

# Higher Education Reforms in the Fight Against Corruption in Georgia

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the nature of corruption in higher education, the extent of higher education corruption in Georgia and the policy reforms aimed at lowering its incidence. The article addresses the issue of corruption in relation to access, equity and quality of education. The article offers one possible explanation for the high intensity of anti-corruption measures regarding higher education in Georgia: the aspiration of the country to join NATO. This endeavor has put pressure on the government to implement new (and oftentimes radical) measures and to monitor the process of fighting corruption.

**Keywords:** corruption in higher education, bribery, nepotism, quality manipulation, entrance examinations, accreditation, staff reorganization

It has been stated that corruption affects three major aspects of education: access, equity and quality.<sup>1</sup> Corruption in higher education hinders all three goals. This fact, in turn, slows the development of human capital. The reforms that began in Georgia in 2004–2005 (and still continue) have made a significant contribution to fighting corruption. They include: 1) access through the introduction of Unified National Entrance Exams and equity in access by assisting the financing of various ethnic minority and low-income students through the establishment of governmental grants; 2) quality, through the accreditation of higher education institutions; and 3) efficiency, through the restructuring of academic and administrative staff. The discussion of the three interventions is based mainly on the examples from Tbilisi State University; references to other universities and institutions are used for comparative and illustrative purposes whenever relevant.

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The information used here is drawn from scholarly studies conducted on corruption in higher education, mass media reports, private conversations with people affected by corruption in higher education in Georgia, and knowledge accumulated through years of experience that could be qualified as a participant-observation method.

### **Corruption in Higher Education in Georgia: Prevalence and Interventions**

Corruption in higher education is difficult to define. What is considered to be corrupt behavior by some may be considered acceptable or normal by others. For instance, insisting that a student's opinion mirror that of a professor is considered a sign of corruption by some; others consider that to be *de rigeur* in an educational setting. What might be perceived as favoritism or nepotism in one culture might be considered as supporting family, relational or friendship ties in another. On the whole, certain cases from a single country may provide an example for the consideration of corruption issues in other countries or regions. The present paper sets forth corruption cases in Georgian flagship universities, and analyzes the strategies for fighting corruption in the future.

Scholarly literature on corruption in higher education is relatively scarce in any country due to the specific nature of the topic. Georgia is no exception. Stephen Heyneman offers interview results from professors at Tbilisi State University regarding their experience with corruption.<sup>2</sup> Jean-Christophe Peuch,<sup>3</sup> Ketevan Rostiashvili,<sup>4</sup> Tengiz Dalalishvili,<sup>5</sup> Louise Shelley, Erik Scott, and Anthony Latta<sup>6</sup> have all discussed the spread of corruption in the Georgian higher education system and its negative influence on the country's development in general. Peter Temple has offered approaches to fighting corruption in Georgian universities.<sup>7</sup> The Decree of the Parliamentary Subcommittee of Education of Georgia<sup>8</sup> acknowledges the existence of corruption in the higher education system and sets fighting it as one of its primary goals, while Jackie Stephens and Jan Hellberg<sup>9</sup> perceive the Tempus TACIS project as a catalyst to initiate reforms and fight general corruption in the education sector.

The Black Sea Conference<sup>10</sup> has also discussed the issues of equity, fairness and access in higher education, while a recent EPPM (International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management)<sup>11</sup> study outlines the major challenges facing higher education, in which the necessity to establish an autonomous peer-reviewed system of accreditation and to increase transparency and access to information in the hiring process of academic and administrative staff is emphasized. The involvement of international experts in monitoring the progress and transparency of implementing new policies is also underlined. The document states that because accreditation is mostly nationally monitored, objectivity has not yet been achieved; there are no horizontal connections between universities in order to develop an autonomous peer-reviewed accreditation system. Lack of information or a centralized accreditation process are seen as creating an environment conducive to the spread of corruption. According to the EPPM document, 30 court cases were registered during 2007–2008; the National Accreditation Center won 27 of these cases, and three cases were submitted for reconsideration.<sup>12</sup> The cases in question concerned the claim of unaccredited or disqualified universities that they had been treated unfairly by the accreditation center. The most-frequently-named reason for this, perhaps unsurprisingly, was the presence of corruption in accreditation centers or coercion from the government.

## The Prevalence of Fighting Higher Education Corruption in Georgia

One possible explanation for the pervasiveness of anti-corruption measures in regard to Georgian higher education might be the country's desire to join NATO. This aspiration has put pressure on the government to implement new (and sometimes radical) measures and to more strictly monitor the process of fighting corruption; Georgian authorities, by the same token, have often discussed the importance of conducting reforms contingent upon the country's NATO agenda. Better international education, fellowships, and employment prospects began to be discussed, starting in 2004, especially via the mass media. Both pro-governmental and opposition channels began highlighting the debate on radical education reform and connecting this goal to the NATO prospect.

Higher education reform, consequently, was made a top priority; the relatively immediate, strident nature with which the reforms began to be conducted was criticized by certain academics—particularly those of the older generation.<sup>13</sup> However, it was exactly this intensity that may have brought about results. The reforms, especially the Unified National Examinations and institutional accreditation, received the support of the wider public<sup>14</sup>—people were able to see the benefits of the new policies, of transparent examinations, and of high-quality institutions, and recognized that academic degrees could become competitive on the national and international job market. The desire to join NATO made fighting corruption, increasing transparency and enhancing the quality of education all the more significant.

According to a recent survey, unlike Russians and Ukrainians, Georgian responders look at the prospect of joining NATO as a positive step.<sup>15</sup> As the survey revealed, “The majority of Russian and Ukrainian respondents perceive NATO as a threat to their country, while the majority of Georgians see it as protection.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it may be assumed that in Russia, for instance, new policies like the introduction of unified testing (EGEs, university admission tests equivalent to the Georgian Unified National Examinations) have been more controversial, largely due to the public's more skeptical attitude regarding such reforms.<sup>17</sup>

In Georgia, increased public awareness about the low quality of education during the Soviet and early post-Soviet years, combined with an overwhelming desire to bring about positive change, likely also contributed to the intensity of these reforms. Also, the reform policies had different levels of success and public support in terms of their implementation and results—the Unified National Entrance Examinations received high support, while the process of accreditation was viewed as controversial due to the fact that there it only addressed only institutional accreditation, not other educational entities. The accreditation of study programs, for example, is just now being initiated. Moreover, prioritizing certain programs of study over others may turn into another avenue for the spread of corruption if the process is not carefully monitored. These realities have all diminished the success of Georgia's accreditation processes.

Historically, corruption in Georgian academia has been largely associated with bribery and nepotism—giving higher grades to students, admitting them to their desired institutions without proof of merit, and practicing nefarious policies in regard to faculty. Similarly, a recent reform policy specifically involving the dismissals and hiring of staff became the most publicly controversial, and was the most debated in the mass media. Staff restructuring at Tbilisi State University brought about new requirements for re-hiring and raised the issues of professionalism, accountability and transparency. The criteria for re-hiring had often been ambiguous, and the transparency of the process was questioned. However, in spite of the reforms' drawbacks—namely, the method of hiring

professors after total dismissals—the process itself shattered the complacency of corrupt individuals and made engaging in corrupt behavior more risky.

### **Bribe Costs During the 1990s and the Probability of Engaging in Bribery**

During the 1990s, bribe costs for admission to higher education institutions reached US\$15,000-\$20,000, depending on the prestige of the department.<sup>18</sup> Admission to law, business, medical and international relations programs was usually priced the highest, followed by admission to humanities, social sciences and technical programs.<sup>19</sup> Tamuna Karosanidze and Camrin Christensen wrote in 2005 that “Until 2004, students were able to purchase not only their university admission, but also passing grades and eventually a diploma. Individual universities administered their own admissions exams. Admissions bodies, composed of university lecturers, would sit in on oral exams and grade written papers. No independent observers were allowed to monitor the process. Previously, there were two ways to obtain a university place. The first involved students in their final year taking private classes offered by the same lecturers who sat on the admissions body at his or her chosen university. The second required the parents of a university applicant simply to bribe the admissions body before the entrance exams. In both instances students would be “fed” pre-arranged questions in the oral exam and given advance warning of the subjects (i.e. topics, exam questions) in the written exam.”<sup>20</sup>

The members of entrance-examination committees were pushed to share bribes with the chairs of the committees in order to guarantee high grades for their students and to enhance their own chances of being admitted to the examination committee in future years. Examination committees became analogous to cartelized firms. As Susan Rose-Ackerman states, “Firms that can cartelize may be able to obtain benefits through corruption that no individual firm would attempt on its own.”<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, disclosing and reporting corrupt actions was difficult due to the complexity and ambiguity of the operations of such committees. Committee members taught private students throughout the year, to whom they willingly gave the necessary material for passing entrance examinations; as they were in close contact with the committee chairs, members could pull strings for their students and guarantee high grades. This way, the members would be able to have more private students, and increased personal income the following year. The chair of the committee would select the members according to personal ties, and would require that the member not reveal any insider information regarding the examination process or report bribery cases to the police or judiciary. The unwritten agreement was that the committee members share the bribes—the monetary benefits that they took from their students—with the chair. Because this system was so closed, neither police, nor any other judiciary or law-protecting instances, were able to penetrate inside the circle.

Entrance exams generally covered four subjects. Private tuition costs per subject ranged between \$1,000 and \$2,500, depending on the “prestige” of a subject. Georgian and foreign languages garnered the highest prices.<sup>22</sup> This meant that parents would have to pay more than \$9,000 in order for a child to be accepted to college. In fields such as law, economics, and international relations, the cost for bribes often reached \$15,000. In a country where the average monthly salary was approximately \$14 per month, such sums were incredibly high.<sup>23</sup>

Final grades for courses or end-of-year exams cost between \$20-\$150 per subject, depending on their difficulty, prestige and the level of student preparation. Naturally,

less-prepared students had to pay more.<sup>24</sup> Again, in the fields of law, international relations, foreign languages and economics, bribe prices were generally higher.

Being familiar with this entrenched system of academic corruption considerably increased the probability of academics or administrative staff becoming engaged in bribetaking. One's degree of confidence and complacency, it seemed, was directly related to the probability that one was involved in illegal practices—and good at covering one's tracks.<sup>25</sup> The present article concerns the correlation between system-familiarity and corrupt behavior (not considering, of course, the beliefs and morals of a person, or other characteristics).<sup>26</sup> Joel Robbins even discusses the presence of cynicism during the illegal transactions themselves.<sup>27</sup> The wide-ranging academic-reform policies launched in Georgia in 2005 dealt a severe blow to this entrenched culture of bribetaking.<sup>28</sup>

### Changes in Policy, 2000–2002

From 2000 to 2002, the commoditization of education raised issues of the legitimacy of a number of practices. The value of education for the public good, not based upon market-oriented tendencies—introducing fees for studies, offering different types of services at higher education institutions for money, and so on—contributed considerably to the reconsideration of the definition of legal and illegal actions.

In 2001–2002, government officials began to recognize the critical situation in higher education. Opposition parties began criticizing government officials for inactivity and for plaguing almost all spheres with corruption. A task force composed of Georgian and European experts was established. Eleven papers were prepared on Georgian higher education, involving such topics as accreditation, attestation, licensing, quality assurance, student admission, financing, evaluation, governance, private higher education institutions, and the labor market.<sup>29</sup> In March 2002, the Georgian Parliament adopted the Decree on the Main Directions of Higher Education Development in Georgia, which contained the objectives and principles of the higher education system. Corruption in higher education was also largely recognized. The decree confirmed that “The current admission system that uses entrance examinations to decide enrollment to public institutions of higher education contradicts the objectives of transparent access and high quality. It indirectly favors those with more money over those with less, produces non-transparent outcomes, facilitates corruption and is thus, by definition, not meritocratic. The outcome is elitist.”<sup>30</sup> Although the corrupt system was now officially recognized, it was not until the 2005 reforms that the first steps were taken to address the issue on a practical level.

### Post-2005 Period: Reforms and the Struggle for Scarce Resources

The Corruption Perception Index from 2004 listed Georgia as among 60 countries suffering from serious corruption.<sup>31</sup> In order to decrease the level of corruption and increase

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access, equity and quality, new education policies had to be introduced. Increased transparency and objectivity in university admissions, transparent accreditation of higher education institutions, and objective procedures for hiring university academic and administrative staff became the top priorities for education policymakers. However, these policies encountered certain challenges and achieved uneven degree of success in fighting corruption.

NATO accession aspirations intensified the fight against corruption in socioeconomic, political and legal spheres. It can be even stated that Georgia could serve as an exemplary case of conducting efficient reforms in the higher education sector. The new policies were implemented under collective national and international monitoring; this fact engendered positive outcomes in achieving a certain degree of transparency and objectivity, particularly in regard to entrance examinations for higher education institutions.

### **Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs)**

In 2004, the Georgian Parliament adopted a new Law on Higher Education, which targeted "... specific reforms in the higher education system: improvements in administration and governance at all levels (including removing elements of corruption lingering from the previous system); decentralization to address the diversity of local needs, and promote fiscal and administrative accountability; in-service training for teachers and administrators to reform instruction; parent education to encourage community engagement; on-going student assessment and program evaluation for multi-level accountability; standardization in testing toward grade promotion, 11<sup>th</sup> grade graduation and university admission."<sup>32</sup> In addition, the following year witnessed the establishment of Unified National Entrance Examinations (UNEEs), which significantly decreased the level of corruption in admission to higher education institutions—and since then, UNEEs have been the only way to enter any accredited higher education institution in the country. The key difference between the UNEEs and the entrance exams of previous years is that while in the latter, each university had its own entrance requirements, the UNEEs are uniform in structure. Special examination centers have been set up in several places in the capital and other cities; all students must register for the exams and sit for the tests at one of these centers, which are assigned to them during their registration process.

The tests are a combination of achievement measuring, curriculum-based tests, and skill/aptitude-measuring tests. In contrast, during previous years, the majority of tests and exams were purely knowledge-based; moreover, they were based on the knowledge that each individual university required, based on skills learned from private tutors, not on training from secondary schools. Therefore, the chances of entering higher education institutions for ethnic minorities, students from low-income families and residents of Georgia's regions significantly increased after the UNEEs' introduction.

Grant and loan schemes were introduced to cover full or partial tuition for entrants with high exam scores, as well. However, there were certain impediments in implementing these schemes to their full extent. While 30 percent, 50 percent, 70 percent and 100 percent merit-based grants provided a partial solution to the equity-of-access problem (still, not all ethnicities had equal opportunities for high-quality preparation), the income-contingent loan system was more difficult to implement, as it was directly related to income declarations of families as a proof for the eligibility for study loans.<sup>33</sup>

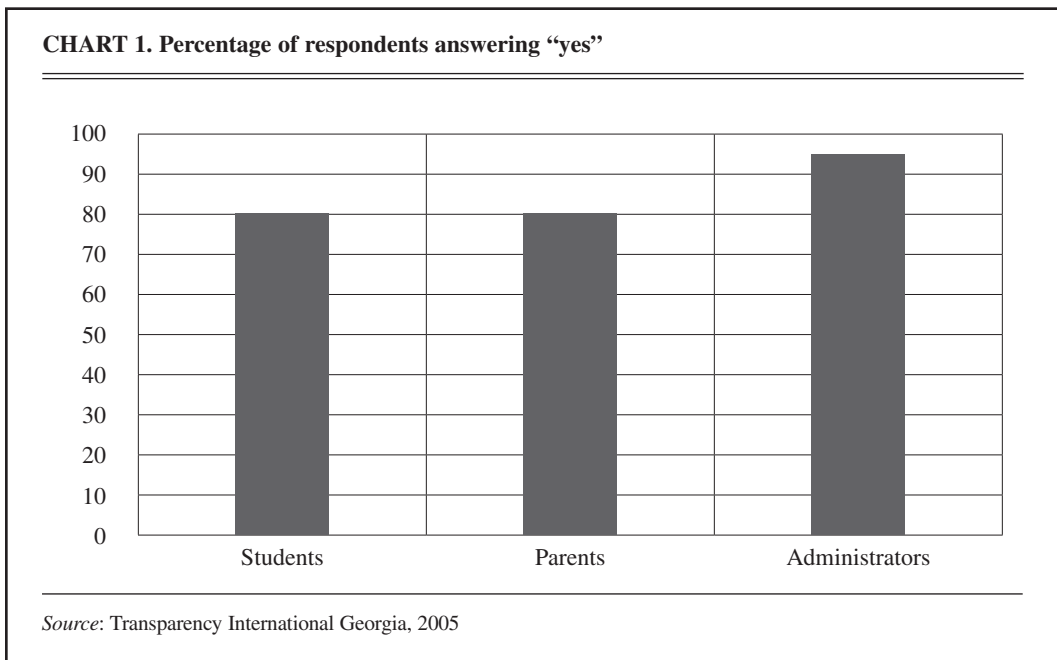


### Public Perception of the UNEEs

It is interesting to view the reaction of the public concerning the transparency of the UNEEs and their impact on decreasing levels of corruption in the university admissions process. In 2005, the NGO Transparency International Georgia "... carried out three separate surveys with a total of 973 students, 764 parents and 340 administrators across Georgia. Parents were interviewed outside the testing site while their children sat the exam inside. TI Georgia monitors interviewed test-takers as they exited the test centre. Only students who volunteered to be interviewed were included in the survey. A large majority of respondents (80 percent of students, 79 percent of parents and 96 percent of administrators) felt confident that the new process would eliminate corruption in university admissions. Interestingly, only 19.5 percent of students made use of a special information hotline that was put in place in Tbilisi."<sup>34</sup>

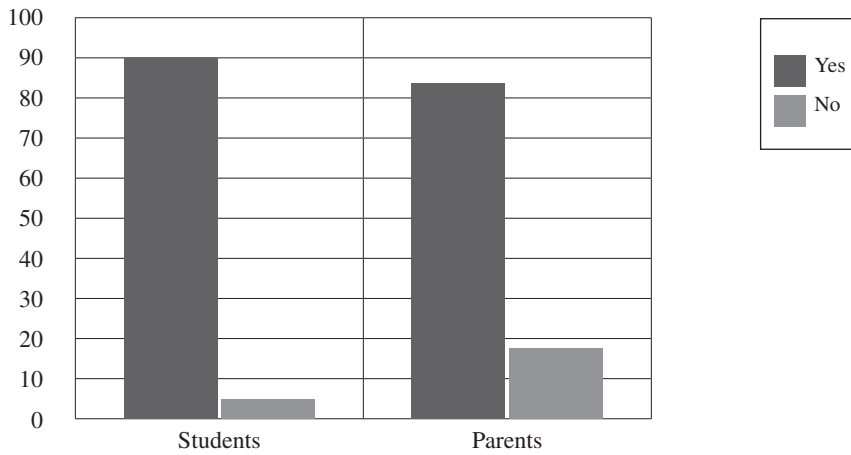
Chart 1 illustrates the results of the survey conducted among students, parents and administrator

Chart 2, found on the following page, presents the results of a survey that was conducted among students and parents regarding how understandable the process of university admissions was. The survey revealed that a high percentage of both students and parents understood the procedures of the newly introduced examinations.



### Implications of the UNEEs

Implementation of the UNEEs created a uniform, more transparent testing system that was understandable and accessible for ethnic minorities, low-income and regional students. They also successfully decreased the rate of corruption in the academic system, and increased the enrollment share from different regions. Table 1 illustrates the increasing enrollment percentages of students from different parts of Georgia in 2005 and 2006. By 2009, there were

**CHART 2. Do you understand the process of university admissions?**

Source: Transparency International Georgia, 2005

**TABLE 1. Enrollment percentages of students from regions of Georgia**

Producer	2005	2006
Tbilisi	62	65
Abkhazeti	N/A	38
Adjara	43	42
Guria	42	51
Imereti	55	65
Kakheti	53	58
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	44	45
Racha, Kvemo Svaneti	51	51
Samegrelo Zemo Svaneti	50	45
Samtskhe Javakheti	51	60
Kvemo Kartli	54	44
Shida Kartli	46	54

Source: National Examinations Center, Georgia



68 examination registration centers in Georgia, 63 of which were in the regions and five in the capital, Tbilisi. The exact percentages of regional enrollment distribution from later years has not yet been released, but the presence of 63 registration centers throughout Georgia—as opposed to zero regional entrance examination centers during previous years—points to increased regional representation in higher education.

Another significant consequence of the UNEEs was that they not only raised the standard and quality of testing, but also prompted the revision of secondary school study programs. However, this revision was not conducted equally at all secondary schools;<sup>35</sup> additionally, the majority of secondary school teachers were unaware of the exact requirements of the new exams (though the requirements were more uniform in comparison to previous years). This fact necessitated teacher-training courses that would help school-teachers upgrade their skills and meet new challenges. But unfortunately, many of these courses lacked preparation, since there were not many professionals who were qualified to train teachers.<sup>36</sup>

The UNEEs had larger societal outcomes, as well. Under the conditions of a single unified policy, each ethnicity felt more a part of the wider community: “People are more likely to adhere to social contracts under certain conditions. They are more likely to adhere to contracts when they do not consider each other as cultural ‘strangers.’”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, while they reduced the rates of corruption, the UNEEs also raised public trust.<sup>38</sup>

Educational institutions are considered to be essential to the public good, and the human capital that they produce is strengthened by knowledge-enhancement and skill-mastery—societal cohesion is an end-goal of this.<sup>39</sup> A better-educated public also enhances a country’s economic capacity and contributes to the health of its citizens. In Georgia, it can be theorized that less-corrupt educational policies work toward the overall aim of bettering the nation.

### **University Accreditation Procedures**

In the country’s fight against corruption, the introduction of a revamped accreditation policy has also been seen as significant. During the Soviet era, all higher education institutions were established by the state, and no formal accreditation procedures existed. There was, instead, regular state control of the quality of teaching, research and administration. In the instance of fraud, misconduct or any illegal action, the individuals involved were punished, but the state-controlled institution itself would not be affected. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, under the influence of 1990s market forces, the government began issuing teaching licenses to newly opened private universities. However, since bribery for acquiring licenses was widespread, many questioned the credibility and quality of these institutions.

The new accreditation process, created to improve institutional quality, was introduced alongside the other education reforms that began in 2004–2005. The UNEEs were to be conducted along with national accreditation and quality assessment processes. The number of students to be accepted at the universities and the number of universities entitled to accept a new cohort of undergraduates would be directly related to the results of accreditation and quality assessment processes. *Numerus clausus* was introduced in higher education institutions as a consequence of the accreditation process—each accredited university was restricted by the number of students that it could accept.

Monitoring expenditures by institutions was another major criterion for being accredited. A number of institutions were closed down as a result of failing to meet accreditation

requirements, largely due to insufficient resources or the prevalence of corrupt practices like money laundering, misappropriation of university property, and misappropriation of funds by academic or administrative staff.

For example, Tbilisi's Georgian Technical University was disqualified from accepting any freshmen in 2007 because the university premises were used for illegal business purposes by top administrative staff.<sup>40</sup> The case sent shockwaves through the administration at various universities and to the faculty members involved in the misuse of power. Failing the accreditation process also had a consequence for former students: their degrees and diplomas were now devalued on the job market.

Georgian Technical University's accreditation failure pushed other universities to make their activities more transparent and accountable, to upgrade standards, and to reconsider a number of curriculum and teaching-level issues. Additionally, the devaluation of diplomas on the job market brought the cost of corruption in higher education to the public's attention more directly.

There remain certain issues in the accreditation process that need to be tackled in order to decrease corruption. At present, the National Center of Accreditation is highly centralized. A new board of accreditors was appointed by then-Prime Minister Lado Gurgendze on September 24, 2008, consisting mainly of previously appointed top officials: the Deputy Minister of Education, the Head of the Department of State Property Management at the Ministry of Economic Development, the Head of the Quality Management Department at Tbilisi State University, the Head of the Department of Education Programs at the Ministry of Culture, Protection of Monuments and Sports, to name just a few.<sup>41</sup>

There is no peer-reviewed system of accreditation for higher education institutions. Although the institutions are required to present the results of self-evaluation to the Board of the National Accreditation Center, top government officials remain in charge of the accreditation process, increasing the chances for corruption in the form of bribetaking for lobbying. To combat this, one recommendation would be to decentralize the system and set up independent accreditation agencies that would promote a peer-reviewed process. The International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management (EPPM) recommended this in its recently published report.<sup>42</sup>

This issue of quality control is not new. Alongside institutional accreditation, program accreditation should be implemented with competence and objectivity to minimize violations, abuse of power and corruption of accrediting agencies. At present, the National Center of Accreditation in Georgia is working on the issue of program accreditation. The results of this have yet to be seen.

### **Staff Restructuring at TSU and University Adaptation Strategies**

Due to the chaotic situation in post-Soviet Georgia, the majority of universities overstaffed their departments during the 1990s. Hiring relatives, friends, and acquaintances through favoritism and bribery became a common practice. Therefore, artificially created positions and duties had produced dead wood that became almost impossible to regulate. These hiring practices presented a number of staffing problems that needed to be addressed.

The staffing-based issues that can arise at universities are myriad: older professors may refuse to accommodate curriculum changes or shoulder increased workloads; staff members may adapt to new technology with difficulty; staff may be performing redundant tasks; and there may exist an atmosphere of antagonism and tension between academic and

administrative personnel. Hence, university officials may consider certain solutions such as targeting "low performers" in budget cuts; deciding upon on a merit-pay protocol and whether it should reward seniority or achievement; and merging of redundant departments, and consequently, the dismissal of redundant faculty and staff. These issues are, naturally, controversial, and usually lead to tension and adversity.

Universities have been traditionally considered to be organizations that are slow to respond to changes in the external environment. As Barbara Sporn notes, "Universities are among the oldest organizations in the world and have proven resilient over several centuries of socioeconomic and political change."<sup>43</sup> It can be assumed that resistance to change is, in the majority of cases, caused by the presence of various bureaucratic structures that exist within universities. It is common knowledge that any organization possesses bureaucratic features. As Henry Mintzberg et al. state, this is because organizations are created to replace uncertainty with the type of stability that is usually achieved through adherence to rules and regulations.<sup>44</sup> This, in turn, breeds bureaucratic problems. Universities are considered as functioning like professional bureaucracies in order to sustain cohesion and maintain regulations.<sup>45</sup> They are characterized by highly specialized and minimally formalized jobs, carried out by "functional groups based on knowledge or skills."<sup>46</sup> In addition, the environment in academia is a relatively stable one, as changes are typically enacted more slowly than in other fields—it takes time to design new study programs, curricula, and even more time to teach old professors how to handle new staff and new methodologies.

Regarding horizontal and vertical decentralization, universities (especially in the US) are highly decentralized organizations. Karl Weick even refers to the university as a loosely-coupled system (that could be perceived as an extreme form of decentralization), where the introduction of innovation in one unit (department) might not affect other units. Weick states that functional loose coupling refers to the low level of cooperation and coordination required by teaching and research activities within higher education institutions.<sup>47</sup>

Therefore, it can be assumed that a professionalized bureaucracy (which strengthens the resilience of academia) and loose-coupling (which distorts interdepartmental coordination for implementing new policies) are two factors that might cause confusion for universities when trying to adapt to a changing external environment. The inherent paradox here is that while a professionalized bureaucracy<sup>48</sup> might lead to extreme authoritative power and constrained organization, loose-coupling might engender another extreme of unregulated system and chaos.<sup>49</sup> It is at this point that the strategy of organizational isomorphism<sup>50</sup> might be useful. As Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell suggest, an optimal way to deal with the problem is through one type of organizational isomorphism, called mimetic isomorphism, which involves adapting business strategies to academic institutions.<sup>51</sup> Through mimetic isomorphism, academia decreases the level of bureaucracy and makes itself adaptable to the external environment.

Another strategy to transform the highly-bureaucratized university has been introduced by Burton R. Clark.<sup>52</sup> According to Clark, there is an imbalance between environmental demand and institutional response. Therefore, he proposes an interactive instrumentalism, which implies the creation of a climate of innovation within the university.

Sporn analyzes the development of universities from the perspective of influencing the external environment and presents a comprehensive theory of adaptation.<sup>53</sup> As she states,

“successful organizational adaptation for colleges and universities will require new and innovative strategies to respond to the changing environment for higher education.”<sup>54</sup>

Staff restructuring at Tbilisi State University (TSU) can serve as an illustration of how the above-discussed theories interplay. The majority of staff were made redundant, both on the academic and the administrative level. Tensions intensified particularly during the summer of 2006, when all professors and lecturers were dismissed from the university.<sup>55</sup> Corruption, ambiguous and biased criteria for re-hiring, degree of transparency, objectivity—all of these became buzzwords. Department after department dismissed their staff; professors could re-apply, going through the typical screening process and interviews, but the re-hiring procedures were largely seen as corrupt and dishonest from the outset.

The debacle at TSU prompted concerns about the fairness of re-hiring procedures. The total dismissals of academic and administrative staff from the institution triggered discontentment and protest from the individuals affected by the events. The dismissed professors accused the authorities of persecuting them and attempting to replace them with more government-connected staff.<sup>56</sup>

There were instances of professors being discouraged from to re-applying to the positions under pressure of competition; there were even cases in which the heads of departments recommended the possible candidates for professorship positions. Application deadlines, re-hiring competition dates and requirements were modified several times at different departments. These shortfalls caused further resentment between academic and administrative personnel; the re-hiring process in particular created the most tension between the administration and academic staff, and caused a blame-game between opposing sides. There are still certain issues to be tackled in this respect. In particular, hiring criteria and procedures must be refined and further elaborated.

Stephen M. Cahn offers recommendations on conducting an efficient, objective and transparent hiring process for new staff. Strict, objective criteria for the evaluation of candidates' teaching and research potential, as well as rigid and professionally designed questions for the interview, he proposes, are among many other recommendations that should be implemented at TSU when hiring academic or administrative staff: “At the interview, hard questions should be asked and cogent answers expected. Those candidates who do not provide them should be eliminated from consideration, not out of animosity but from a firm commitment to maintaining excellence. The road to mediocrity or worse is littered with the excuses offered by department members for candidates whom they liked but who performed poorly in interviews. While an interview situation, like a musical audition, can be misleading, in both cases false notes signal trouble.”<sup>57</sup>

Relatedly, the dismissal of TSU Rector Roin Metreveli, accused of “heavy-handed rule and corruption,”<sup>58</sup> was widely demanded by the public shortly after the Rose Revolution of 2003. Metreveli was accused of spreading corruption throughout the institution and siphoning-off of resources from the university. The Georgian public, prompted by his dismissal, came to further understand that the country's scarce resources could be allotted to better purposes (such as better academic preparation) than on bribery and its resulting contribution to the “second income” of corrupt individuals within academia. The media widely highlighted the case.<sup>59</sup> Metreveli's dismissal became a turning point in the fight against corruption, more succinctly delivering the message that times had changed and that under the ongoing reforms, no one would be immune from prosecution for illegal action, corruption or abuse of power.

The process of dismissals and re-hirings also raised further issues. As a result of dismissals, retrenchments, and department mergers, the demand for new disciplines that would be better suited to new socioeconomic developments became clear. This fact necessitated the creation of new syllabi and teaching methodologies,<sup>60</sup> and care in selecting non-corrupt potential candidates to monitor the quality of these processes. Academic quality control and reconsideration of curricula in the majority of disciplines has presented a challenge for TSU; this issue is still under discussion.<sup>61</sup>

### **Recent Developments and Anti-Corruption Policies**

According to the recent decision made by Georgia's former Minister of Education, Nikoloz Gvaramia, through the decrease of administrative expenses, it is now possible to finance at least 500 out of every of 3,500–4,000 master's degree students. The grant-recipients will be selected on the basis of test results. The selection tests will be conducted in two phases in order to improve transparency and objectivity, and to decrease the chances of bribery for the purpose of raising grades. The first phase of tests will be conducted by the Ministry of Education. The second phase will be conducted by the respective universities. This way, the practice of a two-tier examination system will establish "cross-checking," and this monitoring practice will enhance the level of transparency and increase the risks of engaging in corrupt practices of bribery, favoritism and nepotism.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, through the decrease of administrative expenses, funds could be directed toward increasing affordability and access.

### **Summary and Implications**

Standardized entrance examinations, accreditation, transparency and objectivity in hiring may be the first steps toward decreasing corruption in Georgian higher education. Raising the public's awareness of these reforms' positive results could, in turn, trigger a more measured approach to distribution of scarce university resources.

In summation:

- Post-2005 reforms triggered the struggle for scarce resources that may have been intensified by the aspirations of the country to join NATO and to improve overall economic conditions, and by increased public awareness of the benefits of collective action against corruption.
- The article assumes that the degree of familiarity and impunity with corrupt channels increases the probability of individuals to engage in corrupt practices. Cases from 1990s Georgia could serve as an example.
- The reforms of 2005–2007 removed corrupt individuals and resulted in improved educational institutions and admission structures. Although corruption remains a highly fluid and adaptable practice, new policies dismantled the corrupt structures by making illegal transactions by faculty and administrators more risky.
- While the Unified National Entrance Examinations received overwhelming support, accreditation and university staff restructuring were more controversial. Therefore, criteria, procedures and monitoring of these policies should be further refined and improved.

Several questions that policymakers in Georgia may need to answer before attempting



future improvements arise as well: How socially equitable are the present exams? How efficient are they in terms of the quality of administration? How could socially-equalizing policies be further refined in the preparation process of UNEEs? Which testing models are preferable? How should the UNEEs' effect on fighting corruption be further researched? How should programs' accreditation be implemented alongside the institutional accreditation to guarantee efficiency, objectivity and unbiased evaluation of individual programs? How and who should monitor the objective, transparent, non-corrupt and rigorous selection process of academic and administrative staff in higher education institutions?

The measures offered by Heyneman<sup>63</sup> could be implemented to make fighting corruption in higher education more effective. For instance, he notes, such mechanisms for adjudication and management as "the establishment of public ombudsman, of professional boards, of faculty-student code of conduct boards to hear cases of infractions and to recommend consequences"<sup>64</sup> would significantly increase transparency in academia. In addition, such preventative mechanisms as the introduction of "Blue Ribbon" committees (independent and exclusive commissions of nonpartisan statesmen and experts formed to investigate important issues in the governmental or public sphere); codes of conduct for administrators, faculty and students; annual reports to the public on corruption in education; public access to financial statements of educational institutions; anti-corruption commissions; and a free and active education press should be implemented. "Clear ownership of educational property, tax differentiation between for profit and not-for-profit educational institutions to seek monetary support without being subject to taxation"<sup>65</sup> are structural reforms that need to be carried out. And "Sanctions such as criminal penalties should be introduced for economic and professional corruption. Public exposure, dismissal from employment, fines payable to victims of misconduct, withdrawal of license to practice" should be widely institutionalized.<sup>66</sup>

Another significant issue that policymakers should consider is the effect that corruption in higher education can have on the Bologna Process. As Heyneman suggests, "Many countries in the Europe and Central Asian region are participating in the Bologna Process with members of the European Union. One objective of that process is to make university degrees equivalent in hopes of facilitating the transfer of students and greater mobility in the labor market. Whether experienced or perceived, universities or university systems with reputations for corruption will likely end the Bologna Process. Were this process to actually take effect it would constitute the educational equivalent in the European Union of unilateral disarmament. It is difficult to imagine why a country or a university with a high reputation for excellence would allow its degrees to be made equivalent to a university or a university system with a reputation for corruption."<sup>67</sup> Policymakers should spend more time and effort on monitoring and evaluating new policies. Quality evaluation should be the top priority in order to analyze how well these policy strategies are applicable in the Georgian context.

At present, the introduction of program accreditation is planned in order to improve not only the quality of facilities and guarantee the purposeful use of university infrastructure, but also to provide instruction that meets the demands of the new requirements. Favoring certain disciplines over others because of the biased attitudes of officials (such as deans, rectors, and vice-rectors) should be minimized in order to raise the objectivity of programs' evaluation. Multiple types of agencies will provide broader choice, will decrease dependence on any single agency, and hence, will hamper corrupt practices by

curbing absolute power. Regarding staff reorganization, more rigorous, fixed, transparent and objective selection criteria should be used for hiring. National and international experts should be invited to monitor the objectivity and transparency of this process.

Despite the understanding that a number of policies still should be implemented, the fact that recent reforms have been presented and undertaken has brought many beneficial changes to Georgian academia as a whole. These ongoing processes in the country's system of higher education—which, on a more holistic scale, are crucial to economic and social development—possess certain features that could be disseminated to aid other countries whose academic systems face similar internal struggles.

## NOTES

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7. Peter Temple, "Universities without corruption: a new approach for Georgia's higher education," *CIHE Newsletter* 1, no. 42 (2006), available at [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number42/p19\\_Temple.htm](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/newsletter/Number42/p19_Temple.htm) (accessed September 30, 2010).

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10. "Promoting fairness and equity in access to higher education," Black Sea Conference on University Admission and Exams, held in Georgia, September 19–20, 2006.

11. EPPM, "The results of higher education reforms (Georgia)," *Descriptive Report According to the Bologna Process Indicators*. EPPM, International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management, 2008.

12. *Ibid.*, 30.

13. "Several issues concerning the reform of the education system," in *Tbilisi University*, no. 34 (2004); "An Open Letter to the Parliament of Georgia and to the Minister of Education and Science. Regarding the Project 'On Higher Education'," in *Tbilisi University*, no. 40 (2004); and "Let us conduct reforms in a right way," in *Tbilisi University*, no. 2 (2006).

14. Tamar Karosanidze and Camrin Christensen, "A new beginning for Georgia's University Admissions," in *Stealing the Future: Corruption in the Classroom—Ten Real World Experiences*, Transparency International (2005).

15. Gallup poll results, April–May 2008, available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/110035/Findings.aspx> (accessed October 7, 2010).



16. Results are based on face-to-face interviews with at least 491 adults, aged 15 and older, conducted between 2006 and 2008. Gallup most recently polled in Russia in April–May 2008 and in Georgia in June 2008. For security reasons, Gallup did not poll in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the maximum margin of error attributable to sampling, weighting, and other random effects is  $\pm 3$  percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. See Gallup poll results, April–May 2008, available at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/110035/Findings.aspx> (accessed October 7, 2010).

17 “EGE Turned Out As Usual,” in Scepssis.ru, July 2008, available at [http://scepssis.ru/library/id\\_2167.html](http://scepssis.ru/library/id_2167.html) (accessed October 7, 2010).

18. The name of the specific department is not disclosed for ethical reasons.

19. See “Who and at what costs teaches you at Tbilisi State University,” in Rustavi2 Forums, June 16, 2003, available at <http://forum.rustavi2.com/index.php?showtopic=399&mode=threaded&pid=11301> (accessed October 5, 2010); Bryon MacWilliams, “In Georgia, Professors Hand Out Price Lists,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2002. Also drawn from author’s research—anecdotal evidence and informal conversations.

20. Karosanidze and Christensen, “A new beginning for Georgia’s University Admissions,” in *Stealing the Future: Corruption in the Classroom—Ten Real World Experiences*, Transparency International (2005): 36–37.

21. Susan Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption: A Study in Political Economy* (Maryland Heights, MO: Academic Press, 1978): 87.

22 See Rustavi2.com, available at <http://forum.rustavi2.com/index.php?showtopic=399&mode=threaded&pid=11301> (accessed October 7, 2010); and MacWilliams, “In Georgia, Professors Hand Out Price Lists,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 2, 2002.

23. Data is based on MacWilliams’ “In Georgia, Professors Hand Out Price Lists,” and on expert knowledge, observations and anecdotal evidence, 1992–2004.

24. Students who were diligent, capable and prepared for the examinations had no need to pay bribes; in the majority of cases, their capabilities were duly assessed by the professors despite the professors’ own engagement in bribe-taking.

25. See Rose-Ackerman, *Corruption*, on corruption and the risk of detection: “Both the probability of detection and the punishment if caught may depend upon the number of corrupt transactions, and the total volume of bribes collected” (139). However, to calculate the risk of detection in academia, its specific nature would require the inclusion of other variables, such as bribe-taking professors promising potential bribe-paying students future professional prospects in order to de-incentivize them from reporting illegal acts to the administration.

26. Moral and ethical values of the individuals should also be considered in this respect. There are staff members (both academic and administrative) who, while familiar with the informal channels and are aware of the ways the corrupt systems work, still refuse to engage in such activities on the basis of personal ethics.

27. Joel Robbins, in Katherine E. Browne, and Barbara Lynne Milgram (eds.), *Economics and Morality. Anthropological Approaches* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2009): 43–58.

28. Rose-Ackerman discusses corruption and the risk of detection, which depends upon the size of the bribes that bureaucrats accept, in addition to other risk-factors.

29. “The main directions in higher education development in Georgia,” *The Decree of Parliamentary Sub-committee of Education of Georgia* (2002).

30. Ibid.

31. Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2004*, available at <http://www.transparency.org/> (accessed October 10, 2010).

32. Karosanidze and Christensen, “A new beginning for Georgia’s University Admissions,” in *Stealing the Future: Corruption in the Classroom—Ten Real World Experiences*, Transparency International (2005): 37.

33. These issues pertain to the problem of Georgia’s inefficient banking system and to still-existing “hidden income” from the private sector, which hinders the development of an efficient loan

system in the country.

34. Karosanidze and Christensen, 37.

35. EPPM, Survey of Teachers' Awareness and Attitude towards the Activities Performed by the Teacher Professional Development Center (May–August 2009). EPPM, International Institute for Education Policy Planning and Management.

36. See Survey of Teachers' Awareness and Attitude towards the Activities Performed by the Teacher Professional Development Center. The government introduced new types of tests that were similar to the US SAT test; Georgian teachers had never dealt with this, and there were certain issues of re-training the teachers. However, there were no trainers either, since the tests were new.

37. Stephen P. Heyneman, "Education and Misconduct," in James Guthrie (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Education, Volume 5* (New York: MacMillan Publishers, 2003): 2244.

38. Brian L. Heuser, "Academic social cohesion within higher education," *UNESCO Prospects* (New York: Springer, 2008).

39 See note 37.

40 See News.gtu.ge, March–May 2007, available at <http://news.gtu.ge/index.php.?newsid> (accessed October 7, 2010).

41. See Nea.ge, September 24, 2008, available at [www.nea.ge/default.aspx?sec\\_id=20&lang=1](http://www.nea.ge/default.aspx?sec_id=20&lang=1) (accessed October 1, 2010).

42. See note 11.

43. Barbara Sporn, "Adaptive university structures: An analysis of adaptation to socioeconomic environments of US and European Universities," *Higher Education Policy Series 54*, (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1999): 6.

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45. Henry Mintzberg, "Structure in 5'S: a synthesis of the research on organization design," *Management Science* 26, no. 3 (1980).

46. Ibid.

47. Karl E. Weick, "Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems," in Marvin W. Peterson (ed.), *Organization and Governance in Higher Education (4th Edition)* (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 1991): 103–117.

48. Henry Mintzberg, *The Structuring of Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

49. Christine Musselin, "Organized anarchies: a reconsideration of research strategies," in Massimo Warglien and Michael Masuch (eds.), *The Logic of Organizational Disorder* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1996): 55–72; and Karl E. Weick, "Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems," in Marvin W. Peterson (ed.), *Organization and Governance in Higher Education (4th Edition)* (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 1991): 103–117.

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51. Ibid.

52. Burton R. Clark, *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press, 1998).

53. See note 43, 280–281.

54. Ibid, 6.

55. See, for example, Order of the Rector of Tbilisi State University, August 10, 2007 (N234/02-03, N235/02-03, and N237/02-03), available at [www.tsu.edu.ge/ge/juridical/orders.htm](http://www.tsu.edu.ge/ge/juridical/orders.htm) (accessed October 2, 2010). On faculty dismissals, see *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, July 8, 2005, 5; *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, July 15, 2005, 1–3; *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, October 13, 2005, 4–5; *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, November 11, 2005, 2–4; *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, November 16, 2005, pp. 1–3; *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, November 25, 2005, 1–2; and *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, January 27, 2006, 3–5.

56. See "The university professors must regain their prestige," *Akhali Taoba [New Generation]*,

no. 137, May 20, 2006; “Georgian Nation, you have to choose: either University or Chancellery!,” *Asaval-Dasavali*, no. 26, June 26–July 2, 2006; “How many professors fell victim to Lomaia-Rankovich Group? Eight dead professors,” *Asaval-Dasavali*, no. 17, April 23–29, 2007; and “How can the attack on the Department of Biology be explained...?,” *Asaval-Dasavali*, no. 5, February 4–10, 2008.

57. Stephen M. Cahn (ed.), *Morality, Responsibility, and the University: Studies in Academic Ethics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990): 71.

58. Metreveli handed in his resignation to the university’s Great Council on October 1, 2004. See “Rector Roin Metreveli Resigns,” *Caucaz.com*, October 5, 2004, available at [http://www.caucaz.com/home\\_eng/breve\\_contenu.php?id=14&PHPSESSID=f82e8d96b06fd3c4321f6545d679eb9](http://www.caucaz.com/home_eng/breve_contenu.php?id=14&PHPSESSID=f82e8d96b06fd3c4321f6545d679eb9) (accessed October 7, 2010).

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60. See “We should conduct the reforms sensibly,” in *Newspaper Tbilisi University*, January 27, 2006, 3; and “It is impossible to like the University the way it functions today,” *Asaval-Dasavali*, no. 45, November, 5–11, 2007.

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63. See note 1.

64. Stephen P. Heyneman, Kathryn H. Anderson, and Nazym Nuraliyeva, “The cost of corruption in higher education,” *Comparative Education Review* 52, no. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

65. *Ibid.*, 22.

66. See notes 1 and 64.

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