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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY OR CORRUPT VALUES: THE CASE OF RUSSIA

Author: **Elena Denisova-Schmidt**

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Academic Dishonesty or Corrupt Values: the Case of Russia

1. Introduction

Academic corruption in Russia is extensively spread; it is not an isolated phenomenon. Rather, academic corruption is tightly embedded into the general corruption in society: in politics, business, and in everyday life. This paper illustrates some common types of cheating and corruption as well as the motives of the involved actors for applying, accepting, ignoring and/or pretending to ignore these activities.

Why is corruption in higher education so prevalent? The improper dependences of all the involved actors might make it possible. Compared to people without a university education, graduates have better chances on the job market. Some university lecturers might expect bribes in order to return the investments they have made into their own studies. Other university lecturers might water down their requirements and try to be more tolerant, especially to students who are looking for a formal certificate rather than for an education, or who might need to have more time for other activities. If university administrators would receive the same budget from the state, the reduction of staff and lecturers would be not necessary.

Why are studies on corruption in education so important? Younger generations are expected to make changes rather than continuing the old systems. During their studies, young people complete their socialization by acquiring, among other things, more techniques of corrupt behavior and a tolerance for corruption. In Russia more than 80% of all young people go on to university and almost all of them finish it. Over the next decades, the spread of corruption in the country might be forecast. This might be very destructive, both on the short-term and the long-term perspectives. The consequences for academia, business and society might be dire.

2. State of Research

Studies on corruption in education prior to the 1990s were relatively few in number and typically described specific phenomena, such as admissions through personal connections (*blat*) (Ledeneva 1998). Since the late 1990s, studies on corruption in this sector have increased and tend to focus on one of two areas: university admission or teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including advanced degrees such as the *kandidatskaia* (~ Ph.D.) and *doktorskaia* (~ Habilitation).

2.1 University Admission

The university admissions process has been one of the most problematic issues in higher education in terms of corruption. Until 2009, all universities in Russia held their own entrance examinations for admission. The level of corruption in this area was the highest of all kinds of corruption in education: by 2004, it had reached 10.7 billion rubles (~ USD 455 million) per year (cf. Galitskii & Levin 2004b). In order to solve this problem, university admission is now granted on the basis of the *EGE*¹ – tests that serve as both school finals and university entrance examinations. The *EGE* gives potential students the opportunity to apply to several universities simultaneously, which had not been possible before. With the *EGE* replacing previous entrance examinations, there is no longer a need to visit a university during the application process and spend a few weeks on campus – expenditures that not all families could afford (cf. Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva 2014).

¹ *EGE* - *Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen* (Engl.: Unified State Exam).

Now, however, corruption has moved to a large extent from the universities to the structures responsible for conducting these examinations and includes, for example, disseminating exam questions before the examination, using mobile phones (for internet searches or SMS) or receiving help from the on-site proctors (Rimskii 2011a, 2011b, Klein 2011, Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva 2012b, 2012c, Osipian 2013b).

2.2 University education at the undergraduate and graduate levels, including advanced degrees

Studies on these levels describe different cheating techniques: copying off or using paper ponies during exams or tests, downloading papers from the internet and submitting them as the student's own, purchasing papers from special agencies, or giving a professor fraudulent or misleading excuses for poor academic performance and asking for preferential treatment (Figure 1).

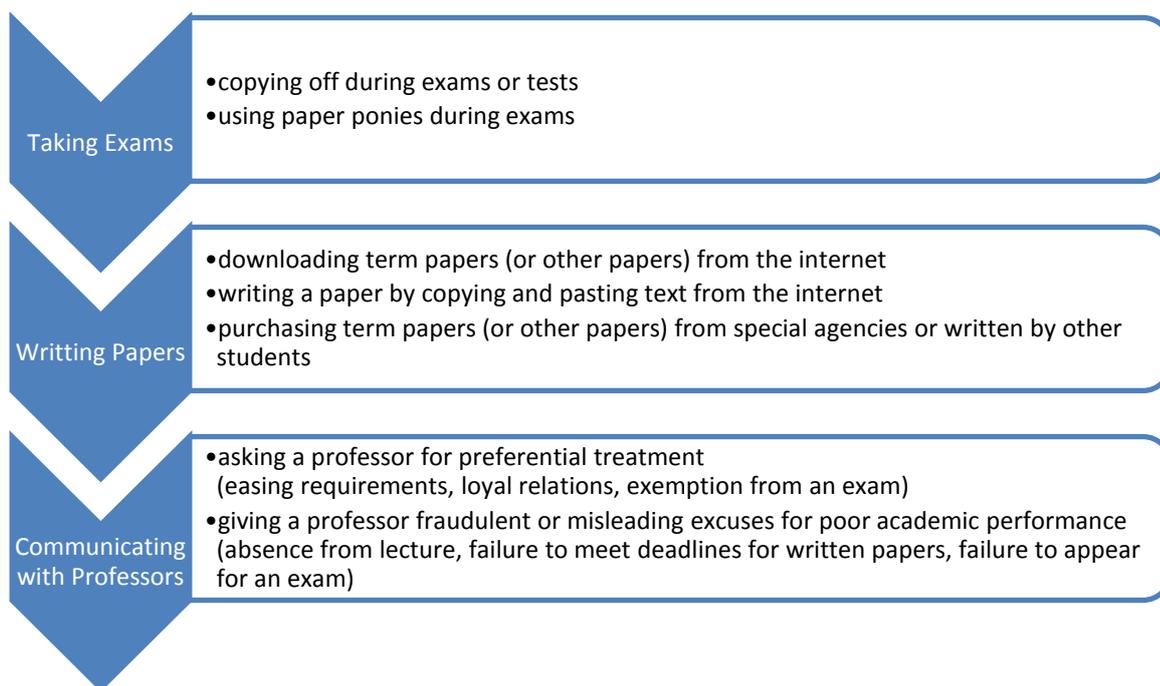


Figure 1: Cheating at Universities: Possible Techniques (Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva 2012b)

Usually scholars talk about non-monetary corruption in cases where professors consciously accept gifts or services in exchange for certain marks or preferential treatment, or monetary corruption where professors consciously accept money in exchange for certain marks or preferential treatment (Galitskii & Levin 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, Leontyeva 2004, Titaev 2005, Fedorenko 2005, Sivak 2006, Leontyeva 2006, Shmakov 2007, Latova & Latov 2007, Galitskii & Levin 2008, Leontyeva 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2013, Oleinik 2012, Osipian 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e, Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva 2013b). Some researchers argue that there is even 'academic collusion': situations in which students cheat and professors act as though they do not notice these activities (Titaev 2012). Other scholars have shown that people with higher education degrees are more prone to corruption (Rimskii 2010) (Figure 2).

Academic Dishonesty	•Students cheat; professors do not notice.
Academic Collusion	•Students cheat; professors pretend not to notice.
Non-monetary Corruption	•Professors consciously accept gifts or services in exchange for certain marks or preferential treatment.
Monetary Corruption	•Professors consciously accept money in exchange for certain marks or preferential treatment.

Figure 2: Academic Dishonesty vs. Academic Corruption (Denisova-Schmidt, 2013)

Research on corruption in advanced degree programs such as the *kandidatskaia* (~ Ph.D.) and *doktorskaia* (~ Habilitation) covers ghostwriting, plagiarism, and various machinations at the defense, including fraud and bribes (Kalinyllin 2006, Osipian 2012a).

2.3 Other Studies

There have also been a few studies covering informal practices in recruitment and career promotion at universities (cf. Kastouéva-Jean 2013) as well as examining the activities of state foundations that support research at universities (cf. Graham & Dezhina 2008).

Empirical studies on corruption in higher education are rare, however, especially after the Igor Groshev case in 2008. Groshev, a Russian scholar, conducted his empirical investigation into the sources and roots of corruption at one Russian university. He published his study outcomes without naming any actors or institutions. His employer, the Juridical Institute in Tiumen', recognized itself in the study, however, and dismissed Groshev from his academic position. Moreover, Groshev was forced by the local court to disprove his previous results.

Empirical studies bring more valuable results, however, and they therefore remain a 'danger' for the researchers involved in those studies. The reasons for this are twofold: Not only might researchers be considered 'whistleblowers' by the institutions with which they are affiliated, but they also might be offenders themselves, and might be involved in corrupt actions actively (as actors) or passively (as observers).

3. Empirical Data

The empirical examples presented here are based on two different data sets.

The first data set was collected between 2008 and 2012 and includes expert interviews (n=52), questionnaires (=485), participant observation and document analysis. This set had been partly published in Leontyeva (2009c) and Leontyeva (2010c).

The second data set was collected between 2012 and 2013 and includes expert interviews (n=23), focus groups (n=7), questionnaires (=463). The pilot study and the initial results of the focus groups were published in Denisova-Schmidt/Leontyeva (2012) and Denisova-Schmidt (2013) respectively. The sample includes only those subjects who were studying on site at state universities in three main subject areas: economics, the humanities and engineering, representing the majority of all students. The students were drawn from selected universities in Khabarovsk, a major Russian city located in the Far East with a population of more than 600,000. Khabarovsk is home to 22

universities, and empirical research was conducted at four of them – two humanities and two technical institutions – in order to avoid subject-based peculiarities. These universities are among the better average universities; hence the results of this study are more meaningful for observing the tendencies of the Russian educational system in general.

463 persons participated in the survey: 314 respondents were first-year students and 149 respondents were in their fifth years. The first-year students were approximately 17 years of age, while the fifth-year students were around 21. Both genders were represented almost equally among the first-year students, while the majority of the last-year students was female: (figure 3 and figure 4):

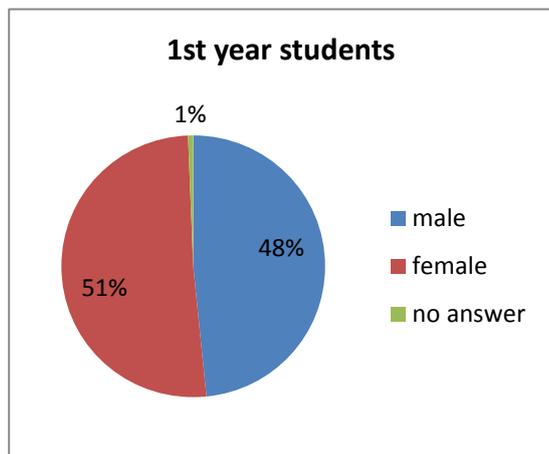


Figure 3: Gender balance

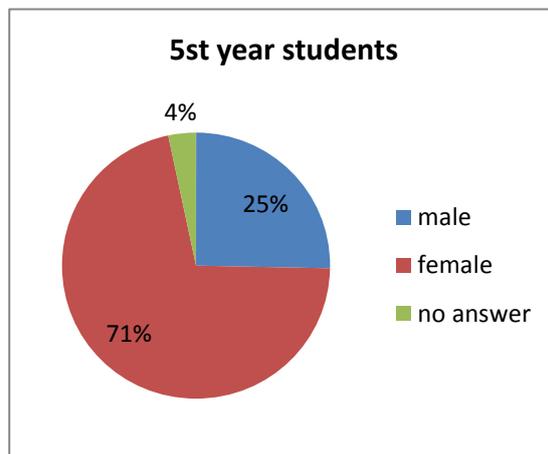


Figure 4: Gender balance

It should be mentioned that it was challenging to conduct this particular survey. Some of the universities in the city are in the process of merging with other schools, while other universities were no longer in operation. Often, university administrations do not welcome any such empirical surveys, as they are afraid of covert inspections. Access to students was granted through a few professors who are agreed to participate by allowing entire groups of their students to fill out questionnaires.

4. Russian Universities: Insider Perspectives

Russia has a large number of universities: in the 2012-13 academic year, there were 1,046 universities in Russia, including 609 state and 437 private schools,² plus more than 1,600 regional branches (cf. Androushchak and Yudkevich 2012). All of these universities are different from one another. Forty of them might be considered elite. This list includes 29 National Research Universities and 9 Federal Universities, as well as Moscow State University and Saint Petersburg State University, which have a special status as unique science and education complexes and the oldest universities in the country (cf. Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva 2013) (s. Appendix 2). All of these universities receive priority financing from the state. Moreover, in July 2013, 15 out of 40 universities were selected by the Ministry of Education and Science as prospective universities for entering the world rankings. The goal of this initiative is to reach the highest possible positions: at least five Russian universities should enter the top 100 and at least 15 should be in the top 200 by 2020. Nine billion rubles (~275 million USD) has been allocated for the development of the international competitiveness of the selected universities.

This paper does not include the elite universities; rather, it describes the situation at the good, average universities in the country, which comprise the majority of all schools, making the results

² Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat). http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/education/#, accessed 3 January 2014.

of the project more representative.

4.1 The university administration's perspective

University administrations are urged to provide a high quality of service, but at the same time, they need to keep the number of students high in order to receive state financing³ and increase the amount of income from student tuition and fees, or the existence of the universities might be threatened⁴. The current demographic crisis makes the fight between universities for almost every student very competitive. Often university administrations pressure professors to water down their course requirements by adapting them to the students' actual level of knowledge and to be more tolerant with the students who pay high fees⁵.

We've got very lower-achieving students. Only two or three students from a group can master the entire course according to GOST. That's why we are pretty oriented on an average student. We lower the bar down to earth. As for my subject, at least they can take primitive actions to continue on other subjects, such as Mechanics of Materials or Machine elements, and they pass.

(woman, associate professor, engineering).

Once I kicked out two swine who took me and other students from our work at classes. I told them to go to the Dean's office, explain the reason for their kicking out and not return without Dean's permission. I know they are afraid of Z [the surname of the dean] and wanted to calm them in such a way. Sometime later they returned with the permission. Then I met Z in the corridor and he told me: 'Don't do that again; you should understand that we have no right to kick out fee students'.

(woman, associate professor, humanities).

4.2 The professors' perspective

On the one hand, professors should educate their students at a high level; on the other hand, they are often overburdened and underpaid. Those who do not yet have a doctorate receive a very low salary. A newly hired instructor can earn about 8,000 rubles (~ 260 USD)⁶ per month in Russia, which is not enough for a living. In addition, Russian professors have to teach a lot: approximately 20 hours of classroom instruction per week, if they work a 100% course load, but many of them work 150% – about 30 contact hours – in order to survive. All of these hours require preparation and follow-up interactions with the students. Often professors have many additional administrative duties and suffer from inadequate working conditions. Thus, they might be more or less inclined to find 'easier' ways to work, such as by ignoring cheating and plagiarism. Moreover, professors have to adhere to federal educational standards, which are sometimes very difficult to follow.

It's very difficult and even physically impossible to complete the academic program on my subject [Theory of Mechanics]. Besides we don't read some lectures from the academic program, because it's impossible to master the entire course according to GOST during the time planned by the curriculum.

(woman, associate professor, engineering).

The academic program is really not ideal; it's the same as for the Faculty of Philosophy but we have less time to master it. We are to master the History of Philosophy, both Russian and Asian, a period of 2,500 years, in 15 lessons. They must learn a fistful of dates, names and terms. It is overwhelming for an

³ The budget for public universities is completely dependent on the number of students; this principle is called '*Den'gi idut za studentom*' (Engl.: 'Money follows the student'). If a university expels one of its students, it must reimburse the state.

⁴ At private universities, nearly 100% of the funding is dependent on student fees. At public universities, approximately 50% of the funding comes from student fees and 50% from state support.

⁵ There are two different groups of students in Russia: 'budgetary' students, who have their tuitions paid by the state, and 'non-budgetary' students, who pay their own tuitions. 'Budgetary' students receive a scholarship from the state depending on their performance.

⁶ Not including additional bonuses. Altbach et al. (2012) give the following average monthly salaries: lecturer: 433 USD, senior lecturer: 476 USD, associate professor: 650 USD, professor: 910 USD.

ordinary student. I can just drill in definitions and categories, but it's not interesting and can cause nothing but rejection. If you want to kindle the students' interest, you should skip some lectures and pay more attention to other topics to have enough time to explain something to students.

(woman, associate professor, humanities).

The other peculiarity of many Russian universities is that the majority of them recruit new lecturers from the graduates of the same university (cf. Sivak and and Yudkevich 2008). In 2009, for example, 90% of all lecturers at the National University of Science and Technology 'MISIS' (MISIS) were graduates of that institution (Kastouéva-Jean 2013).

4.3 The students' perspective

Many students tend to choose university study only for the purpose of getting a diploma and not for such traditional motives as the desire for education and qualifications. This is because university study seems to be the only option for securing a professional future in Russia today (Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva 2012b). According to current statistics, about 80% of Russian secondary school graduates went on to attend universities in the fall of 2013.

In the 2012-13 academic year, there were about 7 million students enrolled in the Russian higher education system; 46% were in full-time programs, 1% were part-time students and 53% were studied in distance-learning programs (Figure 5). The majority of all students – 85% – were at public schools (Figure 6)⁷.

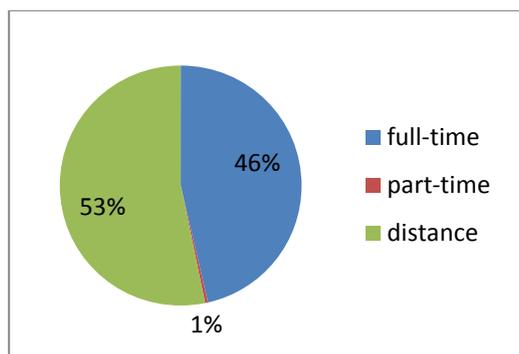


Figure 5: enrollment (per program) in 2012-2013

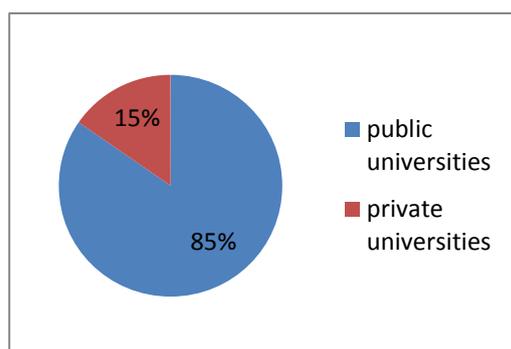


Figure 6: enrollment (per university) in 2012-2013

Between 2003 and 2008, the number of new university students in Russia even exceeded the number of school graduates. Certainly not all of these students are fully prepared for university-level studies, so they are 'forced' to try to find alternative solutions to get their marks – sometimes by bending or even breaking the rules. In many cases, students have doubts about the content of their education in general as well as the didactical competencies of some of their professors⁸, with the result that students do not want to spend their time and energy doing things that will not be required on the job market.

This initial situation, in which:

- the number of students and the amount of their fees almost fully determine the existence of the universities;

⁷ http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/obraz/vp-obr1.htm

⁸ Students have reported some professors coming to class with concepts for their lectures downloaded from internet. Students are often expected only to write everything down. Some professors even come to class and read their own notes back to the students. In this situation, a typical lecture, which lasts about 90 minutes, might look like a dictation (cf. Denisova-Schmidt 2013).

- the faculty does not have a reasonable salary, good working conditions or freedom in teaching;
- many students are more interested in formal certificates than in skills and competencies;

... promotes numerous conflicts of interest and opportunities for corruption in higher education. All of these factors lead to a general distrust of the educational system as a formal institution and to widespread doubt in the professional competence of the professors and the adequate preparedness of the students in particular (Figure 7).

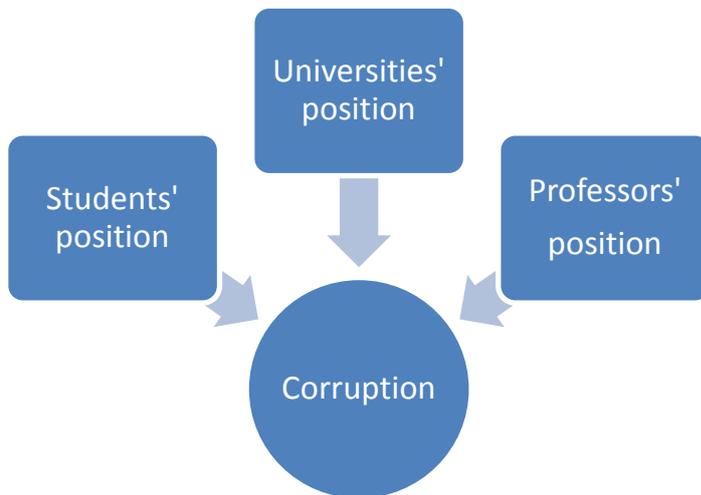


Figure 7: The current situation at many Russian universities

5. Cheating Techniques

5.1 University Admission

There are two possible locations for cheating and corruption in the university admissions process: during the EGE or while applying to a university (Figure 8).

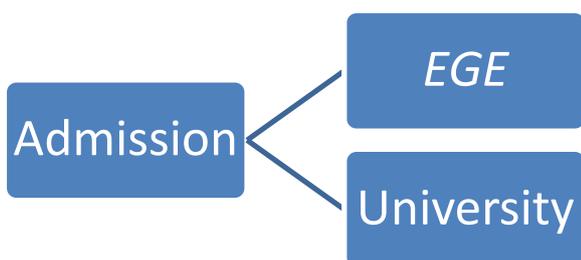


Figure 8: Places for cheating and corruption during the university admissions process

31% of the survey respondents observed some violations during the *EGE*: 14% of them observed these violations personally, while 16% referenced their relatives or friends (Figure 9). These violations include disseminating exam questions before the examination, using mobile phones (for internet searches or SMS), receiving help from the on-site proctors, and re-opening sealed test envelopes to correct mistakes.

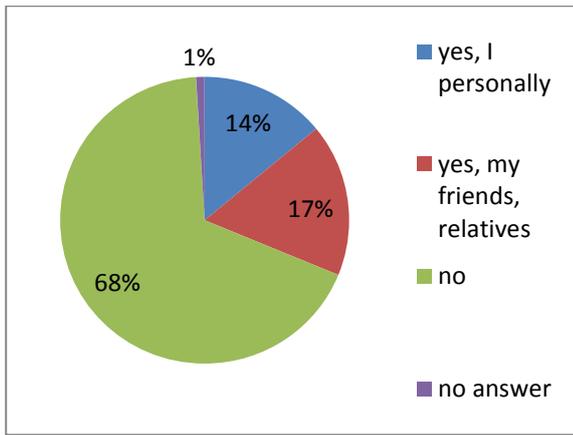


Figure 9: Students who observed violations during exams

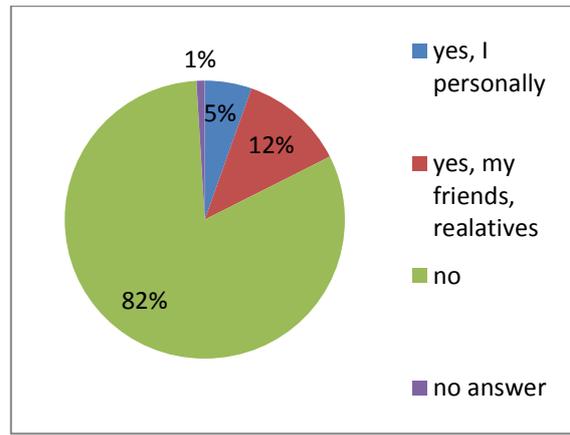


Figure 10: Students who observed violations during entering

12% of the participants heard about other types of violations during the university admissions process from their friends and relatives and only 4% had any personal experiences with them. Those violations include bribes, for example, to gain admission on *bydzhethnoe mesto*⁹, or preferential treatment, such as by a getting *celevoi dogovor*¹⁰ (Figure 10).

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

Nevertheless, the introduction of the *EGE* was a very important step, which allowed the mobility of students, for example, to increase significantly. The results of the sample show that there were more students coming from small towns and villages (locations with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants) in 2013-14 than 2009-10 (Figure 11a and Figure 11b): 70% from enrolled students were not originally from Khabarovsk, while among the current almost graduates only 62%.

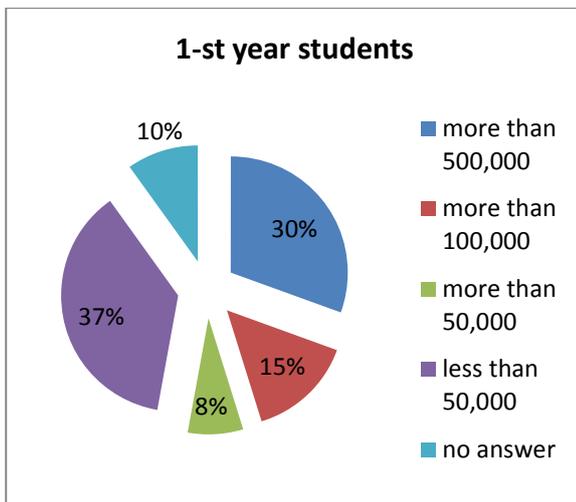


Figure 11a: Geographic distribution

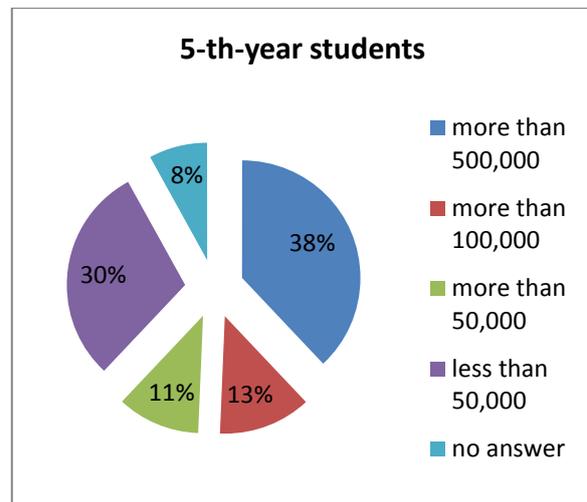


Figure 11b: Geographic distribution

⁹ *Bydzhethnoe mesto* – (Engl.: budget place) – a place for a student paid for by the state.

¹⁰ *Celevoi dogovor* – (Engl.: purpose contract) – a place for a student on preferential conditions.

5.2 Studying at University

5.2.1 Copying or Cribbing

Copying or cribbing is the most common way of ‘passing’ exams. Actually, most students learn this practice in school, and at universities they just ‘improve’ upon it. Tools for cheating might be divided into two large groups: ‘traditional’ and ‘innovative’.

Traditional tools usually include paper ponies as well as textbooks and notes taken during lectures.¹¹ A traditional ‘pony’ is a very small handwritten or typed sheet of paper that can be hidden in the palm of the hand or under clothes. Many publishers in Russia have found a market gap and produce these ponies for students, which can be taken in pieces and used during exams. Ponies for all subjects are available in almost every bookstore and on online shops. The use of textbooks and lecture notes is usually prohibited during exams. Students might be even asked to leave their bags and other belongings in the corner of an exam room, so that they can carry only a pen or a pencil to their desks. But if a professor leaves a room for a minute, students might take an advantage of this and consult their textbooks (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Paper Ponies for Russian History and for Marketing (www.ozon.ru)

Some of the more innovative tools also include two different ways of using mobile phones. For example, a student might get a help from an ‘assistant’ dictating the correct answers via a phone hidden under the student’s hair. The assistant might get an SMS message with exam questions. Exam answers might be also loaded into the mobile phone in advance. Students only have to find an opportunity to use it. Some students might even adapt their bodies for cheating: nails, hands or legs¹² might be inscribed with formulas, data and other important information. This kind of body art is exotic, however.

In spite of all this technological progress, paper ponies still remain the most popular cheating instrument among students.

In the most cases, professors see all of the traditional as well as the innovative and exotic tools that are used during their exams. Their reaction to this might differ: they might acknowledge it or not. If the professors acknowledge the cheating, they might lower the student’s mark and/or ask additional questions. The reasons for not acknowledging vary: If a student worked very hard during a semester and attended all of the lectures, this small ‘sin’ might be forgiven. Some professors might even judge handwritten ponies positively, arguing that, by summarizing the course materials, the students have critically reflected upon the topic.

¹¹ Open book exams are not common in Russia.

¹² Female students can use this method by wearing a skirt.

In the survey, both first-year students and students near graduation were asked about the usage of paper ponies during exams: only 13% of freshmen and 5% of final-year students believed it to be unacceptable (Figure 13a and Figure 13b).

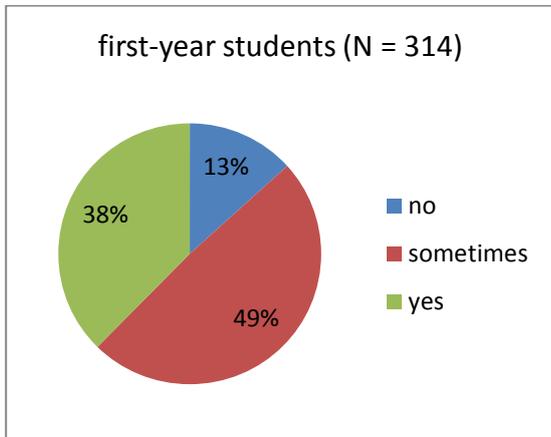


Figure 13a: Usage of ponies during exams

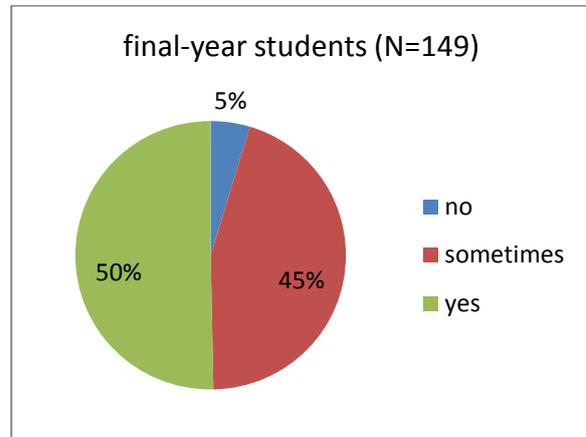


Figure 13b: Usage of ponies during exams

5.2.2 Paper and Thesis Purchase

Term papers, theses and take-home tests might be purchased. This also takes place in two different ways: papers might be downloaded from the internet or another person or an agency might do the job (Figure 14).

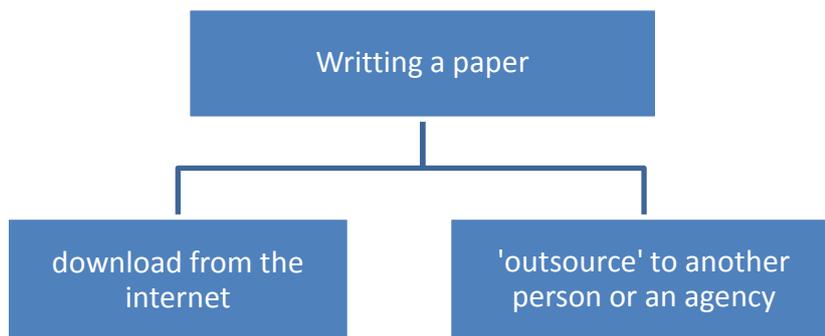


Figure 14: Ways of obtaining a paper

Two questions in the survey were about the students' attitude towards downloading term papers (or other papers) from the internet and purchasing term papers from special agencies and/or written by other students. The majority of the respondents considered downloading papers to be acceptable (64% of the first-year students and 74% of the students about to graduate), while purchasing papers seems to be less acceptable (41% of freshmen and 43% of final-year students) (Figure 15a, 15b and Figure 16a, 16b).

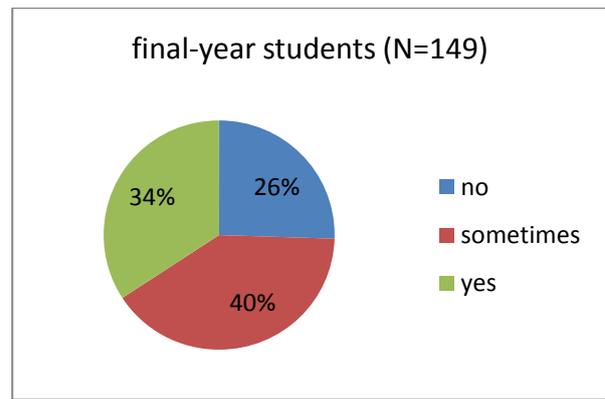
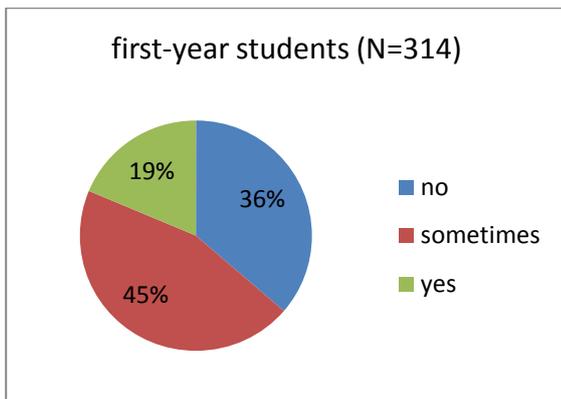


Figure 15a and Figure 15b: downloading term papers (or other papers) from internet

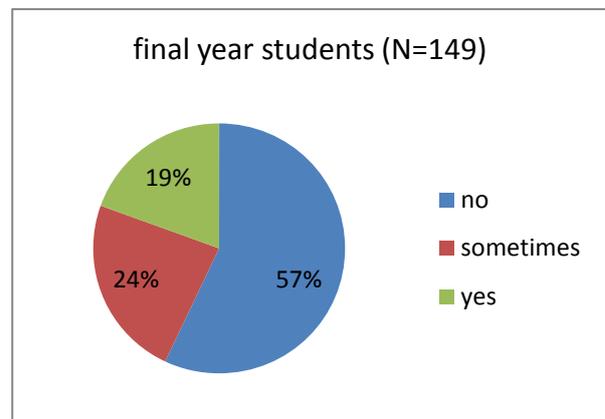
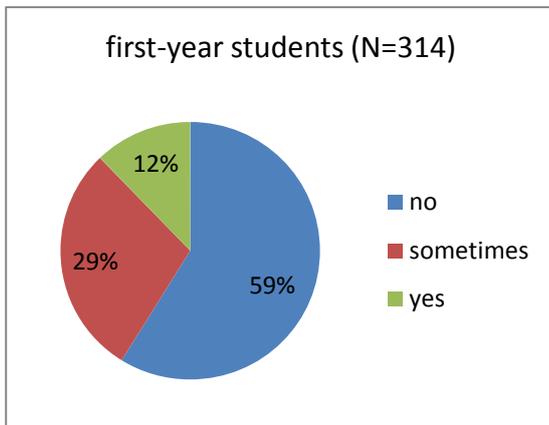


Figure 16a and Figure 16b: purchasing term papers (or other papers) from special agencies written by other students

There are many websites in Russia that provide an opportunity to download ready-made term papers and theses on different subjects. Most of them are free of charge. This method seems to be easy, but it might be risky: The same text might be downloaded and submitted by other students as well. In this case, all of the ‘authors’ might be punished.

For this reason, a custom-written paper seems to be safer, and can be ordered by an individual through an agency that provides such services. Information about these agencies can be found in almost all possible sources, including announcements in the university buildings or at university bus stations, for example:

DO written tests, term papers, diploma theses on fundamental, technical and liberal disciplines. Quickly, efficiently. Phone: XXXXXXXX¹³

Similar ads might be read in local newspapers:

Fortuna LLC completes written tests, term papers, diploma theses in all disciplines. Address: XXXXXXX, Phone: XXXXXXXXX¹⁴

The abbreviation ‘LLC’ indicates that this is an officially registered company, most likely providing educational services. Some ads are written in a very concise way, but readers will understand the context:

Mathematics, statistics, probability theory, econometrics, physics. XXXXXXX (phone)

Some ads provide more information, for example, on price:

¹³ This advertisement was found at a bus station near two large universities in the Far East region.

¹⁴ These some examples from the newspaper *Present* (Khabarovsk) from 2 February 2012 (p. 35).

Physics (50 RUB), mathematics (40 RUB), theoretical mechanics (150 RUB). Exercise solutions. XXXXXXXX (phone)¹⁵.

This type of cheating is commonly used by part-time students, who often work and/or have families and do not have enough time to study.

Professors are aware of these common services for writing papers and, as a rule, recognize them as cheating, but many usually accept them. Most professors are overloaded with work and have neither the time nor the desire to be engaged in any possible investigations. So, for example, one professor initiated the use of a software program to detect plagiarism at her university, but her initiative was not welcomed by her colleagues.

5.2.3 Providing Services for Faculty

The other option to gain mileage with the faculty is to provide services for them. There are three possible techniques for this: a small service with no expectations, a larger service in exchange for something more, and a purposeful exchange (Figure 17):

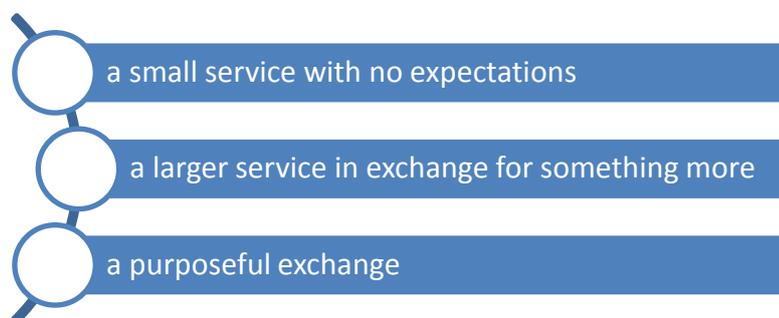


Figure 17: Ways of providing services for faculty

Taking office supplies from storage to the faculty offices, for example, might be considered a small service with no expectations. This is usually done during class time, and some students might even feel even ‘rewarded’, especially if they do it during ‘unnecessary’ lectures¹⁶. In this case, professors do not reciprocate and students actually do not expect anything in return.

For a larger service, something more is required, such as when a faculty member might move to another office. Male students are often asked to transport furniture and other items, while female students are responsible for cleaning and decorating. Students seldom refuse to participate in such activities, though they do it without much enthusiasm. The consequences are clear for them: in potential conflicts with other professors, for example, these professors might protect their helpers and ignore the problems of non-helpers. Possible recommendations for an exchange semester abroad or an interesting job might be written more positively for active participants than for non-participants, if the latter receive them at all. Moreover, many students are required to have a summer internship¹⁷. Students who do not receive interesting offers might instead take service jobs such as cleaning or painting at the university, which are designated as ‘internships,’ though this is

¹⁵ 50 RUB (~1.5 USD), 40 RUB (~ 1.2 USD), 150 RUB (~4.5 USD) as of 5 January 2014.

¹⁶ The Russian educational system requires, for example, students in the sciences to study philosophy and sociology, and those in literature to learn mathematics and ecology. Knowledge of these disciplines is not strictly necessary to work in those professions.

¹⁷ Internships are an integral part of the educational process as a way for students to gain insights in their professions. Future journalists, for example, are expected to spend a few weeks working in print media, television or radio, and future engineers are supposed to spend some time in constructional offices or manufacturing.

officially legal. In any case, the students involved in such kinds of help might expect to receive preferential treatment from these professors.

Part-time students usually offer other services in exchange. They do this more or less honestly, but in all cases with a certain aim: to get preferential treatment and better marks:

I work for an optical chain; if you need something, I can work with you to pick up the goods more cheaply and give you a tip about the quality.

I work for a travel company; we organize group tours abroad. Contact me, I will help arrange you a trip and give a discount; many professors from our university have already considered this option.

5.2.4 Making Presents to Faculty

Presents to faculty members might take two forms: Traditional presents that are a part of Russian academic culture and more pragmatic presents that are given for specific reasons (Figure 18).

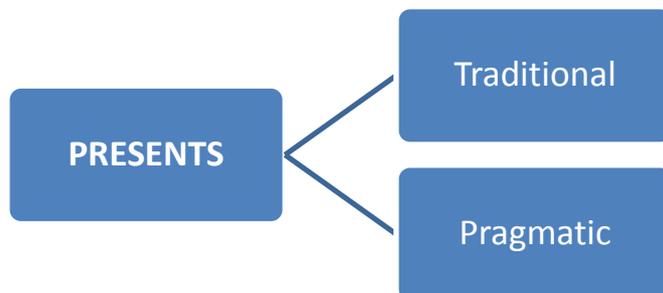


Figure 18: Presents to faculty

Traditional presents: Since Russian universities have a different system and many full-time students are part of a peer group studying together for at least four years with a smaller number of professors (compared to the West), closer personal relationships develop among the students themselves and with the faculty. Therefore professors occasionally receive presents from their students. The preferred occasions are the main Russian holidays: New Year (1 January), Defender of the Fatherland Day (23 February), International Women’s Day (8 March) and sometimes a professor’s birthday. The presents can range from flowers through chocolate and alcohol (wine for female professors and cognac for male professors).

Other presents might be given after graduation as an individual present, such as for the good supervision of a thesis or as a group present for working together for four years. The group present might be expensive and is usually something for the entire faculty, which might be used by many professors and/or many generations of students, like a refrigerator or a projector. The other tradition is a reception organized and sponsored by students. This might range from a modest tea party at the university to a big dinner at a restaurant.

Some students, especially part-time students, can misuse this tradition, however:

Once when I came to the exam for part-time students, there was a bouquet of flowers on the table ... Of course, I said it was not necessary, but decided that I would keep it. I gave the exam as usual ... The next day ... I look – and there, hidden in the branches, is a gift card for cosmetics, I did not even notice it behind all that tinsel (female, professor, 40).

5.2.5 Oral agreements

Oral agreements with professors and/or the university administration are another possible way of getting marks and preferential treatment. This might take different forms, from the simple usage of friendship to ‘oral commands’ from above to unofficial paid transactions (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Oral agreements

‘When my friend’s son entered the university, we did not tell the boy that I would help him, but my female friend asked me to ‘keep an eye on him there.’ For me, this would have been clear without her request – we have been friends forever – all our lives’ (female, assistant professor, 46).

‘Every year the director of our institute distributes the names from the list: “you are responsible for these people, you – for these.” This means, that if a bonehead I am responsible for does not pass some exams, my head will be taken off, and I have to run around and ask for a favor on their behalf ... No, I do not personally receive anything for this.... It is such a duty.... You can refuse to do it, but only if you are going to quit’ (male, associate professor, 36).

‘...a woman from the department of [X] makes requests for over fifty people. Does this mean she has so many relatives? No way, she arranges the grades for them, either at a very cheap rate or just by crying, and some give the grades for free. And they pay her right away, so she would have a reason to run around to her colleagues’ (male, associate professor, 36).

This mutual help often goes without saying and seems to be a part of the system. The Russian academic community seems to be very tightly knit: Many professors and university administrators often support their friends, relatives, neighbors, who study at their schools: As one female professor argues ‘We must help each other, otherwise, why do we work here?’.

5.2.6 Payment

There are usually two main options involving payment: an oral agreement between a student and a professor or an agreement reached through an intermediary. The latter option seems to be the most popular. The possible options are listed below (Figure 20a, 20b and 20c):

To intimidate and force to pay	A professor works hard, is strict, principled, and holds the students to a high standard regardless of any differences in their levels, but does not violate the rules and requirements. The result is that a significant number of students cannot pass the exam, and begin to look for alternative solutions.
---------------------------------------	---

Figure 20a: Possible interactions between students and professors

It was the most difficult subject ... Even the girls, excellent students, did not pass it on the first attempt. It was useless. Then we came and asked about money. [A lecturer] said that for such issues we did not even need to come. Then we found out through whom she takes ... money – in the record book, exam – in the pocket (female, student, 3rd year).

**To give
a hint**

A professor selects some students, usually from among the underachievers, and sets his or her price using different methods – the numbers are written on a piece of paper, a board, or shown on a calculator. Often the students' attendance at paid supplemental consultations is required.

Figure 20b: Possible interactions between students and professors

My friend and I did not pass the exam, and the lecturer himself gave a hint to us that, well, we can pay a 'sponsorship fee' ... and the problem will be solved (male, student, 3rd year).

I had to leave urgently, and I did not have as much time to prepare for the exam as I expected, so I went to the lecturer and explained. Without saying a word, he wrote a number on a piece of paper and I agreed (female, student, 3rd year).

**To make
a nice try**

A student or a group of students try to find some informal ways to pass an exam. It might be a 'material aid' for a professor or for his/her department. Money is placed into the student's record book and is passed to a professor, who takes it, makes a mark and returns the book. If the money is given to the department, a professor usually gets it without informing the department. A professor might also offer additional paid lectures. These are not officially allowed, so a professor usually takes cash.

Figure 20c: Possible interactions between students and professors

When I was a freshman and I gave cash, he said he cannot just take money, and I should come to him for consultations and this issue will be resolved. It looks like he gave me a consultation and so he gave me a five [excellent] on the exam ... (female, student, 4th year).

... people [in the physical education department] work off an exam in the department, i.e. they paint, whitewash and so on, or they purchase sports equipment (male, student, 3rd year).

5. Remediating Academic Corruption

5.1. University Perspectives

Russian universities cannot ignore academic dishonesty and corruption; indeed, they have tried to establish several initiatives to combat it. One of those initiatives is the use of software programs to detect plagiarism. Only a few universities use these programs on a regular basis; most of the others are just making their first steps in this direction.

The other remedy is fighting the companies that provide ghostwriting services and the outsourcing of homework. The advertisements for such services can be seen at virtually every campus; Picture 21 and Picture 22 show such announcements painted on the road. Both announcements give local telephone numbers and offer written term papers and dissertations for purchase. Picture 23 advertises more ‘educational services’: in addition to term papers and dissertations, it offers the completion of tests in all disciplines, as well as drawings and technical, statistical and econometrical calculations.

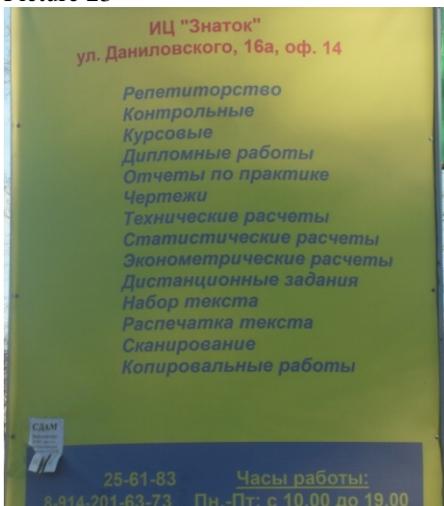
Picture 21



Picture 22



Picture 23



University administrators have no legal means to prevent this. Most of those providers are in fact officially registered companies offering educational services. Some universities have found one solution, however: They paint over the phone numbers – a practice that might be applicable for other universities (Picture 24).



Picture 24

5.2 Citizens' Perspective

Citizen activism is also becoming an effective tool for alleviating corruption in Russian academia: Students might report the unethical behavior of their professors, for example. This reporting takes different forms, ranging from a contribution in social media to approaching the local police. In the last cases, punishment usually includes a fine and a prohibition from engaging in professional activities. In December 2012, for example, a lecturer at the Ulan-Ude Institute of Railway Transport was punished for 23 cases of bribery, ranging from 1,000 Rubles (~ 30 USD) to 3,000 Rubles (~ 90 USD), with a fine of 450,000 Rubles (~ 13,700 USD) and a prohibition from teaching for two years. The offender proposed to give his students marks without taking an exam, or changing an honestly received mark to 'excellent'. In February 2013, a lecturer from the Krasnoyarsk State Agriculture University was punished for 59 cases of bribery ranging from 1,000 Rubles (~30 USD) to 1,500 Rubles (~45 USD) with a fine of 240,000 Rubles (~7,000 USD) and a prohibition from teaching for two and half years. He also gave marks without examining his students.¹⁸

The other form of citizen activism has led to creation of *dissernet* – an online community of experts and journalists investigating plagiarism in *kandidatskaia* (~PhD) and *doktorskaia* (~ Habilitation) theses¹⁹. This initiative has had significant consequences: in addition to online debates it led to some high-profile resignations. Bloggers continue their activities and report about other famous persons cheating in their academic writing. One of the results of bloggers' activities was the changing of the existing time limit for reconsidering decisions on granting advanced degrees from 3 to 10 years.

The public surveys conducted by the Levada Center²⁰ show that the majority of respondents believe that people who plagiarize their academic works should lose their degrees (82%) and if the plagiarists are officials or deputies – their positions as well (83%). Most people (69%) are not very well informed regarding all of these scandals, however. This disinterest might be explained by the endemic corruption in Russian society and by the general corruption associated with authorities in the country: A majority of respondents believe that the level of corruption in politics is even higher than reported in media (58%) and that current anti-corruption strategies are a part of Putin's PR campaign and have nothing to do with reality (59%). The Levada Center also asks people's opinions on the most corrupt party (Table 1).

¹⁸ Denisova-Schmidt, E. and Leontyeva, E. (2013b), Corruption in Higher Education and Research: Russia. *Proceedings of Conference 'Coping with New Legal Challenges in Education'*. Kaunas, Lithuania, Vytautas Magnus University, pp. 55-62.

¹⁹ <http://www.dissernet.org/> accessed 20 April 2014

²⁰ *Obshchestvennoe mnenie* 2013. <http://www.levada.ru/books/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-2013> accessed 20 April 2014

Table 1: Question: ‘Deputes of which party more often hide their businesses, real estate and bank accounts abroad?’

	2013
Deputes of “United Russia”	27
Deputes of “Just Russia”	9
Deputes of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia	8
Deputes of the Communist Party	7
All in the same extent	54
Hard to say	13

Respondents are actually more concerned about the worsening level of education in the country, as well as the challenges in obtaining this education and the various informal practices engaged in by university admissions (Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4):

Table 2: Question: ‘Are you satisfied with the current educational system in Russia?’

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
yes	5	2	3	4	4	4	1	2	3	3
somewhat yes	18	15	22	21	21	19	18	16	16	18
neither yes or no	20	19	22	22	26	24	28	25	24	-
somewhat no	30	33	28	29	30	27	26	29	27	46
no	20	25	18	18	13	12	12	16	23	26
hard to say	8	6	8	6	6	15	15	13	7	8

Table 3: Question: ‘Can you, your children, or your grandchildren get a good education, if necessary?’

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
yes	7	6	6	6	7	8	7	3	4	4	3	4
somewhat yes	30	26	30	26	35	31	36	27	32	28	28	23
somewhat no	38	38	35	35	34	35	36	34	33	35	43	39
no	21	26	25	28	19	21	17	15	14	15	16	18
hard to say	4	4	3	5	5	5	5	21	18	18	10	9

Table 4: Question: ‘By introducing *EGE* the number of bribes, *blat* and other violations by finishing the school and entering universities would/are ...’

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
increase/increasing	25	27	30	35	30
decrease/decreasing	17	15	17	16	13
remain/remaining the same	36	31	33	31	34
hard to say	23	28	20	18	24

Potential Employers are also concerned about the decreasing educational levels of their job-seekers. Job advertisements might even mention the universities whose graduates they are looking for. Some recruiters might not even consider candidates with distance learning diplomas.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

There is an urgent need for more applied, pragmatic remedies for corruption in academia. This was also recently stressed by Elena Panfilova, the chairwoman of TI Russia, who created some initiatives on the transparency and integrity of Russian universities²¹. Scholarly research seldom seems to translate into concrete tools and reform. One of the main reasons for this is the systematic, longstanding tradition of corruption in almost every area of society: business, politics, and everyday life. Corrupt behavior seems to be a norm rather than a deviation in Russia. The other reason might be the high dependency of universities on such factors as the number of students enrolled. A typical public university in Russia receives half of its budget from state money calculated according to the number of students, and half from the students' tuition and fees. If they expel underachieving students, the university would lose a substantial part of its budget, which may lead to a decline in its research activities and the laying off of professors and staff. Therefore, many universities and professors really have a dilemma between being more tolerant with some students – and sometimes even watering down the course requirements to retain them – or potentially losing their job. As long as this dependence exists, any action on the transparency and integrity of Russian universities would be difficult to implement.

²¹ <http://transparency.org.ru/v-rossii/vuzy-dolzhen-byt-prozrachnymi> accessed 20 April 2014

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