

CHAPTER 20

REFLECTING ON CORRUPTION IN AMERICAN AND RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE USE OF MEDIA ACCOUNTS

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ABSTRACT

There is a gap in scholarly investigation when it comes to issues of academic integrity and corruption in higher education. The major research question this chapter addresses is: How is corruption in higher education in the United States and Russia reflected in the media? The frequency with which the media reports on higher education corruption varies. The variation in reporting can be attributed to particular reforms and major changes undertaken in the higher education sector as well as in-depth reporting of some high-profile cases. The scope of problems reflected is very broad, but some important forms of corruption are either underreported or overlooked. The major problems, types, and forms of higher education corruption are nation-specific: in Russia they are bribery in admissions and grading, while in the United States they are fraud and embezzlement of state funds, among others. These types and forms of corruption in general correlate with those analyzed in the scholarly literature. This chapter also presents some policy recommendations for both Russia and the United States regarding anti-corruption efforts in higher education.

Keywords: Bribery; comparative; corruption; education policy; embezzlement; fraud; higher education; media

INTRODUCTION

Corruption in higher education is a serious problem internationally (Osipian, 2008a). This problem is likely to grow and become even more significant (Osipian, 2014b). It has a potential for a large negative impact on economic growth and social cohesion. Despite its significance, scholarly literature does not offer enough comparative evidence on this negative phenomenon. Media to a certain extent fills this gap while reporting the instances of corruption in higher education. On the one hand, the mass media is reactive: it reflects on particular cases of corruption in the higher education industry both nationally and internationally and comments on general trends in higher education corruption, offering generalizations of the problem. On the other hand, media is proactive: by reporting higher education corruption, it shapes the public's opinion on this phenomenon.

In societies with low levels of corruption, the media may be instrumental in identifying forms of educational corruption and designing the policies aimed at reducing the level of corruption (Osipian, 2008a). On the contrary, in highly corrupt regimes, media can play a perverted role and may de-facto encourage extortion, bribery, and gift giving. Moreover, media may oftentimes inflate people's perceptions about the prevalence of corruption in the higher education sector and thus perpetuate corruption.

Socio-economic, political, cultural, and demographic transformations that have taken place after the collapse of the Soviet Union involved changing educational realities, including an unprecedented increase in education corruption. Non-linear trajectories of educational development in the region urge scholars to examine higher education corruption in a comparative perspective (Petrov & Temple, 2004; Zaloznaya, 2017). This study compares Russia, the largest and most populous of all post-Soviet states, to the country outside the region, namely the United States. Although comparative studies of such kind normally offer secondary analysis of quantitative data, this study collects and analyses primary data. The data are gathered from the media published in two languages, English and Russian, which makes this study a bilingual one.

This chapter takes on the task of studying corruption in higher education through the systematic analysis of media reports on higher education corruption. It intends to accomplish this task in the course of addressing the question of what does the media say about higher education corruption in the United States and Russia? Instead of surveys and interviews, the mass media focuses mostly on facts. This focus on real occurrences rather than views and opinions may be of great help in estimating corruption in higher education. Yet another strength of media accounts as compared to basic multiple-choice surveys that the former typically offer more details, sometimes also focusing on causes, consequences, and contexts of corrupt activities. Finally, the public forms its opinions about the prevalence, patterns, and forms, as well as the scale of corruption in higher education institutions (HEIs) based in large on reports met in the mass media (Osipian, 2008a).

CORRUPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

What is corruption in higher education? Simply put, what should one look for while searching for media reports focused on higher education corruption? In order to address these initial questions, this study proceeds to review of existing scholarly literature on corruption in higher education. Hallak and Poisson (2007) and Noah and Eckstein (2001) offer a broad overview of higher education corruption throughout continents. Higher education corruption is investigated in Azerbaijan (Petrov & Temple, 2004), Belarus (Zaloznaya, 2015), Bosnia (Sabic-El-Rayessa, 2013, 2014), Kazakhstan (Osipian, 2009d), Russia (Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, & Leontyeva, 2016; Osipian, 2012e), Tajikistan (Whitsel, 2011), Ukraine (Denisova-Schmidt, Huber & Prytula, 2015; Osipian, 2008b, 2009e, 2010b, 2014a, 2017; Round & Rodgers, 2009; Zaloznaya, 2012, 2017), and Uzbekistan (Sia, 2014). Johnson (2008) and Osipian (2012c) offer an overview of legal aspects and cases of corruption in the US higher education sector, while Ren (2012) criticizes insufficient anti-corruption policies in China.

In all of these countries, authors find evidence of bribery and other forms of corruption in both admissions to colleges and the academic process itself. Prospective students and their parents pay bribes to the faculty members and administrators in order to gain admissions to state colleges and universities, especially to programs financed from the state budget. Corruption in admissions and anti-corruption reforms aimed at changing admissions strategies, including the introduction of standardized testing, is reflected in works of Drummond and Gabrscek (2012), Chankseliani (2013), Kovalchuk and Koroliuk (2012), Liu and Peng (2015), Osipian (2009a, 2013b, 2015), and Shamatov (2012). Once in the university, some students continue to pay bribes for positive grades on examinations and papers up to graduation (Zaloznaya, 2017).

The logic of the relations between the university and the state in former Communist regimes is reconstructed in Osipian (2008c, 2012d). These relations are based in part on corruption and coercion mechanisms. The concept of corruption and coercion is based on the idea that some states might deliberately underpay their public employees, including university faculty, force them to get involved in corruption to supplement their income, and then collect evidence of wrongdoing, to coerce them into compliance (Osipian, 2008c, p. 32). As a result, the participants of the university-state interactions are discouraged from political activism. At the same time, they retain some room for pursuing their economic interests, such as opposing tuition rises and demanding dormitory placements (Osipian, 2016).

Conducting research on a priory illegal behavior is always a challenge. In this sense, higher education corruption is no exception. Over the years, authors attempted different approaches and methodologies to estimate the nature and scale of education corruption. Petrov and Temple (2004) rely on interviews, informal conversations, and media accounts in order to reconstruct major features of higher education corruption in Russia. Zaloznaya (2012) uses interviews with students, parents, and faculty members extensively while investigating organizational

cultures in Ukrainian HEIs and explaining the variation in bribery practices. Similarly, Williams and Onoshchenko (2014) rely on face-to-face structured and semi-structured in-depth interviews. Corruption in Russian and Ukrainian doctoral education is addressed in Osipian (2010a, 2012a, 2019) based on the data collected from the official governmental websites, legal documents, educational guidelines, private firms that offer dissertations for sale, and informal conversations with those obtaining doctoral degrees or being in the position of awarding doctoral degrees.

Sabic-El-Rayessa and Mansur (2016) and Shaw, Katsaiti, and Pecoraro (2015) apply quantitative methods, including regression analysis, to analyze higher education corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ukraine, respectively. Osipian (2009b, 2010c, 2013a) and Waite and Allen (2003) analyze corruption and abuse of power in education administration, focusing on organizational characteristics of corrupt structures in higher education. Macfarlane, Zhang, and Puna (2014) review some 115 sources of scholarly literature focused entirely on academic integrity, divided on teaching-, research-, and service-related literature. Finally, Chapman and Lindner (2014) offer an encyclopedia-like overview of higher education corruption that includes definitions, data sources, manifestations, magnitude, risks, and responses to this destructive phenomenon.

At present, there are only three publications that address the role of the media in highlighting corruption issues in higher education and use the media to make some systematic projections on this. Specifically, Osipian (2008a) considers corruption in higher education as reported in the media sources in Russia, the United States, and the UK in an attempt to answer the question of whether corruption in higher education differs across the nations and why? Osipian (2012b) researches popular opinion and public discourse of corruption in Russian higher education by using a range of media sources reporting on this problem over the period from 1998 to 2011. Finally, Osipian (2014b) addresses the issue of possible convergence in corrupt practices observed and reported in higher education in Russia and the United States. At the same time, media reports rampant corruption in universities. For instance, results of a 2010 survey, reported in the Russian media, show that 40% of students in public universities bribed their professors (Opros, 2010). Thus, more research is needed to highlight the issue of education corruption.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The most general and commonly shared definition of corruption is abuse of public office for private gain (World Bank, 2019). As applied to education, this definition implies misconduct on the side of faculty and administrators abusing their discrete power over admissions, grades, and related matters. Chapman and Lindner (2014) use the definition of corruption employed by Transparency International – the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, as it “encompasses both public and private higher education settings” (p. 4). The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) under the UNESCO

defines corruption in education as a “misuse of public office for private gain that influences access, quality, and equity in education” (IIEP, 2019). This definition is clearly restrictive and incomplete. It emphasizes the negative impact of corruption on access, quality, and equity, but misses such paramount spheres of higher education as research and auxiliary enterprises and corruption that is present in these spheres.

The notion of public good diverts attention from the private sector. And this is no surprise, since the public often confuses notions of public sector and public good, perceiving them as two interchangeable or at least closely coupled terms. Given the growing private for-profit sector of higher education in many countries, including the United States, this diversion appears to be counterproductive. Corruption in higher education may be defined as “a system of informal relations established to regulate unsanctioned access to material and nonmaterial assets through abuse of the office of public or corporate trust” (Osipian, 2007). This definition allows for capturing corruption in both public and private sectors of higher education, thus leaving more space for theorizing and practical implications.

The capacities of the media in reporting corruption are limited, even if it is not controlled by the state and is free of censorship. No matter how comprehensive the media reporting on corruption may be, it can only reflect on a small number of cases. Wedeman (2012) points out that with tens of thousands of cases of corruption occurring each year the number becomes simply overwhelming and “at best detailed information is available on only a fraction of the total” (p. xi). The nature of the media is such that it is constantly looking for sensations in an attempt to increase its readership. Corruption, and higher education corruption in particular, is one of the magnets for readers’ attention. Newspapers – both in paper and on-line format – are the major source of news.

Newspapers are eager to report legal cases against perpetrators in academia, including corrupt faculty and administrators. Legal prosecution of particular incidents of corruption constitutes the bulk of reports on most explicit forms of education corruption, such as bribery. These are de facto case studies of specific instances of higher education corruption. Media reports also provide continuing stories rather than stories in progress or developing stories. A classical sequence is the arrest, prosecution, and sentencing of a perpetrator, all accompanied with the mounting details on the case. Another form of corruption frequently reported in the media is mass cheating and plagiarism committed by students in a given university or throughout the country.

Graeff, Sattler, Mehlkop, and Sauer (2014) simulate students’ interest in involving in corrupt activities. The authors report that risks associated with corrupt activities appear to be significant deterrents, while the benefits increase the likelihood of engaging in corrupt activities. At the same time, other factors also play in. Specifically, the social norms against corruption might be a better and more effective deterrent against academic corruption. Fostering academic integrity may be a more effective tool in the anti-corruption campaign than such administrative functions as monitoring and sanctioning. Social norms are shaped through information flows, including those provided by the media. Here, again,

shaping public opinion through public discourse allocates the primary role to the media, including upholding or raising ethical standards.

Chapman and Lindner (2014) see strength of media accounts in that:

they typically provide more detail as to the context, motives, mechanisms, and consequences of the inappropriate practices. Moreover, the incidents they report are better researched than are those that surface in a survey about what a respondent has seen a friend or colleague do. (p. 5)

As the media focuses predominantly on individual cases of education corruption, providing a context and basis for generalizations becomes a prerogative of the scholars. While the media supplies titles of the reports with such strong terms as corruption, bribery, and fraud, journalists and reporters do not necessarily determine the nature of the deeds they report. Scholars have to be the judges of what constitutes corruption in higher education and what does not.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research starts from identifying sources of information. This project identified one news source that specializes in higher education and one major news source for each of the countries, the United States and Russia. These countries represent different models of higher education organization, including such key aspects as governance, management, financing, property structure and property rights, and admission policies. The scope of all of the publications is not limited to national issues only, instead having a much broader reach. They address both domestic and international problems, news, and events. In the United States, these are *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, a specialized edition, and *The New York Times*, a non-specialized edition and a leading national news media outlet.

In Russia, this chapter investigated online editions of *Gazeta*, a non-specialized edition that nevertheless has a substantial regular section on higher education comparable to that of *The Chronicle*, and *Newsru*, a non-specialized edition that is among the most read online media sources in Russia. All of the media sources presented above address, to a certain extent, both domestic and international issues in higher education. This study used one non-specialized source for each country in order to reduce the duplication or the overlap of reports on same cases to the minimum. The only duplication possible was that between the specialized source and the non-specialized one within the same country.

The proposed categorization of corruption in higher education for this study was derived from the literature review. The spheres of corruption are accreditation, admissions to HEIs, credentials, faculty hiring and promotion, finances, budgeting, property, graduation, grants, licensing, research, and teaching and learning. The categories and definitions used in this study are borrowed from the Glossary of Higher Education Corruption with Explanations (Osipian, 2009c). Corruption in higher education is present in both public and private sectors and extends beyond academic corruption. The clusters of higher education corruption

include corruption in access to higher education, corruption in research and research grants, corruption in academic process, corruption in higher education administration, industry-specific corruption in higher education management and administration, and corruption in auxiliary branches. Clusters of higher education corruption are presented in [Table 1](#).

There is a multiplicity of typologies of higher education corruption, and spheres and clusters of higher education corruption presented here are just two examples of such typologies. For simplicity, this chapter investigates media reports on corruption in higher education categorized and divided by segment. Accordingly, incidences of corruption were considered in the following segments: admissions, including tests, teaching and learning, graduation, credentials and diploma mills, licensing and accreditation, faculty hiring and promotion, research, grants, budgeting, finance and property, administration and auxiliary, and athletics. While in Russia it could be omitted with not much loss to the study, in the US athletics is a significant part of college life. Moreover, high pay for athletics directors and scandals associated with admissions of college athletes and their behavior frequently become topics of media investigations and reporting. This classification allows for capturing all forms of higher education corruption and following the dynamics in reporting corruption.

The keywords were individually searched within the selected media sources are identified according to the set of categories. These keywords include accreditation, admissions, bribe, bribery, cheating, college, conflict of interest, corruption, degrees, diploma mills, education, embezzlement, examinations, fake, favoritism, fraud, higher education, HEI, misconduct, nepotism, plagiarism, research, tests, university, as well as cross-references of all of the above.

Terms used in both languages – English and Russian – reflect all spectrum of corrupt practices. These terms have full equivalency and thus no issues of semantics emerge. The major challenge came not from the side of the terms' equivalency, but from the ability to categorize different forms of corruption reported in the media. It was absolutely essential to be able to read between the lines, figuratively speaking, and in this sense semantics was important. A substantial academic experience in both American and post-Soviet educational systems and intimate knowledge of both systems and the terms used to describe certain phenomena is a must in this kind of research. Each media report on corruption-related issues in higher education was read, analyzed, and assigned a place according to the developed classification.

Media is not an ideal tool devised to address a wide spectrum of urgent societal problems and such complex phenomena as academic corruption. Nevertheless, the frequency of media reporting on higher education corruption may be used as a measure of the seriousness of the problem as well as its predicted or possible impact on society in general. Media reflections are crucial in shaping public perceptions about the scale and scope of corruption in higher education, and constructing public discourse in regard to higher education and academic life in general. Although studying higher education corruption through media reflections is an art rather than quantitative science, some quantification may be useful.

Table 1. Clusters of Higher Education Corruption.

Corruption in access to higher education (admissions and tests)	Corruption in research and research grants	Corruption in academic process (teaching and learning)	Corruption in higher education administration	Industry-specific corruption in higher education management and administration	Corruption in auxiliary activities and branches
Violations in national educational tests	Violations of the rules of conduct	Low, sub-standard quality of instruction	Ghost instructors	Fraud	Intercollegiate athletics
Violations in international educational tests	Presentation of results known to be incorrect	Unnamed diplomas, degrees, and educational certificates	Gross waste	Embezzlement	Academic publishing
Violations in entry examinations	Research fraud	Production, distribution, sale, and usage of fraudulent certificates	Misallocation of university resources	Provision of false information	Development and provision of educational software
Bribery, with bribes being given in exchange for unmerited admission	Accounting fraud	Term papers for sale, including those exchanged through the internet	Misallocation of public funds		Supply of educational services
	Plagiarism	Collusion			Supply of educational goods
	Corruption in obtaining grants	Diploma fraud			
		Diploma mills			
		Cheating			
		Plagiarism			

Source: Completed by the author.

MAJOR FINDINGS

This study identified and analyzed a total of over five hundred sources, ranging from brief news reports and comments to comprehensive analytical overviews of corruption in higher education in the United States and Russia. A given area or sphere of academic activity is an important criterion for recording distribution of corruption in higher education and reporting on corruption. Each segment of university life may be vulnerable to certain forms or types of corruption. Statistics on media reports by segment for the period of 1998–2012 is summarized in Table 2.

The US sources, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times*, indicate that most corruption occurs in the sphere of education credentials, including diploma mills, transfer of credits, production, sale, purchase, and usage of fake diplomas, and teaching and learning, including cheating and plagiarism in midterms, finals, grading, additional time for examinations, time allocated to a student as a customer, and substandard quality of instruction below that claimed or advertised or required in order to be eligible for federal funding in any form.

Corruption in research and in budgeting, finance, and property-related issues also takes place. Research misconduct carries an element of corruption and the research intensive nature of leading universities explains the opportunity for abuse. College and university finances also appear to be not free of corruption. Poor financial management, misallocation of funds, management of property, unfair and undue distribution of monetary rewards and research funds, abuse of college property, property rights, permits and permissions on state property usage in public HEIs, as well as violations in distribution and misallocation of

Table 2. Media Reports on Corruption in Higher Education by Segment, 1998–2012.

Segment	United States		Russia		Total by segment
	<i>Chronicle of Higher Education</i>	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>Gazeta</i>	<i>Newsru</i>	
Admissions, including tests	17	29	55	73	174
Credentials, diploma mills	53	14	15	18	100
Teaching and learning	50	6	18	11	85
Budgeting, finance, property	19	19	15	11	64
Research	52	6	–	2	60
Licensing and accreditation	3	4	7	7	21
Grants	9	–	1	–	10
Graduation	3	1	4	1	9
Faculty hiring/promotion	7	–	–	–	7
Administration, auxiliary	2	–	–	–	2
Athletics	1	–	–	–	1
Total	216	79	115	123	533
Total by country	295		238		533

Source: Completed by the author.

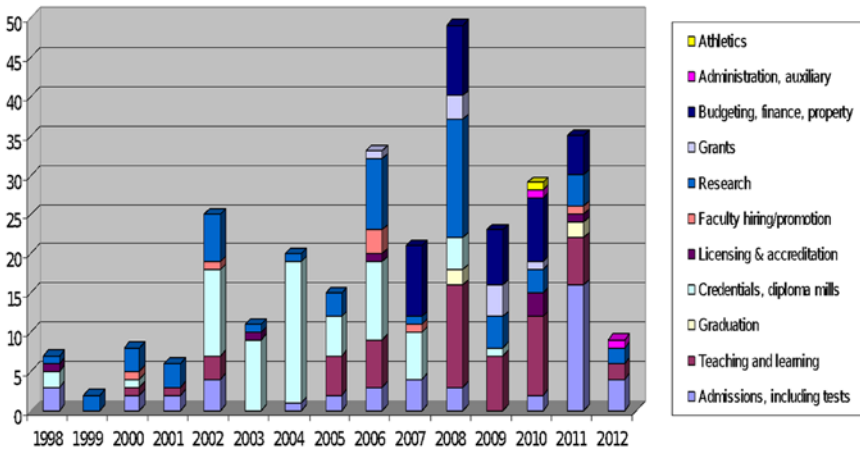


Fig. 1. Dynamics of Media Reports on Corruption in Higher Education by Segment in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times* combined, 1998–2012.

state funding are indicated in the news reports. The dynamics of media reports on corruption in higher education by segment in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times* combined for the period of 1998–2012 is shown in Fig. 1. While the data presented in Table 2 offer summary figures, Figs. 1 and 2 present the dynamics of media reporting on corruption in higher education, by year.

As follows from the results of the content analysis, not one segment of higher education indicates stability in terms of corruption featured in the media. Indeed, any form of higher education corruption in any segment has at least two or more annual gaps in media reporting. Furthermore, the number of media reports that feature corruption in any given segment varies widely over years. Even traditionally much discussed admissions and testing industry have no smooth distribution in reporting, with a sharp increase in 2011. The most “fruitful” year, 2008, became such thanks to reports on corruption in three segments: teaching and learning, research, and budgeting, finance, and property. Increases in reporting cheating, plagiarism, research misconduct, and manipulations in student loan industry were the major contributing factors here. The overall dynamics of media reports on corruption in higher education by segment in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times* indicates a general increase with wide fluctuations from 1998 to 2012.

The Russian sources, *Gazeta* and *Newsru*, point to corruption in admissions and learning and instruction mostly in form of bribes, but, later, in form of cheating and fraud as well. Judging by the number and content of media reports, the Russian public is most concerned with cases of bribery in admissions and while attending the college. Corruption in admissions to HEIs in Russia includes corruption in admission tests, national standardized examinations, making admission

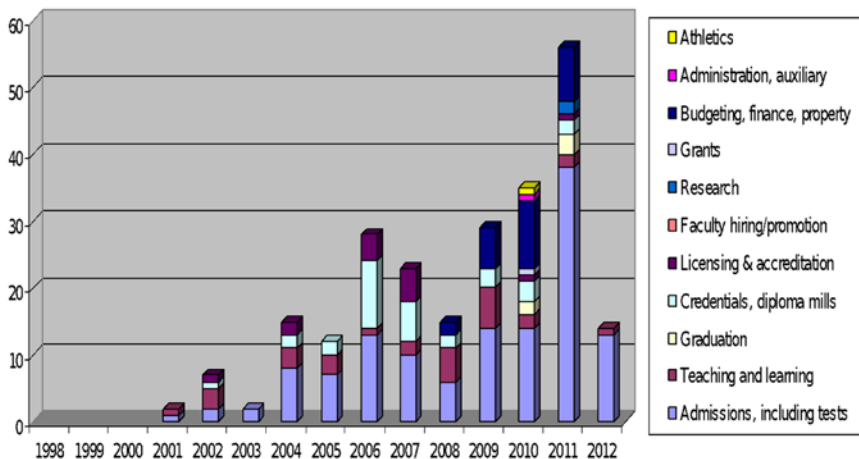


Fig. 2. Dynamics of Media Reports on Corruption in Higher Education by Segment in *Gazeta* and *Newsru* Combined, 1998–2012.

decisions, entry examinations, as well as cases of improper donations, private gifts, corporate sponsorship, student transfers, reinstatements, and even the use of impersonators during tests and examinations. There are also some reports on corruption in educational credentials. This number is especially high in 2006. Licensing and accreditation is yet another area where corruption is reported.

Overall, the variety of spheres where corruption in the higher education sector occurs increases. One interesting and relatively new trend in Russian media sources is reporting corruption in higher education budgeting, finance, and property-related spheres of activity. This issue first appears in 2007 and continues through 2011. Changing forms of financing, mixing of federal, regional, municipal, and private funding, and the often unclear status of college or university property create opportunities for abuse. Another new area of reported corruption is grants. The dynamics of media reports on corruption in higher education by segment in *Gazeta* and *Newsru* combined for the period of 1998–2012 is shown in Fig. 2.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The media does not do a good job when it comes to linking problems of corruption in higher education to fundamental processes that take place in the higher education sector. In this regard, it is interesting to note that while the introduction of standardized tests in Russia is always linked to the fight against corruption by the reformers (including in the official education policy documents), there is not much said about corruption, bribery, and fraud in the news regarding the standardized test introduction in Russia. In fact, out of over 60 news reports in *Newsru* until 2010, only a handful mention corruption. Accordingly, most news reports on standardized test are not included in this database. However, 2011 brings a

drastic change, with reports on serious violations and corruption in standardized testing. Not only was corruption mentioned in admissions, but also in the testing itself. Scandals with paid impersonators contributed to this interesting phenomenon.

According to media reports, Russians do not like to pay for their children's education, and yet they do this quite frequently through bribes. As far as standardized tests are concerned, Russians do not like the test either as a measure of their children's knowledge and scholastic abilities, or as an anti-corruption device designed to fight corruption in admissions to HEIs (Ne znan'em edinyim, 2010). Perhaps, the media does not do a good job of linking the standardized testing initiative with anti-corruption efforts and educating the public. This task now becomes even more difficult, as the reports show high level of corruptness of the test itself. The question of whether the media is up to the challenge for timely and comprehensive reporting remains open.

In the United States, there are also some disturbing trends in reporting. For instance, the last time embezzlement was mentioned in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was in 2006. It is hard to believe that there were no cases of embezzlement in the US higher education sector since then. In addition, the media reports tend to qualify embezzlement as financial mismanagement or utilize a legal term of mail and wire fraud, when presenting officially filed charges against the perpetrators. Also, the last time diploma mills were mentioned in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* was in 2006.

Clearly, the problem of educational credentials in the United States persists and diploma mills and online degree-sellers are far from leaving the US market. During the period of 2007–2009, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* made a series of reports on corruption in the student loans industry, including kickbacks and fraud. The then New York State Attorney General, Andrew Cuomo, investigated illegal practices in the student loans industry. Analyzing Cuomo's investigations leads to understanding the significance of changes that take place in the financial landscape of the higher education sector (Osipian, 2012c).

Cuomo investigated fraud and conflict of interest in the triangle of relations between financial institutions as providers of student loans, students as consumers of educational services and customers of student loan providers, and HEIs' financial officers as facilitators of such transactions. At the heart of this not-so-elaborate fraud is the way that the loan financing system in the United States is structured: private for-profit student loan providers make a significant return on student loans that exceeds returns on other secure investments. The specifics of US education financing are such that student loans are secured by the federal government. Understanding this is key to recognizing the motivations of private student loan providers. The abuse of the system in this case meant monopolization of certain local segments of the educational loan markets, channeling student-customers to inferior options, and unlawful profiteering. These are in essence explicitly anti-market actions that prevent true market forces from bringing the growing market of educational loans to the high-level equilibrium.

Participation of paid impersonators in standardized testing, as was the case in Russia, means defrauding the public, because the public pays with its tax dollars

or rubles to offer access to higher education to the best and brightest candidates. Impersonators facilitate access to higher education for those who are able to pay for their services. Both the former and the latter defraud the public, not the state. At the same time, the state machine is unable to react properly to such crimes, defending the public interest and prosecuting the perpetrators. In the United States, the focus is more on the potential conflict of interest, but admissions to colleges are captured by corruption as well, with cases of preference in public university admissions given to protégés of local politicians.

Cheating and plagiarism in examinations and term papers are forms of education corruption and are no better than bribery. Receiving a good grade by the way of bribing an instructor or cheating on an examination leads to similar results, that is, obtaining a positive academic grade with no merit. Instructors not exercising their authority in detection and reporting of the instances of fraud are corrupting the educational system. This is not only an ethical issue but one of corruption as well. In fact, some academics from the United States and EU consider cheating and plagiarism the two most common forms of higher education corruption in the west. Whether it is legal or not is a separate issue.

Diploma mills are also a part of the corruption market, but perpetrators almost never go to jail for being involved in this fraudulent industry. Cases of real sentencing, such as that in Spokane in 2008, are very rare (Bartlett, 2008). Those running diploma mills can be forced to move to another state or even be fined, but serving a sentence would be unusual.

Both media reports and scholarly literature suggest that in Russia, corruption in the higher education sector is systemic rather than just an opportunistic behavior. Moreover, HEIs might be not only breeding grounds for educational corruption, but also instructional grounds for students on how to involve corrupt activities in their future lives. According to the results of an empirical study conducted by Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, and Leontyeva (2016) in Russia's Far Eastern region, fifth-year students or seniors are more open to a range of informal and corrupt practices than first-year students or freshmen. The perversion of academic purpose in this case has an explicitly systemic character. Accordingly, the response should be systemic as well. Restructuring the system is needed instead of merely chasing particular corrupt individuals, including students, faculty members, and administrators.

Russian Wild West or cowboy capitalism explains the most explicit forms of corruption in higher education that include bribery, extortion, and kickbacks. Unusual for the United States, these forms of corruption have remained commonplace in Russia in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s (Osipian, 2009a, 2016). Media covers corruption scandals in higher education, as it covers such scandals in other sectors. This is of no surprise, since the media is eager to follow stories of bribery and grand theft. However, on a substantive side, instances of less explicit yet very significant incidents of academic corruption remain grossly under-reported.

Even if Russia is able to substantially reduce the level of most explicit forms of corruption, it will unavoidably face the challenge of dealing with forms of corruption present and dominant in the United States. The latency of these forms of educational corruption and their low visibility may create further challenges

for media in reporting them. Simply put, the media might not be as interested in reporting incidences of mass cheating among students as it reports cases of university officials being caught red-handed by the police for extorting a bribe.

CONCLUSION

This study investigates reflections on corruption in higher education by analyzing media reports on this problem in the United States and Russia. Of special interest is the context of these two educational systems, as they are rapidly and significantly changing. These changes are not only incremental, but structural as well. At present, the United States may represent one of the prevalent and most livable models of higher education. How well Russia is doing on its way to this new model, given the broadening use of informal and non-formal education, remains an open question.

Formal education also involves informal and indeed illegal practices, including different forms of corruption met at the higher education level. These corrupt practices depend to a large extent on specific country contexts. Comparing the United States and Russia helps facilitate understandings as to the nature and extent of educational change and education corruption that take place in these two diverse settings, and the mass media is of help in conducting such a comparison.

The frequency with which the media reports on higher education corruption varies. The variation in reporting can be attributed to particular reforms and major changes undertaken in the higher education sector, as well as in-depth reporting of some high-profile cases. The scope of problems reflected is broad, but some important forms of corruption are either underreported or simply overlooked by the media.

The major problems, types, and forms of higher education corruption discussed in the media reports are nation-specific: in Russia, the focus is on bribery in admissions and grading, while in the United States the focus is on fraud and embezzlement of state funds, among others. These types and forms of corruption in general correlate with those analyzed in the scholarly literature. An interesting finding is that cheating and fraud gain momentum in Russian media with the rise in accusations of the standardized test as being corrupted.

Corruption is mentioned not because of the introduction of standardized testing, used by universities in admissions decisions, but precisely because of serious violations in the testing itself. As the relative weight of different forms of corruption in higher education changes in the course of educational reforms and development, the media would have to adjust accordingly. As Russia proceeds – however slowly – with its educational reforms, it should be aware that forms of corruption transform with the changing environment and new forms of corruption, similar to those in the United States, will emerge and develop.

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