

## **7.Larysa Grabovska**

### **“Paying for education... why not do it legally?”**

In 1998 I graduated from high school and it was now time for me to go to the university. Since I was twelve years old I dreamed about going to Ivan Franko Lviv State University (Lviv, Ukraine) to study International Relations. When my dad took me to a special pre-entrance seminar that was held with the purpose of providing basic information on what documents should be submitted, what should the applying students bring with them, etc., my parents were given the five digit number that was ‘needed’ in order to smooth my entrance exams and make it possible for me to get in. This number was shocking. Even though my knowledge was good enough to get the state scholarship and therefore, study for free, it was not possible. From being a crime, corruption became a norm of life. Names of students to be admitted (even for the scholarship) were already on a special list together with the exact amounts of money their parents were willing to pay. The only way I could get enrolled was only if my dad could offer the amount that would beat somebody else’s offer. The fact that state owned higher education establishments in western Ukraine are very corrupt (Ivan Franko Lviv State University has the worst reputation in the region) was not a secret for me or anybody in my family; but this was the first time we had to deal with corruption so closely. My dad did not agree to pay the bribe; corruption has stolen my dream. That summer I became a student at the International Christian University (ICU) of Kyiv – higher education establishment with western-style education system. Even though I am paying for my education (legally), my enrollment did not cost my parents a cent. I am now a junior at ICU. I have never given a bribe, my grades are what I earned not what I paid for. Very often I ask myself a question, what would have happened to me if I did get enrolled at Lviv University? If my dad have bribed the entrance committee? Would I now be a twenty year old individual, completing higher education at a prestigious college, financially totally independent from my parents, firmly convinced that it is not the amount of cash I carry in the pocket, but it is my knowledge that will ‘smooth my way’ in the future? Or would I now be still living with my parents, worrying about them getting paid on time so that then I can pass my finals ‘for sure’, totally depending on corrupted faculty members to decide what grade should I be given based on the amount I can pay?

The purpose of this paper is to provide comparative analysis of state owned highly corrupted universities against private educational institutions, and, therefore, prove that one of the most effective ways to fight corruption in the educational systems of transition countries is through establishing a system of paid/private higher education.

My experience of getting enrolled to the higher education establishment is a vivid example of how far corruption has gone in state owned universities of Ukraine. However, getting enrolled is just a starting point of one’s four or five year long way of gaining knowledge. Once yesterday’s schoolchildren become students they at the same time become a source of their professors’ income; and even though the highest price is paid at the start students keep making little donations to their university on almost constant basis. This is especially a case in the times of tests and finals when passing an oral exam totally depends on the will of the professor and term papers cost somewhere between 20 to 50 hryvnia (up to 10 dollars) bought from one’s peers or an ex-graduate. One of the students interviewed for this paper, a sophomore at one of the most prestigious universities of Kyiv majoring in finance, said that the average prices at his university are 5 to 20 dollars for the midterm and 50 to 70 dollars for the final. Even though the situation differs from university to university, and it depends on one’s major even more, the general picture is that corruption, especially bribery, has its roots very deep in state owned higher education system of Ukraine. Trying to explain the current situation, there are several factors that need to be taken into account.

The number one reason, named by every student and professor interviewed, is university professors' low payment. According to the education Ministry, the average salary for a professor in Kyiv is about 300 hryvnias; and doctor of sciences gets from 2 to 5 hryvnias for a lecture. A salary like this makes it impossible for professors to afford even some basics like good clothes or a trip to the theater or restaurant once a week. On the other hand, every day professors are faced with a number of students who are financially better off. Being in such a situation causes certain discomfort for the professor, and while during the class he can concentrate on the topic of his lecture, he will definitely notice financial difference between him and his student after the class is over; and where some teachers can leave this fact without attention, there are also those for whom a temptation to make this student pay will be hard to resist.

While some professors are being financially jealous of their students, there are also experiencing peer pressure from their colleagues. One of the professors, who would like to stay anonymous said: "Sometimes it is very hard, and sometimes even impossible to resist the pressure from your colleagues. They openly take bribes and they want you to do the same. The university has a system of collecting and later dividing the money that comes from students. First of all, there are tariffs as to how much should be paid for each department (economics, law and journalism usually rank highest). When all the money is collected, the total amount is calculated and later on divided among all of the faculty members. The biggest share, sometimes up to 75% goes to the principal of the university and the rest is divided according to the department of studies and sometimes professor's involvement in the 'money making' process. Yes, it is true, that money that state pays us is ridiculous and not enough even for a living...but still, I do not think that bribery is a way out."

Another reason that corruption has won such a stable and popular practice in our educational system is due to the weakness of Ukrainian legal system as it concerns this issue. First of all, the current law on corruption in Ukraine considers only people deputies and authorities as potential subjects of corruption. As to the university professors, bribery is the only thing that university professor can be charged with. However, in order to do that he has to be caught at the very moment the act of bribery takes place which is basically impossible. This 'money transfer' process is usually conducted in high conspiracy and by following all of the precaution rules. According to articles 168 and 170 of the Ukrainian Criminal Code, the penalty for accepting a bribe is from five to ten years in prison, confiscation of property and deprivation of the right to hold important governmental positions for five years. A person who offers a bribe risks a three- to eight-year prison sentence. This brings us to another point. Not only university professors should be hold responsible for spreading corruption in their educational institutions. It is the fault of students' and their parents' passivity as well. Among students there is a code of silence: everybody knows and understands that corruption is present at their alma mater, but nobody brings this issue out loud; and according to the Ukrainian law only a letter-complaint with the signature of the author can become the basis for administrative investigation; and while there are numbers of anonymous letters blaming certain professors in taking bribes, there are not many students and parents who would stand up for their words. As a result, it is impossible to find at least one investigation per year that was based on legally correct complaint.

The problem of corruption in Ukrainian educational establishments is also due to the lack of control of state owned institutions by outside bodies. Universities become their own monopolies governed by spoken and unspoken rules of the faculty members who have great freedom in their actions since there is no other institutional body, but their own university, to check and overlook how the studying process is being conducted.

There is a number of other reasons causing corruption. Among them the overall mentality of Ukrainian students, 35% of whom consider that giving bribes to university

professors is normal and cannot be changed. In fact, it is not just students' mentality; it's the corruption of the mentality itself and of the way of thinking that leads to corruption in other areas of public life. Education prepares the nation for its future, yet it is here where the most brazen form of corruption takes place and everybody is jumping in for his or her share of the pie. Therefore, corruption should be fought through education by educating youth in a corruption-free climate; and even though we cannot eliminate all of the corruption in education, its level can be greatly reduced by introducing the system of private/paid instead of state owned higher education.

Under the system of private/paid higher education a number of factors will change in respect to both professors and students. First of all, it will partially eliminate the problem of low payment for professors and as a result will lead to the situation where professors will be less tempted to take a bribe. Of course, one has to understand that in no way can this mean that all members of the teaching faculty will lose the temptation to take bribes. That cannot be expected. However, professors will be forced to accept the conditions under which students and parents will not want to pay more money as a bribe since they are already legally paying for education.

Another factor that strongly supports the system of private higher education is the fact that it will now fall under stricter control of Ukrainian legal system. First of all, it will become a subject to paying taxes under the law of Ukraine on tax on profit of enterprises. Therefore, under such circumstances universities will lose their monopolistic power and will be controlled by outside authoritative bodies. In addition to this, students will now be in a position of a client and for that reason will have more rights to demand qualified services they are paying for, and on the other hand, will feel free to write legally correct complaints to start the investigation process if such will be necessary. Good payment will also cause greater competition among educators applying for professors' positions resulting in more professionals being chosen and therefore, correcting the reputation of higher establishments.

Besides decreasing the level of corruption, and thus, bringing benefits for both professors and students, the system of private higher education will also bring benefits for the whole country. Students studying in corrupted educational environment are more likely to fall under corruption influence once they are out of college. On the other hand, those who do not learn how to give and accept bribes while getting their higher education will be more willing to work and build their future careers in the corruption-free society. One interesting observation that comes from interviewing students for this paper is that those students who are currently studying in private colleges are more positive and optimistic about privatizing educational system as means of fighting corruption. However, those enrolled in state owned universities have little hope that anything will change with the introduction of new system.

In fact, the major argument against the idea of private education was that currently we do have paid for departments in our universities and they are corrupt, too. In response to this one can say that first of all, professors teaching at the paid for departments of the universities are still the same professors who teach students officially not paying for their education at the same university. These professors are paid the same low salary. Another reason paid for departments are still corrupt is because there are state owned universities that exist together with paid for departments and this creates certain inequality among students. Obviously, some professors feel obligated to compensate the difference by putting students who already pay for their education in the same conditions as those who do not. However, it should be noticed that paid for departments are far from being as corrupt as state owned institutions. At the end, it is necessary to add that private educational system will bring benefits to the country as well. Not only will it bring higher income to the state from the taxes paid by educational institutions and decrease state's budget expenses, it will also start the process of educating young individuals who will learn through their education the principles of fair

game, equality of rights and opportunities, they will go on into their lives having received a knowledge of their profession and not bribery, having learned to appreciate their knowledge and not the depth of their pockets. These people, not knowing corruption, will fight it when they face it and gradually, in a slow step by step movement anti-corruption fight started in educational system will support this struggle in other areas of day-to-day life.