advisors; quality and accessibility of the academic advisement;

curriculum offered; quality/accessibility of the language and academic skill services; and ability to utilize prior experience, generally of the cultural character.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. All interviews addressed the same questions listed in the questionnaire. However, interviewees were welcomed to change the sequence of questions to reflect their personal understanding of importance of the issues discussed. They were also encouraged to add new areas of concern to talk about.

### *Analysis*

Information collected from the interviews was summarized separately for each interviewee to reveal personal academic interests and needs and then grouped by the separate issues defined by the questionnaire and analyzed.

The official records, reports, and other documentation of governmental bodies and program administration agencies available on-line was investigated to collect information on the Muskie Graduate Fellowship program, with special attention being paid to the formulation of the Program goals and to the issues related to the academic component of the Program.

The research in the trends of internationalization and globalization of higher education was scanned to reveal the patterns of globalization strategies of the US universities.

At the conclusion, the student academically-related interests were summarized and tested against the Program goals and institutional response to the students' needs. Special attention was paid to relevance of knowledge and skills received to the future professional career of the Program participants. This issue appears to raise the major concern among students and be the most related to the Program goals and the institutional capability to meet the students' needs. Additionally, the question of academically focused information available for pre-sojourn participants is addressed, as this appears to be the area relevant to the students' pre-sojourn

expectations and the ways they formulate their future goals, whereas the improvements in the level of information availability are equally dependable on the program administration and host universities' strategies.

*Limitations*

Due to the nature of the sampling design, most of the findings may only be of incentive value for the future research of the international educational exchange.



## ANALYSIS OF DATA

### *Educational Exchange as the U.S. Governmental Policy*

#### *Public diplomacy and soft power*

Harvard University political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. introduced the concept of soft power in his seminal essay "Soft Power" (Nye 1990). In his 2002 book, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone*, Nye discussed the varieties of power that the United States can deploy as it builds its world order. In his analysis, hard power is military or economic force that coerces others to follow a particular course of action. By contrast, soft power is cultural; it is the power of example, the power of ideas and ideals. Following Nye's definition, the United States' soft power is "its ability to attract others by the legitimacy of U.S. policies and the values that underlie them" (Nye 2004b: 16)

The effectiveness of soft-power strategies is yet to be proved and does not allure political proponents of force-based methods ("sharp power" in Nye's terminology). Ian Forbes (2004), for instance, argues that soft-power strategies are more characteristic of NATO countries' approach to foreign policy. The mere comparison of budgetary, technological, and intellectual inputs made into military development reveals the US international strategies' proclivity to forceful methods. In 2004, the combined cost of the State Department's public diplomacy programs and U.S. international broadcasting was just over a billion dollars, which constituted about four percent of the nation's international affairs budget. (Nye 2004b:20). In Forbes' opinion, "the brutal truth" (2004:76) was that this provided for the US military success in Afghanistan and Iraq, outperforming the UN attempts to pursue peaceful strategies.

Opponents of soft-power strategies, including the U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld claim that its "popularity is ephemeral and should not guide foreign policy" (Nye

2004b:16). The situation is complicated by the fact that, a relatively recent concept of soft power, introduced to explain public diplomacy efforts of the U.S. in the field of international politics “has yet to be accommodated within a sophisticated theoretical framework” (Geun 2004:2) whereas the research showing effectiveness of soft power strategies is scarce.

#### Educational exchange as democratic aid and public diplomacy tool

Proponents of cultural and educational exchange regard it as a “key element” of soft power strategy (Nye 2004b:18, NAFSA 2003). “Welcoming foreign students enables us to replace walls of misunderstanding with reservoirs of goodwill. Now is the time for us to seize the opportunity to teach democracy, to teach human rights, to teach the rule of law, and the equality of each man and woman, to all of our children,” said former Congressman and National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States Vice-Chair Lee H. Hamilton at the panel of leading experts in foreign policy, immigration, and Middle Eastern politics hosted by NAFSA in July 2003 (NAFSA 2003).

Since the 1950’s, but especially in the 1980s and ‘90s, numerous cultural and educational US exchange programs were carried out by the US Information Agency (USIA). As an independent agency, USIA enjoyed both governmental support and sufficient independence to be able to position programmatic goals over policy ones. In October 1999, USIA was incorporated into the U.S. Department of State as the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Since then, the organization came under direct influence of the government and political and security goals took priority over the goals of enhancement of international and cultural education. Educational exchange becomes more viewed as a tool in implementation of foreign policy goals, including those of international development and democratic aid. Correspondingly,

governmental funding for educational programs becomes more driven by political goals than by programmatic needs.

Before restructurization, educational exchange enjoyed substantial financial support on the part of the US government. For 2000, the administration asked Congress for \$1 billion to support exchanges and other programs with the 12 states of the former Soviet Union alone (see Erb 2002).

Under the Republican administration, governmental support of educational exchange decreased significantly. Following the terrorist attacks of 2001, the Bush administration's policy provided minimum support to public diplomacy initiatives. By comparison, in 2001, President Bush asked for only 225 million (Erb 2002). Together with tightened visa regulations, which complicated international students' access to the US, this led to a decrease in overall numbers of international students enrolled in US higher educational institutions. For the year 2004, an annual 2.4% decrease in the numbers of international students enrolled in the US higher educational institutions was reported (IIE 2004).

This decline of governmental support affected all democratic aid programs during the Republican administration, especially following the terrorist attacks of 2001. A number of latest reports on public diplomacy, including those of the Defense Science Board and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), as well as polls by the Pew Foundation suggest that the US is not doing enough in the field of public diplomacy (Alliance News 2005). Nye (2004b) argues that the recent international decline of popular support of the United States' international politics was caused both by excessive use of military force and negligence of soft power strategies by the US government (Nye 2004b:18).

The beginning of the second presidency term of George W. Bush has evidenced an increased attention towards the questions of public diplomacy. In the opening statement at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 25, 2005 the recently appointed Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that “the time for diplomacy is now.” Earlier, during her confirmation hearing, Dr. Rice has demonstrated her intentions to “reinvigorate public diplomacy” in the US, and emphasized that public diplomacy is a “State Department Responsibility.”

During the same session, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN) talked about the value of foreign students to the U.S. “One of our most effective methods of diplomacy has been our programs that have admitted students from all over the world.” (Alliance News 2005). Responding to his question about what could be done to reverse the decreasing numbers of foreign students’ enrollment, Dr. Rice stressed that student exchange is invaluable, and that both funding and visa issues needed to be paid attention to in order to reinvigorate educational exchange in the US.

For the Fiscal Year of 2006, President Bush’s administration requested \$328 million for public diplomacy activities, up from \$320 in FY 2005, and \$430 million for exchanges funding, an increase of \$74 million (Alliance 2005).

#### *Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program*

All students that were interviewed for this research came to the United States as participants of Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program (Muskie). Muskie is one of the educational exchange programs managed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (formerly USIA). The Muskie Program “confers fellowships for Master’s degree-level study in the U.S. in the fields of business administration, economics, education, environmental policy and management, international affairs, journalism/mass communications, law, library and

information science, public administration, public health and public policy for students and professionals from Eurasia” (see IREX 2005).

The Muskie Program was initiated in 1992 after adoption of the Freedom Support Act, which was passed by the U.S. Congress to provide up to \$40 million of defense department funds as part of the government’s “nonproliferation and disarmament programs,” to the countries of the former Soviet Union. Through the 1990’s, the Freedom Support Act or FSA was shaping U.S. educational activities in this region.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C.) constitutes the legal base of the program. Starting in 2004, the program is administered by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX). The funds for this Program come from two sources: the Freedom Support Act and the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 covering Bureau activities promoting mutual understanding. In addition, significant cost contributions are provided by the administering organizations and by host universities.

The focus of the academic component of the Program changed with the shifts of policy goals towards the targeted countries. In the early 1990s, when the outcome of market reforms in the former Soviet Union was unclear, the academic focus of the Program was on economic studies and business administration, whereas a bigger portion of funding was allocated for Russian professionals (Gallagher 1993, Semenenko 2003). Later, with the development of economic reforms in Russia, the Program’s focus shifted to democratic reforms. In terms of academic studies, this was a shift away from funding of business and legal studies toward funding of studies in areas such as democratic development, civil society, independent media, and the health sector.

Following the shifts in the US foreign policy goals, the level and distribution of funding among former USSR countries received from the US government were changing, too. The Freedom Support Act assistance for the former Soviet Union peaked at \$1.2 billion in 1993. For the fiscal year 2003, appropriation stood at \$755 million, with Russia's share set at \$142 million. Starting in the mid-90's, the distribution of funds was changing with the level of funding of such countries as Ukraine, Georgia, and Armenia going up. After the events of September 2001, the US foreign policy's attention shifted towards Central Asian countries, with corresponding changes in funds appropriations (Semenenko 2003).

Consequently, the Program's design was more shaped by shifting goals of US foreign policy than by programmatic needs. The situation was complicated by the fact that, similar to most of the other exchange programs in the US, Muskie has been administered by a variety of independent organizations (up to four different entities in a single program year), each with its own institutional design and methods of operation.

As most recently formulated, the major goal of the Muskie program is to foster democratic and economic reform in the independent states of the former Soviet Union (UISSI 2002). To achieve this goal, the agencies administering the program select mid-career professionals with potential to become leaders in specified professional areas and provide them with the opportunity to receive higher education in US universities. The underlying logic is that when these future leaders return home, they will "succeed in those fields specified by the program, contributing ideas, skills and competencies not needed or developed under communism" (UISSI 2002:2).

However, the overall effectiveness of educational exchange in achieving this goal is yet to be proved. Although it is hard to deny that long-term periods of study in the US leave

considerable impact on foreign students, whether this impact matches the goals of the program sponsors is unclear.

There have been little evaluative investigations of this question. First, a close relation to political goals makes it difficult to select objective criteria of success. Second, an operational theoretical frame for studying effects of the democratic aid efforts is yet to be developed (see Carothers, 1999). The findings of the University of Iowa Social Science Institute (UISSI), which conducted an evaluation of the Muskie program in 1999, indicate that program alumni exhibit lower levels of political participation than representatives of the control group. Erb (2002) suggests that exposure of foreign students to alternate ways of thinking and doing things does not make them automatically willing and able to apply their new knowledge in their home countries. She also suggests that, if provided with the post-program completion support in terms of information and networking resources, program alumni would be more equipped to produce change in their home countries.

Another supposition is that the new skills and knowledge of alternate ways of doing things that foreign students receive in US universities might not be appropriate or applicable in their home countries. Carothers (1999) claims that a general misperception of certain conceptions as universally applicable is symptomatic of democratic aid programs of the US. Lacking sophisticated understanding of the societies they work in, democratic aid providers often are:

“misguided by the idea that their knowledge of democracy alone is a sufficient guide to foster democracy wherever they go. Too often they have taken upon themselves the role of agents of political change in transitional societies, treating local partners as mere assistants. Countless projects have foundered for lack of real ownership in recipient countries.” (Carothers 1999:2).

Finding whether this is a misadministration by the program agencies or omission on the part of the overall democratic aid policy providers would go beyond the scope of the current research; what is important is that its findings indicate that Muskie participants get few opportunities to take courses directly related to transitional societies. Whether their new knowledge and skills make them prepared to make change in their home countries, is not clear. The fields of studies chosen by the program are all of culture-specific nature. However, as the UISSI evaluation report shows, these new skills and knowledge make them well-fitted for work in international organizations' offices back in their countries (UISSI 2002:5).

From a different perspective, however, immediate calculable effects of educational exchange do not paint the whole picture of its impact over participating societies. As Carothers (1999) emphasizes, many of the most important results of democracy programs are psychological, moral, subjective, indirect, and time-delayed.

*Universities: Institutional Response to the Processes of Internationalization*

#### Economic sociology about modern universities

Current changes in Western universities attract close attention to them on the part of economic sociologists. Established as publicly funded institutions that are directed, above all, by the philosophy of public good, universities recently have been increasingly influenced by the principles of the private sector. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) referred to this process as academic capitalism, a term that embraces all instances of the for-profit ideology and practices permeating higher educational institutions (Slaughter and Leslie 1997).

Recent reduction of public funding introduces ideas of entrepreneurialism into the principles of administration of universities (Deem 2001), making them explicitly seek out new ways of raising funds. Academics and administrators strive to attract private sector funds through enterprising



activities such as consultancies and applied research. Student recruiting is often viewed as a contest for resources they bring to their schools, whereas international student enrollment is often evaluated by mere calculations of funds they contribute to the national economy (Open Doors report 2004).

New managerialism is another concept that purports to explain and describe new discourses of management derived from the for-profit sector, whose introduction into publicly funded institutions has been encouraged by governments seeking to reduce public spending costs (Deem 1998). It explains how and why concepts constructed to describe and explain economic forces have been increasingly employed in the analysis of university administrations. Economic discourse raises questions of efficiency of education provided, brings objectives of the search for excellence, and makes the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation through measurements of performance and client satisfaction. Thus, market-oriented theories, such as Total Quality Management and consumer satisfaction are applied to analysis and policy advisement in the field of higher educational management (Bonstingle 1992, El Khawas 1998, Chance and Chance 2002).

The phenomenon of capitalization of higher education has been related to the processes of globalization (that is, the global spread of business and services as well as key economic, social and cultural practices to a world market, often through multi-national companies and the Internet) and internationalization (the sharing of ideas, knowledge and ways of doing things in similar ways across different countries).

Although interpretations and assessments of globalization processes by theoreticians and politicians alike vary radically, there are several points of agreement that could be related to changes in Western universities. First, nation-states operating in a newly globalized world appear

to be reluctant to spend public money on public services, including education. Second, universities are expected to enter market relations, treating students as clients, or consumers of service provided on some agreed upon conditions (Deem 2001).

Global labor market and technology development, from their side, indirectly prompt universities to converge their curricular and contents of knowledge and skills taught and make them globally tradable. It is expected that students after graduation will be competitive on the global labor market.

#### Organizational sociology about universities and the processes of internationalization

Universities as institutions have benefited from close attention on the part of organizational sociology, which argues that universities are complex organizations with unique sets of characteristics, which have an impact on their institutional culture (Peterson and Spencer 1990, Sporn 1996).

Organizational sociologists claim that, compared to business organizations, goals of universities are differentiated, unclear and difficult to measure (Birnbaum 1988; Kosko 1993). Their internal stakeholders are numerous and varied, including domestic and foreign undergraduates, graduate and professional students as well as mid-career individuals seeking continuing education programs.

Universities' response to the processes of globalization is often viewed in organizational theory as the process of adjustment, where complex organizational structures (universities) respond to the influences from the part of compound environment (that includes processes related to internationalization of knowledge and globalization) (Gibbs 1990, Schoorman 2000a,b). The external environment within which universities operate is extremely complex, rapidly changing and demanding. Internationalization, mass education, and reduction of state

funding are some of the forces exhorting their influence over universities (Bartell 2003). Internationalization as an adaptation process can be driven both by strategic (in response to the external influences) and developmental (internally-motivated, pre-planned) logics (Chaffee and Jacobson 1997, Bartell 2003).

Ellingboe (1998) in his study of internationalization of the curriculum at the University of Minnesota, defines internationalization “. . . as the *process* of integrating an international perspective into a college or university system. It is an ongoing, future-oriented, multidimensional, interdisciplinary, leadership-driven vision that involves many stakeholders working to change the internal dynamics of an institution to respond and adapt appropriately to an increasingly diverse, globally focused, ever-changing external environment” (p. 199). Here, campus internationalization is viewed as both introducing the international aspects into classes and curricula and two-way student exchange. In terms of university administrations, this includes decisions and planned activities related to diverse issues, such as provision of financial aid for foreign students and funding for study abroad programs, introduction of international perspectives into the class contents and inclusion of globally oriented courses into curricular, provision of special services for foreign students on campus and international awareness of faculty, internationally co-curricular units of universities (residence halls, conference planning centers, student unions, career centers, cultural immersion and language houses, student activities and student organizations) and faculty members’ international involvement in activities with colleagues, research sites, and institutions worldwide, and many more.

Bartell, trying to build a holistic vision of the internationalization process that includes multiple strategic and development choices and is both intrinsic to and exhorting influence upon specific organizational features of each school views “internationalization as a complex, all

encompassing and policy-driven process, integral to and permeating the life, culture, curriculum and instruction as well as research activities of the university and its members” (2003:46).

Special attention has been paid to the fact that institutional response to the external influences differs depending on specifics of organizational structure and internal culture of particular organizations. Bartell (2003:47) states that

“there appears to be considerable variation among universities and among different units within a single university, with respect to internationalization. This variation can be attributed to several factors, such as structure, strategy, field of study and university culture. Structure refers to the formal hierarchy of authority, patterns of communication, interactions and coordination. Strategy involves action plans, ways and means employed for interacting with the environment in order to achieve the institutional goals. Some fields of study, such as science and engineering, owing to the nature of these disciplines and the use of mathematics as the universal language (Groennings and Wiley 1990), have been internationally oriented, while in some other areas, such as the social sciences, the humanities, education, public administration and, somewhat less so, management studies, the tendency has been to a more narrowly-defined focus characterized by a national, or at most, North American approach rather than a substantive international approach. As a result, on a single given campus there can be strong differences in efforts made to internationalize.”

Thus, recognizing the general importance of the urge to internationalize for the universities, it is important to see that the institutional response will be diverse and dependent on the specific sets of characteristics of each school and academic program.

*Academically Focused Interests of Graduate Students-Participants of the U.S. Government Sponsored Programs*

Following are the interview summaries for the eight graduate students—participants of the Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program, contributed for this research. Their names were changed in compliance with the confidentiality terms of this research.

## Student Summaries

Leta

At the time of the interview, Leta was a 26-year old law student from Russia. As a Muskie participant, she was enrolled in a one-year LL.M. program at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Law. This program was specifically designed for Foreign Law graduates willing to study common law in the US.

Prior to her participation in the Muskie program, Leta completed a vocational program in Legal Studies at the Moscow State Academy of Law. She has four years of professional experience, including work in international law companies. For Leta, this was not a first visit to the US as an exchange student. She had participated in an educational exchange program for high school students.

Because of her high school studies in an American school, Leta felt comfortable with her English. She never sought the help of the writing center or other student learning services available at the University of Pittsburgh, although she admitted that their university professors did not make allowances for their international background and tried to ask as much from the foreign students as they would from the US ones.

Leta highly praised the quality of Internet services and access to electronic database available for students in her program and preferred to search for study-related materials on her own, without referring to the library staff for help.

The major difficulty she experienced with her studies was heavy workloads and the system of regular tests of knowledge. Being accustomed to the teacher-oriented system of learning, she found it challenging to meet demands of independent work. However, she

emphasized that systematic knowledge she received at the university back at home helped her to meet this challenge.

Leta stated that her career goals were the major reason for her to apply to Muskie program. She felt that her vocational studies were not enough for a good career in law and she was convinced that a US degree would open new opportunities for her. Inspired by her previous learning experience in the US and her personal conversations with colleagues from a US law firm she was working for Leta regarded US study programs in law as providing students with solid knowledge and strong analytical skills. She expected to take courses relevant to her future career and receive skills and knowledge valuable for her professional development.

Leta's interview was conducted by the end of her second semester in the LL.M. program. At that time, she was searching for a summer internship and thinking intensely about her future career plans. When asked whether she thought that her new knowledge and skills would be applicable back at home, she said that understanding of the differences in law systems and traditions of the two countries made her hesitant as to how to answer this question. Having emphasized that she received new knowledge in the areas of her interest, Leta admitted that most probably she would not be able to use her new expertise in a Russian law company. Only if employed by an international firm, she would avoid the problem of incompatibility.

Leta admitted that her academic program did not offer courses focusing on international issues. Created as a program introducing international students in the US law system, it did not incorporate much of the international law studies. None of the school professors were familiar with specific questions foreign law professionals would have to face. According to Leta, "they only had a very vague understanding of the common law system and would not be able to make a comparative analysis of legal issues." Having chosen to do a comparative study as her summer

research project, she did not expect to receive much academic advisement on her project. Rather, she was planning to conduct the research on her own.

Although she had studied in the US before, Leta admitted that she was not well familiar with graduate education in the US when she started her studies at CMU. She applied to the Muskie program twice. However, being aware that the Program makes placement decisions for the fellows, she did not try to obtain more information on academic programs or different universities in the US. Consequently, she was not fully aware of the particulars of the academic program she got enrolled in.

Overall, Leta positively evaluated her experience and the quality of knowledge she received. She successfully adjusted to the new learning environment and appreciated foreign student-friendly atmosphere in her host school. However, her academic program was not suited to equip Leta with specific knowledge necessary for her future professional career in her native country. She could not find academic advisement for her comparative research and was hesitant as to whether her new knowledge would be applicable back at home. Understanding the level of incompatibility of two different systems, she did not intend to try to employ new schemes contradicting the existing traditions in her home country. Only if employed by an international company, she was hoping to apply her knowledge in practice.

#### Vera

Vera is a law student from Belarus brought to the US as a participant of Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program (Muskie). At the time of the interview she was a 29-year old graduate student completing her LL.M. studies at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Law. She received her bachelor equivalent in Law from the university in her native city of Polotsk and then continued her studies towards a Master's degree at Belarusian State University

(BGU). Vera had also spent one year at a university in Sweden as a participant of an exchange program for graduate students.

As part of her graduate program at BGU Vera was working on a research project prior to coming to the US. She had several independent works published in national-level scientific journals. While at an American university, she was hoping to focus on her graduate research project, collecting data and reference materials for it.

Vera highly appreciated the friendliness and consideration of the program created specifically for foreign students. Because of her prior international learning experience, Vera had few problems adjusting to a foreign educational system. Having admitted that she had little knowledge about specifics of the graduate education in the US, Vera was confident in her ability to cope with a new environment. She determined language skills deficiency as her major learning problem and, unlike other respondents, used language and other learning aid services offered by her school.

As a professional teacher (she had several years of teaching experience from her home university and intended to continue teaching upon returning back) Vera appreciated the advantages of the student-centered approach to learning. She understood the value of seminar classes and in-class discussions for successful learning process and recognized the benefits of professors' being approachable and easy to communicate with. Due to her personal preferences to different ways of learning, she did not easily participate in the interactive learning practices. However, she was confident that lack of her in-class participation would not impair her academic success, whereas her systematic learning background helped her to manage heavy workloads, characteristic of the student-focused educational systems.



Vera's decision to apply to the Muskie Fellowship Program was closely related to her professional goals. After completion of the program, she was planning to come back to her career in academia, to complete her research required for kandidatskaya<sup>8</sup> degree, and to start working on her doctoral thesis. For her, the Muskie Fellowship provided an excellent opportunity to gain knowledge in an area close to her research interests and to gather data necessary for her future research.

Vera admitted that after familiarizing herself with the specifics of her academic program, she had to modify her research topic to fit her new academic schedule. However, her new research focus remained in the area of her general academic interests. Like the rest of Muskie participants, she was not able to choose the placement. Neither had she tried to search independently for information on academic programs available in the US. However, she said that her academic program suited her research interests and she was satisfied with the choice.

Vera received detailed materials about her academic program before coming to the US. She had time to plan her research activities and academic schedule ahead. She managed to take most of the courses she was planning to take and was satisfied with the quality of knowledge received. Because of her solid background in academic studies, Vera did not find academic advisement provided in her host school either helpful or necessary. Furthermore, she negatively evaluated her professors' familiarity with the international law and foreign countries' legal systems. However, being confident in her abilities to conduct an independent research, she focused on data collection and took the most of the electronically accessible and other types of data sources available for students of her school.

Although Vera had to modify her research and did not find a satisfactory level of academic advisement in her host school, a good match between her research interests and her

host academic program provided for Vera's ability to receive the most of her academic experience in the US. The new knowledge she received was valuable for her future research and professional development. At the time of the interview, her most immediate goals were related to her professional career in academia. Whether her academic career would provide her with the possibilities to contribute to democratic changes in her country is difficult, if at all possible, to judge.

### Boris

Boris is 29, Russian, enrolled in the LL.M. program at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Law. Prior to applying to the Muskie exchange program, he had completed graduate studies in International Law in Moscow and started working as a university lecturer. His other professional experience was with various law firms in Moscow. Boris had publications related to his graduate research. He considers doing a post-graduate research project at some point in the future.

Boris had participated in an international seminar organized by the Red Cross for young professional working in the field of international law. Apart from that, he had no international experience and was not familiar with foreign educational systems. Led by a "vague idea" of the necessity to get an international degree to boost his career, he applied to Muskie Fellowship several times.

Prior to coming to the US, Boris had little, if any information on the local graduate education system. Neither he knew the system of law education and programs available for entrants. Although he had a good understanding of what kind of knowledge he needed to obtain while studying in the US, Boris did not try to search for courses relevant to his interests or programs offering courses that might be interesting for him. He was convinced that, possessing

so little knowledge on the US graduate educational system, he would not be able to choose a program on his own.

Although he knew so little about his future academic program prior to coming to the US, Boris was hoping to take courses that would be helpful for his future career. He appreciated academic advisement provided at his school and admitted that without this help it would have been difficult for him to build his class schedule for the first semester.

Boris did not have good language skills before coming to the US. As he was approved for participation late, he did not have a chance to participate in a pre-academic English language training provided, if necessary, for Muskie fellows. When needed, Boris turned for help to the English writing center, but never used any other learning aid services available in his university. Having taught as a university teacher in Russia, Boris is cautious to give a one-sided evaluation of the student-oriented learning system. He appreciates the practical side of his academic program, whereas he emphasized that for a career in academia back at home one might need to obtain a more systematic education.

His own professional plans, although key for his decision to come the US for graduate studies, were yet uncertain at the time of the interview. Boris was planning to find a job in Moscow that would allow him to support his family. He was also hoping to continue his research at some point in the future, although he was not sure whether he would be able to afford it.

Boris claimed that most of the courses he took were related to his sphere of academic interests to some degree. However, he thought that his new knowledge was only valuable for his possible doctoral research, whereas his new skills and professional expertise would not be applicable in a Russian company. Due to differences of the legal systems and practices traditionally employed, he expected his new knowledge and skills not to be in a high demand on

his home country's labor market. Most of professors in his host school were not well familiar with the foreign countries' legal issues and only had a "general idea" of the concept of civil law adopted. He agreed that his new degree would be a good asset in his job search, if he decides to work for an US employer in Russia. This way, his new expertise would help him reach his goal of career advancement.

#### Denis

Denis is a 26-year old Information Technologies specialist from Ukraine. His professional background includes three years of service at Procter and Gamble in Kiev. At the time of the interview, Denis was completing his first year of an MBA program at Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU) school of Business as a Muskie exchange student.

Denis had obtained his Bachelor's equivalent in Engineering from the University of Dnepropetrovsk. While at undergraduate school, he spent a year in the United States, studying Computer Science at the University of St. Louis as an exchange student. Since then, he had been applying to various exchange programs for graduate students until he was admitted to the Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program.

Because of his studies in the US as a college student, Denis had a good command of English at the time of application to Muskie Fellowship. The differences in teaching style and the ways professors communicated with students were easy for him to adjust to. As his school had a significant number of international students enrolled, most of his professors had experience in working with foreign students and were perceptive to their learning problems. Per his own words, the biggest difficulty for Denis was to adjust to team work, which traditionally constitutes a significant part of MBA students' learning activities in the US.

Denis had considerable experience of working for an international company his enrollment at CMU. He thought that an MBA degree from a US university would help him to either advance

his career in an international company in Ukraine, or to find a job in one of the European countries. Although he considered applying to universities independently, the low chances of getting financial aid for his MBA studies made him choose the Muskie Fellowship.

Denis admitted that, despite his previous studies in the US, he was not well familiarized with the US graduate studies system before his enrollment at CMU. He also mentioned that, although he searched independently for MBA programs available in the US, he paid attention to school ratings and financial aid opportunities available rather than to academic contents of the program and types of courses available. He had to change his specialization after his first semester at CMU to make it more compatible with his professional career plans.

In general, Denis was satisfied with the quality of education he was receiving at his host university. He admitted that his academic program was created to meet demands of the local labor markets and, consequently, to address interests of local students. To receive knowledge better tradable outside the US, Denis tried to avoid taking courses devoted to purely domestic issues. However, he was convinced that it would be impossible for him to apply his knowledge in a Ukrainian company in any near future. The technological gap between the two countries would leave his new expertise unclaimed by domestic Ukrainian labor market.

Oleg

Oleg is a 29-year-old Muskie Fellow from Ukraine. At the time of the interview, he was completing his MBA studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Oleg received his Bachelor's equivalent in Economics from Kiev Institute of International Affairs. He had working experience in both private and governmental sectors. All of the for-profit companies he worked for were international. After graduating from the Kiev Institute, Oleg participated in a short-term research project in France. However, he was not very satisfied with his performance. He was

convinced that an MBA degree, “no matter which country it is received in,” would give him a chance to advance in his career.

Alongside with the Muskie Fellowship, Oleg applied independently to several other universities and was admitted to one of them. According to him, financial reasons made him choose the exchange program, as he could not get full tuition expenses coverage independently.

While searching for universities to apply to, Oleg searched the Internet for information. However, he paid attention primarily to the university ratings, financial aid opportunities, and alumni careers. Oleg admitted that he was not well familiar with the contents of MBA programs in the US universities, neither he was well aware of the specifics of graduate studies in the US universities before he came to CMU as an exchange student.

Oleg confessed that, although his command of English was not very strong, he did not experience too many language related problems during his studies at CMU. He never used the writing center’s services, as the nature of his home assignments did not require his writing to be impeccably correct. He appreciated library services, electronically accessible databases, and library services instruction classes provided for new students.

Oleg was comfortable with the informal teaching style and appreciated his professors being approachable and helpful. Although he admitted that heavy workload, a lot of home assignments, and frequent exams were an unusual and challenging practice for him Oleg was convinced that his previous education helped him to complete his studies successfully. His major difficulty was to adjust to peculiarities of team work, a learning practice that he was not closely familiar with before.

Having decided to improve his career options with a graduate degree from a foreign university, Oleg planned to take courses directly relevant to his future career. As is noted above,

he was not well familiarized with the programs' academic contents and courses available for MBA students in the US universities at the time of making his decision. However, after two semesters of studies Oleg was quite satisfied with the courses available at his host university. At the same time, he acknowledged that there were no courses focusing on his home region issues. Neither were his professors referring to materials from his home region. For one of his home assignments, Oleg did a project based on materials from his home country. Not being familiar with this area, Oleg's professor, although supportive of his initiative would not provide him with advice on this research.

Oleg was highly appreciative of the value of his new knowledge and experience for his career advancement. He also emphasized that it was valuable for his personal development. However, he was doubtful that most of the technical knowledge on management he received in the US would be applicable back at home, unless he was employed by a foreign company. Although pointing out that his new skills would help him to analyze and understand managerial problems better, he thought that if hired by a local company, he would need to search for different techniques.

#### Peter

Peter is a 27-year-old Muskie exchange student from Ukraine. At the time of the interview, he was completing his one-year graduate program in Public Policy and Management at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Pittsburgh.

Peter has received his Bachelor's equivalent in Russian and English Languages from Poltava Pedagogical University. Prior to coming to the United States as a Muskie exchange student, he

was enrolled in graduate studies in Law at Kiev State University. He was planning to complete his studies upon coming back home.

When in undergraduate school, Peter spent a year in the United States as an exchange student. Later, he did his internship in a parliamentary candidate's office in Germany. Peter had some experience of working for international organizations and was planning to continue his career in an international NGO. When applying to the Muskie Program, he was convinced that an international degree would help him to advance his career.

Alongside with the Fellowship, Peter was applying independently to several US universities. He was interested in Public Policy graduate programs and searched for information available on the Internet on academic programs in this field. He also talked to some colleagues and friends, including those who graduated from the US universities. However, as Peter confessed, he only had a vague understanding of what he was going to study. Despite his undergraduate studies in the US, he found himself ignorant of the US graduate studies system.

His previous experience of studying in the US helped Peter to adjust to the new learning environment and saved him from language related problems. He never used the writing center services. Among other services available for students Peter specifically noted high quality of library services and electronically accessible sources of information.

On the whole, Peter was satisfied with the courses available in his school. He admitted however, that he had to choose a concentration that would be the least focused on specifically local issues, tried to avoid purely domestic courses, requested for a waiver from some courses, and looked for the opportunities of taking classes in other schools in the area to customize the program in accordance with his professional needs. Peter was specifically grateful to his academic advisor who helped him to build his class schedule.



At the time of the interview, Peter was working on a research project for one of his home assignments that was focusing on the situation in his home region. He admitted that despite his professor's support, he experienced considerable difficulties working on this project, especially when gathering reliable data for his research. Peter acknowledged that within the frame of his academic program, it was impossible to get a specialized knowledge on his home region. Neither it would be possible to receive an expert advice on the issue from his professors.

Peter appreciated his new knowledge and skills very much. However, he highlighted that he was specifically looking into professional opportunities with international NGOs working in his home country. He also pointed out that some general analytic skills would be valuable for him in case he would be looking for a job with Ukrainian employers. In the whole, however, he considered his education better tailored and applicable for a position with an international job provider.

Slava

Slava is a 29-year-old Muskie Fellow from the Siberian part of Russia. At the time of the interview, he was completing his first year of an MPA program at GSPIA.

Slava had received his Bachelor's equivalent from a Linguistics University and was working in NGO project management since then. He looked for opportunities with different graduate fellowship programs, as he was convinced that participation in an international exchange program would be his only chance to find a decent job in Moscow.

Although he did some research on the contents of his future studies before going to the US (he looked at the information on courses available on the Internet and talked to Muskie alumni), Slava admitted that he had a vague understanding of both academic programs in MPA

and graduate studies in the US. At the same time, Slava was confident that an international degree would be a good asset for his resume.

Slava reported that although teaching style differed from what he was used to he did not have problems adjusting to it. He also noted that he preferred a more systematic approach to learning, whereas a more practical style that he experienced in his host school in the US made an impression as less challenging. Although he regarded team work as overemphasized by his professors, Slava was confident in his overall success with studies.

Slava named language problems as his major learning related difficulty. However, he never turned to the writing services center as most of his professors did not grade a non-native speaker for language errors. Although he was in general satisfied with the library services, Slava did not try to ask library staff for assistance when he experienced difficulties with searching for Russian data for one of his home assignment projects. Instead, he asked his ex-colleagues for assistance.

Having chosen to focus on urban planning, Slava had no complaints about courses available at his host school. However, alongside with his excitement regarding the new knowledge he was receiving Slava expressed a deep concern in applicability of his new skills and knowledge back at home, where local government system and the level of technological development differed significantly from he was taught in the US. At the same time, Slava was convinced that a US degree would help him advance his career.

Ana

Ana is a 30-year-old Muskie Fellow from Armenia. At the time of the interview, she was enrolled in the one-year MBA program at Joseph M. Katz School of Business of University of Pittsburgh.

Ana received her Bachelor's equivalent in Computer Science from the Armenian State Engineering University, and her MBA in Finance and Marketing from American University of Armenia (AUA). She applied to the Muskie Graduate Fellowship several times, as she was convinced that an MBA degree from a US University would provide her with better chances to be employed by an international company.

Because of her studies in the American University of Armenia, a school that is structured to mirror a US graduate school, Ana was familiar with the peculiarities of graduate studies in the US before she came to Pittsburgh. Ana took English language and learning aid courses at AUA that prepared her for graduate studies in the US. Access to Internet and professors from US universities that taught at AUA provided for sufficient information on academic contents of MBA programs in the US schools. Consequently, she did not experience adjustment problems at her host school in the US and was well aware of what exactly she was going to study when she had to choose classes for her first semester at CMU.

Ana never asked the writing center's staff for assistance with her writing assignments. She was satisfied with the library services and highly appreciated assistance of the library staff with her data search.

Ana did not expect her professors to be familiar with the situation in her home region. Neither did she expect to take courses directly focusing on the economic situation in her home country. Ana did not try to devote any of her research projects to her home country or region, as without a proper access to valid data she considered it meaningless.

Being familiar with the Armenian market structure, Ana was aware of the inapplicability of most of the marketing strategies she learned in the US. At the same time, she recognized

universal applicability of at least some part of her new knowledge. She was also convinced that her new degree would be helpful if she finds a job in an international company.

#### Language proficiency and services available

Language fluency was stated by the interviewees as one of the major difficulties they had to deal with. In this sense, special language courses provided by universities and encouraged by program sponsors were helpful for the interviewees. However, the ways this concerned international students seem to be contingent on requirements the different academic programs and professors present to their students.

Those interviewees that had little or no experience in international learning reported language problems as one of the major difficulties. Under the terms of the program, Muskie Graduate Fellowship Grant provides pre-academic English language training for those students whose knowledge of English Language is not sufficient for being enrolled in a graduate program (IREX 2005). Having completed a pre-academic English course before starting her studies at Pittsburgh University's Law School, Vera has admitted, for instance, that this intensive training had saved her a lot of troubles when the studies began.

Nonetheless, Vera and other students that had language training prior to beginning their studies reported substantial difficulties they experienced having to cover extensive graduate school reading assignments in a foreign language. Heavy work loads were mentioned by almost all of the interviewees, including those who did not report any substantial difficulties with language. Students possessing less command of English (Vera, Slava, Oleg) thought that it was one of the biggest challenges in their academic experience.

Fewer respondents reported poor understanding of spoken language as a barrier to successful participation in the studying process. Vera, Slava, and Ana admitted that they rarely

participate in the in-class discussions. Although agreeing that language difficulties might be one of the reasons for their unwillingness to speak up in class, they stated that this was generally caused by their personal attitude to the ways of studying. “I never participate in discussions; this is simply my way of doing it” says Vera.

Oleg has mentioned that both professors and American students in his school appear to have enough experience working with international students not to be surprised or disappointed by their language capabilities. At the same time, the other international students’ presence in class made respondents feel comfortable regardless of their level of English proficiency.

When asked about their general concerns regarding language proficiency, none of the interviewees recalled the instances of usage of colloquial language and local cultural references by professors that would create academic challenges for international students. Only after been asked directly by the interviewer, respondents agreed that some of their professors use idiomatic phrases and sometimes refer to cultural events that internationals in general are not familiar with. However, all of the respondents thought that this never was done in a way that would preclude them from understanding the academic component of the lectures. Oleg and Slava have mentioned further, that this might have made them feel outside the cultural-specific component of the discussion, although they were convinced that the professors’ style of presenting material in class was not the major cause for this feeling. There is a possibility that these students, although experiencing this type of difficulty do not recognize it as an impediment to their academic success.

All of the interviewees admitted that they had experienced difficulties with writing in English. However, only a few of them have visited their writing services centers at least once. Oleg and Denis (both were enrolled in the MBA program at CMU) were not aware of that they

have any at the university. On hearing the interviewer's explanation that writing centers normally offer university students services in proof reading papers, they admitted that they had heard about it but never thought of asking them for assistance. Some students (Oleg, Denis, Peter) said that they normally did not have time for that and that professors did not really pay too much attention to language quality of works submitted by international students. "They [professors] do not expect us to have perfect language skills anyways" said Slava.

Ana and Peter admitted that they preferred to turn to fellow students for help instead of going to writing centers, as this would take less time and they would not need to explain the specifics of the writing tasks to the proof-readers. Ana, Oleg, and Denis also emphasized that MBA programs tend to ask students to do most of the tasks in teams, where students with better writing skills do the proof reading for the whole team. Vera was the only one to admit that she used their Center's services several times and thought "it was very useful." She emphasized that it seemed to be a consistent policy in their school to treat students equally regardless their native language.

#### Other services related to academic activities

All of the respondents reported positive experience with the scope of internet-accessible resources and services related to it. They also pointed out that library orientation sessions were informative and useful. However, those respondents who reported troubles with finding country-specific data for their research admitted that they did not ask faculty librarians for assistance.

Vera was the only respondent to report attending learning aid courses. She followed her professor's advice to attend a workshop in legal writing provided for students of her school.

### Cultural patterns of learning and style of teaching

All of the interviewees come from the countries where educational systems traditionally favor oral, lecture-based, professor-oriented style of teaching that requires less initiative on the part of the student. This might explain their disappointment with the size of home assignments they had to struggle with on their own. As it was mentioned earlier, all of the interviewees reported some level of difficulties with the unusual work load. Even those interviewees that had previously studied in the United States as undergraduate or high school exchange students (Leta, Denis, Peter) mentioned that they were not aware of how tight academic schedules in American graduate schools were. Some (Oleg, Slava) were disappointed as they felt that this resulted in insufficient amount of time and attention paid to particular questions.

All of them had to find some way of adjusting to the tight schedules of graduate schools. Some of the interviewees (Leta, Vera, Slava) admitted that, being unable to complete all of the home assignments, they had to prioritize them and only work at the most important ones. Most of the students pointed out that their academic background helped them a lot. All Muskie Fellows possess advanced degrees and proved abilities to deal with academic challenges. Ana and Boris pointed out that prioritizing was effective for them as their current fields of studies were close to what they had studied at home.

Most of the respondents also noted that the teaching style they observe in their host universities is different from what they were used to back in their countries. Ana was the only respondent to report substantial experience of studying in a student-oriented environment prior to coming to the United States. She obtained it at the American University of Armenia, where part of the faculty comes from US universities. Leta, Denis, and Peter recall that they went through

an adjustment period when they first came to the US to study. Some interviewees say that this process of adjustment was “quite uncomfortable” for them.

Vera, who has an experience of teaching university students in her home country, gave an example to show how different her understanding of the appropriate instruction style is from what she observed in her host university in the US:

“Once I approached one of my professors with a question about international legislation related to the Soviet sector. The regulation I was referring to is still in force. Professor knew nothing about it, but what surprised me most was the way he dealt with the situation. If I found myself in a situation like this I would have to apologize, promise to find the answer, and appoint a time to discuss this issue with the student later. For my professor, this situation was not unsettling at all. He simply asked me to prepare a presentation on this question for the next class.”

Vera was judging the situation from the point of view of a person accustomed to the perception of instructing professors as those leading the teaching process. When serving as a graduate instructor herself, she was supposed to know more than a student on the subject and it would be a question of honor for her to find information needed and to pass this knowledge to her student. For her host professor, however, it was obvious that he was to encourage her to find this information on her own.

Through the course of the interview, Vera emphasized that professors in their school were particularly sensitive to international students’ specific needs. However, in this case it did not occur to her professor to ask whether she would be comfortable doing a presentation in class on this topic, or to explain the reason for asking her to take an active lead on that problem.



In general, interviewees gave positive responses about professors' encouraging discussions in class. "It is good that they encourage you to question everything, to make the conclusions of your own," said Slava. Vera and Leta pointed out that they liked the way professors in their school led seminar discussion. However, Vera did not participate in the in-class discussions herself because she was not used to it. Slava confessed that once he did not speak up in class to correct a serious mistake made by professor, because he thought it would be inappropriate. These students approved the interactive style of teaching but were not willing to fully participate in the process for the reason that they were unaccustomed to it. They nevertheless were confident in their success with the studies.

MBA students (Ana, Oleg, and Denis) pointed out that it was difficult for them to get used to team working assignments. Oleg and Denis admitted, that they had little prior experience of doing educational assignments in groups, and that it took them time to adjust and understand how they could successfully participate in team work. Oleg confessed that although he understood how to work in groups, he still did not feel comfortable with it. Slava, although obliged to do less group assignments in his school than MBA students commonly do, felt that the role and effectiveness of team work in education "might be overestimated" in local system of education. None of the respondents reported that they had serious problems with working in teams. All of them adjusted to group work to the level that allowed them being successful with their studies. "I do not like it, but now I know how it works and I am sure I am capable to participate in [team work] successfully," said Oleg.

#### Systematic versus practical approach

Although this item was not included in the questionnaire, most of the interviewees mentioned that they felt more confident in their success with studies because of their previous

education. The major emphasis was made on the systematic character of knowledge they received in their home countries. They were convinced that this background helped them to handle the case-oriented material for their classes in the US universities.

#### Decision to go to the US and academic interests

From the sample of seven students, Vera was the only one to report that she had purely academic reasons for applying to the program. Back at home, she was doing research for an advanced degree in law and worked as a lecturer at her home city university. One of her major goals for participating in a US exchange program was getting easier access to information resources and collecting data for her research.

Other respondents, although being at different stages of their careers at the time of making the decision to apply to an exchange program, had more or less expressed understanding of a need to get an advanced international degree to change or boost up their careers. “It was the only chance for me to make a career,” said Slava. For Ana, it was a career-changing decision. Having tried to survive on a salary of a university teacher at a small Armenian university, she decided to get a degree in Business Administration, hoping that this would give her chances for finding a better paying job. Boris, who was working on an advanced degree in Moscow, confessed that he “had been speculating over a vague idea of getting a degree from a US university for quite a while. I thought that this would open new opportunities for me, although I was not quite sure of what kind of opportunities that might be.”

Although differing in the level of certainty for success and having their career plans developed to a different level, most of the respondents expressed their primary interest in getting a job in an international company or organization, hoping that an international degree would increase their chances to do so.

Those who were relatively satisfied with their jobs applied with an intention to advance their careers. Denis remembers that when he was applying for an undergraduate exchange program, the economic situation in Ukraine was so bad that he “simply wanted to go away for some time, to see something different.” Although he received a promotion offer from a big international company shortly before he was informed about a Muskie Fellowship Grant award, he opted to participate in the program, hoping that it would widen his career options later.

Oleg had a position at a small international company when he decided to get an international MBA degree, hoping that this would improve his chances with bigger international companies.

At least three respondents admitted that after completion of the program they will try getting a position abroad, saving international companies located in capital cities of their home countries as a backup choice. Two respondents, being not sure of their ability to secure a job in an international company, were willing to consider opportunities with national companies, mentioning that this would be their second choice job search.

The stated overarching goal of the Program is “to foster democratic and economic reform in the independent states of the former Soviet Union. “The logic is that when these future leaders return home, they will succeed in those fields specified by the program (fields that are critical to reform and by exposing them to the U.S. market economy and to democracy in practice), contributing ideas, skills and competencies not needed or developed under communism.” (University of Iowa Social Science Institute 2002:ii). Although current research would not allow inferring population-wide tendencies, a brief analyses of the interviewees’ responses hints at a hypothetical contradiction between the Program goals and the participants’ interests. The interviewees have expressed a clear intention of making a career in an international company

(conditional to their decision to stay in their home countries). Whereas an international career would provide them with plenty of opportunities to exercise new skills, this would presumably limit their chances to contribute new ideas to the development of national enterprises.

#### Relevance of new knowledge and skills for the future educational and professional activities

The fact that educational systems differ across countries and exhibit proclivity to diverse educational strategies and practices has been studied by many researchers of education. Furthermore, they admit that international students require special attention in terms of adjusting to foreign educational system. There is little debate over the necessity of special advisement and learning assistance for international students' success. However, the subject of curricular adjustment to the specific needs of internationals has been approached cautiously.

For instance, Seeger (1993) investigated the question of faculty members' perceived obligation to respond to international students' needs. His findings indicated that, although a majority of students surveyed believed that academic programs need to be adjusted to respond to their specific needs, their professors believed it was out of the scope of the host universities' responsibilities.

As it was revealed earlier, most of the students participating in the current research had reported that their reason for participating in the program was the belief that international education would help them improve their career. Under the terms of the Muskie Fellowship Program, participants are required to return home after completion of the program components (IREX 2005); commitment to returning to the home country is listed as one of the selection criteria for the Program (IREX 2005b). It is expected also, that participants become leaders in the fields of their specialization so that they have the opportunity to contribute new skills and

knowledge acquired and have the means to produce a significant change in economic and democratic development of their home countries.

As a part of the interview, respondents were asked to remember whether at the time of applying to Muskie Fellowship program they expected to receive knowledge and skills applicable for their future jobs. Although some respondents admitted that they had a vague idea of the academic programs they will be enrolled in, all of the interviewees gave positive response to this question (“even though I did not know well the academic program I was accepted to, I expected to take courses relevant to my future career” said Boris). They also agreed on that they regarded most of the experience they had as participants of the exchange program useful and empowering. However, when asked whether, having spent more than one semester in their host university, they think they would be able to apply their new knowledge and skills in their home countries, respondents gave more complex answers.

Leta and Vera, enrolled in the LL.M. program at the University of Pittsburgh emphasized that their academic program was specifically designed for international students willing to study the US system of law. The program description says that it provides foreign law graduates with “an opportunity to study common law in a United States context” (University of Pittsburgh School of Law 2005). Planning to continue her research on issues related to common law system upon returning home, Vera was satisfied with the knowledge she was receiving at school. Leta, who had a previous experience of work with international firms, admitted that, although she was appreciative of the new knowledge, her ability to apply it back at home would depend on her success with applying for a job at international companies.

Boris, who was enrolled in the same program as Leta and Vera, admitted that if at some point in the future he works in academia then his knowledge of common law system will be a

good asset for him. He also was considering a possibility of doing a post-doctoral research, for which all that he learned while in the US would be invaluable. However, his short-term career goal was “to get a job that would feed me and my family”, and he saw few opportunities of making this knowledge helpful for a job of this kind.

Peter was working on his Master’s degree in Public Policy Management (MPPM) at GSPIA. A survey cited in the description of that program (GSPIA 2005a) reported 83% of the recent MPPM alumni saying that their experiences at GSPIA enhanced their understanding of the ethical dimensions of public and/or international policymaking and decision-making. However, Peter, who came from a country with a different history of public management development, admitted that “most of the skills in statistical analysis and cost-benefit analysis will be applicable. Well, knowledge in specific areas, such as urban development, will not be possible to apply in Ukraine. All of the structures are based on the European model their. That’s why I decided to try to avoid specialized courses in my school.”

Slava was enrolled in another GSPIA’s program in Public Administration. GSPIA Having a personal interest in urban development, he tried to take more specialized courses in this field. To his opinion, “it would be wonderful to try applying at least some of the principles of information management they use here for urban development. But it is impossible to do so in Russia, there is a long way to go to before we would be able to try it. The levels of technology are too different. Besides, traditional views of management are hard to fight.” Despite his interest in the field and excitement with the new knowledge he was receiving, Slava was not going to look for a job in urban management upon returning home. Meanwhile, the program description implies that it pays special attention to challenges that public administration specialists working in transitional societies have to face (GSPIA 2005b).

Denis was enrolled in MBA program at the CMU's School of Business. He was employed by an international company as an IT management specialist at the time he was approved for a Muskie Graduate Fellowship grant and he was planning to return back to the same company upon completion of the program requirements. In fact, he was planning to do his summer internship in that same company, in Ukraine. Here are his responses regarding future applicability of knowledge he was receiving at CMU:

Interviewer (I): Do you think that academic knowledge you are receiving in CMU will be applicable for your future career?

Denis (D): Some portion of it, yes. Although in some areas it is simply impossible. I think that all contemporary concepts from accounting and finance that are taught in the US schools are irrelevant to the current situation in Ukraine. We have a long road to go before we have at least something close to what they have now in the US. In IT management it is even worse. Ukraine is at least five years behind everything that has been achieved in this area in the US. I am receiving knowledge and skills that almost no one possesses in Ukraine now. Under normal conditions, technology comes first and then it brings demand for specific knowledge and for people that have that kind of knowledge. In my case, I will have knowledge before such a technology comes. I know it will be a perfect asset for me, but I will only be able to work in international companies.”

Oleg at the time of the interview was completing his MBA program at CMU. To his opinion, MBA programs are in general too practically oriented to be able to provide students with a widely applicable knowledge base. He thought that managerial skills and knowledge of operational management he acquired at the university would only be applicable in an international company. Although he admits that some local job providers in Ukraine would be interested in hiring MBA graduates, as it has become almost “fashionable” to have an

international degree in business administration, Oleg thought that the situation in his country was incompatible with his new knowledge. He was sure that if he tried to apply some of the management tactics in a traditional business company, he would unavoidable fail. However, he thought that he might try to adjust some of it to the local situation.

Oleg also emphasized that although specific new knowledge was hardly compatible with the ways business and business communication worked in his native country, the understanding of how it can be analyzed and managed from a different perspective was still very useful for him. He was sure he would be able to use his new soft skills, communication skills in real life back home. He stressed that his understanding of people-to-people communication and of the nature of people has changed dramatically. He learned to see things from a different prospective, and to understand communication concepts better.

Ana, who was working on her MBA degree in marketing at the University of Pittsburgh's Katz School of Business pointed out that some concepts (like consumer behavior) are applicable for human behavior analysis everywhere. She pointed out, however, that the most part of practically oriented knowledge she received in the US referred to types of financial infrastructure that are virtually non-existent in Armenia. Ana mentioned that she would like to acquire more knowledge relevant to transitional economies. Normally, MBA programs in the US are customized to meet the academic needs of American students and to respond to demands of the local labor market. To her mind, it is only natural for an American academic program to be tailored down to American students' needs. However, for her it meant that she would only be able to apply a part of her knowledge provided she gets employed by an international company in Armenia.



All students interviewed have mentioned in some way that their academic experience at the US universities have contributed to their personal development. However, the nature of knowledge they acquired only reinforced their intention to seek employment in international companies. They also were doubtful that new skills they had acquired would be hard, if at all possible to apply back in their countries.

In 1999-2002, University of Iowa Social Science Institute conducted an evaluation of Muskie Fellowship program. Among other findings, they reported that “fellows who participated in internships were more likely to find that the skills they learned while in the US were very useful to them (as opposed to only somewhat useful).” (University of Iowa Social Science Institute 2002:6). Although the evaluation report did not include information on why respondents thought internship made their experience more valuable for them, it is possible to assume that job experience received in the US increased alumni chances to be employed by international companies on returning back home. The evaluation report (2002:4) also indicates that, compared to semifinalists, Muskie alumni had twice the chances to be employed by foreign firms and governments (43% of alumni as compared to 22% of semifinalists reported to be employed by such organizations).

### Courses available

Research participants have reported different experiences with building their class schedules. As most of them had previous academic background in the same fields of studies as they chose for the exchange program, some instances of duplicate course requirements were reported. The ways they dealt with this differed depending, first, on the flexibility of their academic programs and second, on the specific interests of the students themselves. For instance,

although Ana had completed an MBA program back at home, she was willing to take some duplicate courses in the required by her host MBA program in the US.

Several respondents reported that there were several required courses in their programs that were irrelevant to their prior experiences and inapplicable for their future career-related interests due to subject difference between the countries. Peter and Denis said that under these circumstances, their host universities granted them an opportunity to take a different course. Leta and Vera reported that they were compelled to follow initial program regulations in the similar situation.

As for electives, most of the respondents mentioned that they were trying to avoid taking courses based on purely domestic material.

#### Cultural content of courses

Some respondents agreed that they had experiences with professors using culturally specific references in classes. However, they emphasized that in most cases those references were not used to explain major subject-related concepts and hence, did not influence their ability to understand the academic issues explained in class.

Leta and Vera have pointed out that all professors in their program paid specific attention to the cultural contents of their lectures and made sure their classes were comprehensible to foreign students.

Among other questions on courses' contents, the interviewees were asked whether their professors paid attention to their home countries-specific material in class. None of them reported that their professors were familiar with the situation in their home countries or regions in the spheres relevant to their classes' subjects. Vera and Leta reported that they were encouraged to contribute any country-specific information in classes. "Our professors appreciate

our input in class as we provide them with a comparative component for in-class discussions. They always refer to us to give culture-specific comments on various issues. The very attitude to international students shows that they value our contribution to their classes”.

Slava, on the contrary, said that he felt that he was discouraged from contributing culture-specific comments in discussions. All MBA students regarded it irrelevant to contribute any information of this type. Coming from the countries with transitional economies, they thought it would be irrelevant to try to contribute information about poor management experiences from their countries.

All of the respondents said that at least once they did their home assignments based on their home countries’ data. Boris was the only one to report that he was encouraged by his professor to make this type of a research for his home assignment. Most of them also reported that they had difficulties finding reliable information for this research. However, none of them thought it would worth asking their instructors for advice.

#### Academic advisement

Most of the respondents had little pre-sojourn knowledge about academic advisors and their role in graduate schools. Only one respondent (GSPIA) admitted that his academic advisor provided him assistance beyond usual help with academic registration.

MBA students from CMU said that they had some different type of advisor helping them with academic registration matters. They could not either remember the title or give a description of duties of these advisors.

Vera and Leta (LL.M. program, University of Pittsburgh) mentioned that, in addition to academic advisors, they had students from their school assigned to them as tutors. Both felt that

it was uncomfortable for them and in general not necessary to ask for help tutors, who were mostly younger students without any professional experience.

All of the respondents agreed on that their professors were very accessible, much more so than their professors back at home. They, however, did not think it was worth asking them for assistance with research on their home country-related topics, as faculty was generally unfamiliar with this type of information.

#### Pre-sojourn familiarity with academic programs

Information available for prospective students plays a significant role in their decision-making process. Surveys of international students coming to study in the US show that prior to making the decision, they try to gather information from accessible resources (Dillon and Swann, Huxur et al). Depending on the level of information access, they search paper and on-line publications, talk to their colleagues, friends, and relatives to make their decision. Although exchange program participants do not have freedom in choosing host institutions, some of them browse information available about universities and academic programs to get a better understanding of what to expect from a foreign university's academic program. Sometimes, along with their applications to exchange programs they apply for admission to universities individually.

When answering questions about how they made a decision to apply to the Muskie Fellowship and come to study to the US, research participants listed sources of information that were available for them to make the decision. While some of them (Slava) had little information accessible and their decision was almost solely based on their perception of Muskie program as the only way to change their life, some others spent substantial amounts of time searching for possibilities within the graduate educational system of the US. Peter and Oleg, in addition to

Muskie exchange program applied independently to several universities in the US. They were admitted both individually and as the Program's applicants, but later made their choice in favor of Muskie, which provided full financial support for participants.

The study by Dillon and Swann (1997) shows that lack of information may influence the process of cultural adjustment of international students and impact their overall academic experience in the foreign country. Huxur (1996) in his study of experiences of international students in Canadian universities mentions that international students' expectations are formed largely by the information available to them. How these expectations are realistic depends on the reliability of sources of information available and students' ability to decode this information. He also emphasizes that the gap between prospective students' expectations and their post-sojourn experiences impacts their academic adjustment to the foreign education system. Meanwhile, the information available for the applicants regarding academic issues is often incomplete and difficult to interpret for those coming from foreign educational cultures.

Although several of the research participants mentioned that they were browsing education-related information prior to coming to the US (Leta, Oleg, Denis, and Peter), they admitted that the information they were focusing on was primarily related to university rankings, financial aid opportunities (for those applying individually), and alumni post-graduation employment success.

Slava and Boris reported that prior to coming to the US they had little to no information on the academic programs they were enrolled in, as they did not receive welcome packages from their host universities. In fact, Vera was the only one to admit that she had ample material mailed to her ahead of time, so that she could learn information about her academic program before departure.

Answering the question about his knowledge of the academic program he was accepted to prior to coming to the US, Peter said that he “had a vague understanding of what a Public Policy academic program could be. It was difficult to get a clear understanding of it back at home. It’s even hard to translate it [public policy] to my native language.” He made his decision based on a belief that he needed an international education and chose a concentration in the field of Public Policy because it seemed to be close to his interests. Slava, who was enrolled in the same school as Peter “did not even quite understand what MPA means” prior to coming to the United States. He admits that he looked for courses description on the internet “but did not really understand them.”

Four respondents had to change their concentration significantly later in the course of the academic year, as they realized that classes that they were taking initially did not quite fit their academic interests.

#### Familiarity with graduate educational system

Analysis of the interviews conducted for this research also showed that all of the respondents had little information about graduate educational system prior to coming to the US as Muskie exchange students. At the same time, knowledge of particularities of the educational system is no less important for prospective students than information about academic programs they are applying to.

In 2003, the Association of International Educators of the United States declared in one of its strategic documents, that in order to encourage prospective international students to apply to US universities, “user-friendly, comprehensive, sophisticated, Web-based information resource is needed, through which international students will be able to understand the multiple higher education options available to them in the United States” (NAFSA 2003:3). Two years

later, in March 2005, such a resource was launched under the aegis of the Department of State's Bureau for Educational and Cultural Exchange. Education USA (ECA 2005) is a comprehensive web resource containing information about graduate education system in the US, degrees, academic calendar, course load, admissions process, and tests. Unfortunately, countries with transitional economies do not have internet networks developed well enough to provide for a broad access to electronic information.

All of the exchange students that were interviewed during this research had attended a pre-departure orientation workshop that included a session on the educational system of the United States. However, only one of them remembered that he had received general information of this type prior to departure. Oleg, Slava, and Boris said that they had almost no knowledge of graduate education in the United States before they started their studies here.

Those respondents that have participated in educational exchange programs prior to applying to the Muskie Fellowship have reported fewer difficulties with adjusting to the graduate school requirements. Nonetheless, they admitted that they possessed little to no knowledge of the US graduate education system at the time they began studies in their host universities as Muskie exchange students.

Investigating the problem of the lack of information available for international students, Huxur (1996) mentioned that the gap between undergraduate and graduate educational systems in the United States is big enough to provide for adjustment troubles of native students. He stresses, however, that this situation is easier for them to overcome due to a better access to a variety of information resources. This includes formal channels of information as well as informal, such as visits to campus, talking to professors, alumni, and current students enrolled in the program of interest.

Leta and Vera recalled that they had heard a lot about law students being overly competitive and hostile to each other before they came to their law school at the University of Pittsburgh. Designed specifically for foreign students, this program paid special attention to adjustment of international students in all spheres of life, including their academic activities. Above all, both respondents emphasized that they were quite surprised to find the atmosphere in the school very friendly and student-oriented, and that students enrolled in the program were helpful and easy to approach.

At the same time, Denis and Oleg, both enrolled in the MBA program at CMU mentioned that their peer students were very competitive. “It’s impossible to ask for help from students. Frankly, nobody would even decide to ask; it is considered inappropriate here” said Denis.

This type of university-specific and program-specific information is inaccessible for international applicants without the help of both the exchange program sponsors and host universities.



## CONCLUSIONS

### *Interests of the Major Stakeholders of the U.S. Government-Sponsored Educational Exchange: Contradicting or Mutually Complimentary?*

At the beginning of the current research, it was hypothesized that the expressed academic needs of the graduate students, coming to study in the US as participants of government-sponsored programs are not fully compatible with the officially stated goals of the programs and host universities. Is it possible to provide exchange program participants with education that would both match their career goals and address the policy goal of inspiring change in the participants' home countries? Do the universities have capacities to meet these needs? In support of the hypothesis, the findings demonstrate that, regardless of the level of internationalization of their academic programs, host universities were not capable to meet all specific academic needs of the interviewees, who, in their turn, realized that they did not receive skills and knowledge needed to pursue the Program's goal. However, having recognized the importance of specific knowledge and skills, these findings draw attention to the need of locating right academic programs for participants.

Participants of the US government-sponsored exchange programs are limited in their right to exercise a free choice of the academic program they can apply for admission with. According to §62.23 of the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C.), which constitutes the legal base for educational and cultural exchange sponsored by the US government, The Department of State may, in its sole discretion, designate *bona fide* programs which offer foreign nationals the opportunity to study in the United States at post-secondary accredited educational institutions. Consequently, it is entirely in the hands of program

administrators to choose an academic program that would be most responsive to the interests of both participants and program sponsors.

The data gathered for this research is limited by trying to infer what role academic knowledge plays in making program alumni willing and capable to produce change in their home countries. Allegedly, all experiences they go through while living and studying in the US can influence this ability. It is also likely that the immediate, obvious, and calculable outcomes cannot be taken as definite, nor as exhaustive picture of all the effects educational exchange produces in participants, as that the effect of democratic aid programs should be viewed as long-term and subtle (Carothers 1999).

The tendency of participants to evaluate all their new experiences against their career goals is not surprising, as the Muskie program is designed for young and mid-career professionals. Indeed, they test the new knowledge against its value for their future jobs. It is also not surprising that their new knowledge and skills make them most fitted for the international jobs. Almost paradoxically, the better a participant becomes integrated into the host society the better are his chances for a success on the international labor market. Although perfectly suitable for their personal career needs and significantly contributive to the globalization processes, this might not be in a perfect alignment with the program goals.

It is also difficult to measure how the intensity of personal change can influence bringing institutional change in a society. Lack of ability to exercise new knowledge under constrictive circumstances of a different society may diminish the overall value of educational programs as the tool of inspiring change in other countries. However, if the technical goal of the educational exchange is viewed as enhancing the ability of program participants to induce change, then one of its strategies would be improving their technical skills in their fields of expertise. Here,

knowledge of how to solve specific problems under specific conditions of transitional societies could be invaluable to them.

Higher educational institutions in the US, although demonstrating, as the research into their organizational structure shows, complex goal sets and heterogeneousness of their response to the processes of internationalization, do recognize it as one of the most important issues of their agenda. With variable success and thoroughness, international perspective is being introduced into their curricula. Indeed, universities cannot tailor their programs to satisfy academic interests of all potential students. However, the flexibility and diversity of academic programs of the US universities makes the search for better match promising.

This, again, brings us back to the responsibility of the programming agencies in choosing appropriate academic programs for participants. Considering the lack of information available for applicants, it is doubtful that they would be able to make this choice on their own. Rather, this should be a mutual decision supported by ample information and counseling provided to applicants.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

### *Host Universities*

Similar to findings of previous research in the institutional response to the processes of internationalization, this study has demonstrated that attitude towards international students as well as the ways of addressing their special needs differ by academic programs and institutions. Within one institutional body, different academic programs may exhibit diverse policy towards international students as well as varying levels of international perspective introduced into their classes.

The students interviewed for this research recognize most of the academically related challenges pointed out in the previous studies of the students' adjustment to a foreign academic environment. However, reported response to these challenges demonstrates a high level of adaptability of respondents. The merit-based selection process of the Program, designed to choose better candidates among successful early and mid-career professionals excels at approving highly competitive applicants. Although they admit that they experienced considerable difficulties with studying in a foreign language and recognize that learning patterns, typical assignments, and the very social culture of learning in the US is different from what they were accustomed to in their native countries, all interviewees showed full confidence in their academic success. Most of them had extensive educational and professional experiences prior to coming to the US. Drawing upon their background, they found ways of dealing with these difficulties.

These specific characteristics of the educational exchange program participants should be recognized by the host universities. More than being accustomed to a different way of doing things, they have good records of doing them successfully. From the part of the faculty, it would pay off to know the difference in the learning approaches and to take care to explain to students the reason for doing some things differently from what they might be accustomed to.

It is also necessary to recognize these students' specific career goals, which to a considerable extent shape their academic needs. By the requirements of the exchange program, they have to return to their home countries after completion of studies. Both their backgrounds and future aspirations are influenced by the demands of their countries' labor markets. To the extent that is permissible by the institutional capacities, it is necessary to support them in choosing courses that best respond to their needs. Also, there is a need to encourage them to use

their home countries data for their home assignments and research. Their in-class presentations can contribute to the international component of the course.

The same appreciation of these specifics is important for the organization of the student services provision. For instance, if tutoring is provided in addition to regular academic advisement, it is worth making sure that tutors and tutored have comparable life experiences. Most of international exchange students are adults with advanced degrees and professional experience received in their home countries.

#### *Information Available for Students Prior to Enrollment*

Although the findings of current research may not be indicative of the population's characteristics, the scarcity of academically related information available to the program participants as reported by the interviewees is astounding. The Program provides participants with pre-departure orientation that includes introduction into the US graduate educational system. However, this appears not to be enough. Both timing and scope of the information presented are inadequate. It is necessary to recognize the importance of provision of timely and sufficient information about graduate studies in the US, specifics of host universities, and host academic programs.

It is also necessary to include more information on the typical academic programs in the program application materials. It is important that academic-related and other information about future host universities should be provided to the program participants in a way that is comprehensible to foreigners not familiar with the US educational system. It is important to recognize that information accessible for the prospective students from countries with less developed internet access, which requires joint efforts of the program administration and the host universities in providing them with information needed.

## APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

### *1. General introductory questions on:*

- a. Age
- b. Gender
- c. Program affiliation
- d. Host school
- e. Major in the host school
- f. Previous academic experience, major
- g. Professional experience
- h. Previous international experience
- i. Intentions to stay in the US
- j. Reasons to participate in the program (academic, career, personal)
- k. How would you formulate your academic interests?
- l. Did you conduct a research of your own prior to coming to the US? Did you intend to continue working on it at your host university? Were those expectations met?

### *2. Expectations regarding the educational process*

- a. What were your expectations regarding the educational process/ academic challenges/ academic adaptation?
- b. What were your expectations of the university's response to your academic needs?
- c. What were your expectations of the courses available at your host university?
- d. What were your expectations of the type of materials used in classes and for the assignments? Did you expect to use the materials relevant to your home country situation/ your academic interests?

- e. What were your expectations of the academic advisement at your host university?
- f. What did you consider to be most important for your academic development in the host university?

*3. Evaluation of the academic experiences in the host US university.*

- a. How would you evaluate your academic experiences at the host university?
- b. What do you think of the courses available?
- c. Did you use materials relevant to your home country situation/ your academic interests in class or for the home assignments?
- d. What do you think of the academic advisement available at your host university?
- e. What kind of experience would you consider as the most valuable for your future academic development?
- f. What do you consider the most applicable experiences for to your future career?
- g. How would you evaluate your host university's response to your academic needs?
- h. Describe your correspondence (if any) with Program advisors regarding your academic experiences in the host university.

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## APPENDIX C: ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This figure represents a 2,4 % decline in the total number of international students enrolled in U.S. higher education for the year 2003/04. However, the total number of graduate enrollments increased by 2,4 % in 2003/04. Institute of International Education. 2004. "Open Doors 2004: International Students in the U.S." Washington, D.C.: Institute of International Education, Accessed on February 21, 2005. (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>)

<sup>2</sup> This conservative figure is based on tuition figures from the College Board, enrollment figures from the Institute of International Education's Open Doors 2004 report, living expenses calculated from College Board figures and analysis of the data by Lynn Schoch and Jason Baumgartner at Indiana University – Bloomington's Office of International Services (NAFSA 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Alliance for International and Educational Exchange Newsletter. 2005. "President Bush's Fiscal Year (FY) 2006 Budget Calls for Substantial Increase for Exchanges." Washington, D.C.: Alliance for International and Educational Exchange, Distributed February 8, 2005 (<http://www.alliance-exchange.org>).

<sup>4</sup> Words "interest" and "goal" are used interchangeably in this research. The major emphasize is made on the interests or goals being academically focused.

<sup>5</sup> Most recent examples of these are studies of Udoh in the field of cultural adjustment and Leung in regard to psychological adaptation of international students in host countries (Udoh: 2000, Leung and Berry: 2001).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Steven Muller in his study of globalization trends in contemporary intellectual capital stresses that faculty members should play a key role in this process. However, he is

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doubtful that “they [would] be willing to donate time and energy required to do this” (Muller 1995: 63)

<sup>7</sup> Franklin and Shemwell attempted to study student satisfaction using a questionnaire grounded in the disconfirmation theory of customer satisfaction. Following the economic approach, they treated students as customers, entering the educational process to pursue certain goals of theirs. While stating that this approach is more relevant to the measurement of student satisfaction, the authors acknowledge that the questionnaire they borrowed from the disconfirmation studies of the customer behavior was insufficiently modified and required to be more adapted to the specific nature of the educational environment (Franklin and Shemwell 1995)

<sup>8</sup> Equivalent of graduate studies in Belarus