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## ДЛИННЫЙ ПУТЬ ОТ АСТАНЫ ДО БОЛОНИИ: ПОЛИТИКА МЕДИА-ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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В данной статье анализируются попытки усовершенствовать национальные образовательные стандарты по программам подготовки журналистов в Казахстане, рассматриваются возможности устранения барьеров на пути более активного взаимодействия вузов и СМИ, а также выявляются основные проблемы в деле повышения педагогического и исследовательского потенциала преподавателей.

**Ключевые слова:** политика, журналистика, масс медиа, образование, Казахстан.

### The Long Road from Astana to Bologna: the Politics of Journalism and Media Education in Kazakhstan

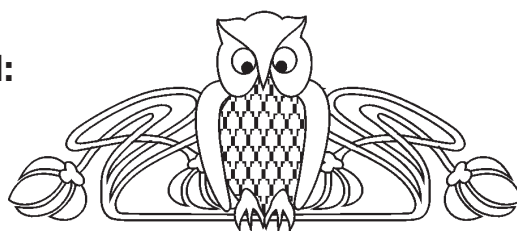
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This article examines attempts to improve journalism and media curricula and resources in Kazakhstan, barriers to collaboration between universities and the media industry, and the challenges of building teaching and research capacity.

**Keywords:** politics, journalism, mass media, education, Kazakhstan.

### KAZAKHSTAN'S INVESTMENT AND REFORMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Kazakhstan is the most prosperous and politically stable (though not yet democratic) country in Central Asia, and the government has made education a priority. Kazakhstan's economy has been growing, and revenues from oil, gas and mineral



resources have swelled the government budget. In 2001 Kazakhstan launched a multi-year program (now extended to 2020) to improve education. Many universities are stronger and healthier than in the 1990s, with higher salaries and state funding for research and development. Standards have been improved with the introduction of the Unified National Test, roughly equivalent to the SAT (the standardized test used for most college admissions in the United States). As a signatory to the Bologna Process, Kazakhstan introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which has improved mobility and flexibility. Between 2004 and 2008 the Ministry of Education and Science closed about 40 underperforming universities and branch campuses. In the 1990s, entrepreneurs started opening private universities to attract upper and middle-class students dissatisfied with education at state institutions. Some failed or were closed because they did not meet minimal standards; from a peak of 123 in 2000, the number fell to 83 in 2007, but rebounded slightly to 92 in 2010. Nationwide, about 620,000 students are enrolled, most at state institutions; about 285,000 (46 per cent) are part-time or distance education students, completing their requirements by examination. Over the next few years, enrollment may decline because of demographic trends; in the harsh economic times after independence in 1991, fewer children were born, and this is the cohort now reaching college age. About one fifth of students are supported by merit-based state scholarships (which do not cover living expenses); the rest pay tuition<sup>1</sup>. During the global economic crisis, working and middle-class families found it difficult to pay for



their children's education; some private universities, such as the English-language Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP) in Almaty (recently renamed the University of KIMEP), saw sharp falls in enrollment which in 2009 led to cuts in teaching staff. State universities depend primarily on government funding and tuition, and have struggled to attract private gifts and research funding. Meanwhile, the government has targeted several institutions for strategic investment, including Nazarbayev University in Astana, a partnership with several U. S. and European institutions, which offered its first classes (in English) 2011<sup>2</sup>.

To help fund the expensive project, the government diverted money from the successful *Boloshak* program which funded overseas undergraduate education for high-performing students. The university is designed to create an international education experience in the middle of the steppe. The court is still out on whether the investment is a wise one.

## JOURNALISM EDUCATION

Historically, journalism in the Soviet Union was a subfield of literature so journalism education was conducted in faculties of philology (language and literature). Many journalism teachers have degrees in philology but no academic or professional experience in media. They can teach theoretical courses on journalism and society, but struggle with the practical courses. "Most of our faculty members are philologists," said to me Tatyana Dyakova from Taraz State University. "I am a lecturer in classical Russian literature, and I would appreciate help from real journalists".

As in other countries, the requirements of universities and the Ministry of Education and Science for teachers with doctoral degrees and scholarly research, and the needs of the media industry for practical skills, are in conflict. Media employers complain that teachers lack practical experience and that the curriculum is too theoretical. As Freedman pointed out in his analysis of journalism education in Kyrgyzstan: "Their pedagogy includes an orientation towards lectures rather than field reporting assignments, towards rote learning of facts rather than critical thinking, and toward discouragement of students from actively questioning their instructors"<sup>3</sup>.

The situation may worsen, with the mandate from the ministry that teachers publish their research in "high-impact factor" peer-reviewed journals, a classification system from Thomson-Reuters that rates journals based on the number of citations<sup>4</sup>. This is a major challenge for faculty, especially in the humanities and social sciences, including journalism, who for years have met their own institutions' more modest research standards by publishing articles in university-produced books. They lack both English academic writing skills and training in Western research methods. The ministry requires

faculties and departments to have a specified number of teachers with graduate degrees; those that do not will lose their state accreditation. Most working journalists have only a bachelor's degree, so the rule often prevents departments from hiring them. Even without it, attracting practitioners is a financial challenge; journalism in Central Asia is not a well-paid profession, but teachers' pay is even lower. At many universities, working journalists can do no more than give a few *pro bono* guest presentations, and supervise interns.

The trend is worrying, because enrollment in Kazakh-language journalism tracks (most universities offer two tracks, in Russian and Kazakh) is increasing. Even Kazakh academics admit that the educational and professional standards of Kazakh-language journalism teachers are lower than their Russian-language counterparts, and so departments face a difficult dilemma: Russian-language teaching capacity may be adequate, but there are fewer students to teach; more students want to work in Kazakh-language journalism, but there are not enough qualified teachers.

Many graduates do not end up working in journalism because Kazakhstan's media sector, although it has expanded, especially in online news, does not create enough jobs for the annual output of graduates. Some had always planned to work in the better-paying fields of public relations and corporate communication, but many others have to find work in non-media fields. The trend towards English-language instruction also has consequences. Several universities offer what they call "international journalism" programs, which include instruction in foreign languages (usually English) and more courses in international relations and economics than in the traditional curriculum. In principle, this is an advantage because students can do Internet research and interviews in English, thus broadening their range of sources. However, it does not help them much in a job market dominated by Kazakh and Russian-language media.

The over-supply of journalism graduates was the pretext for a controversial proposal in 2011 by Education and Science Minister Bakhytzhan Zhumagulov to close all the journalism departments at regional state universities, and offer journalism at only two institutions – Kazakh National University (KazNU) in Almaty and Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana. KazNU is the traditional leader in journalism education in Kazakhstan; it has been educating journalists since 1934, and, in collaboration with the ministry, plans the national curriculum. Although there was broad agreement that weak departments with few students should close, the plan was opposed by almost all regional university rectors who correctly sensed that Zhumagulov had a political agenda. Centralizing journalism education in Astana and Almaty would help the authorities to make sure that teachers and students toed the government line and would draw on a steady stream



of graduates for jobs in government and corporate communication. The plan would also have reduced the number of students because many cannot afford education in the two most expensive cities in Kazakhstan. Those who can are unlikely to return to regional cities to take lower-paying jobs. University rectors argued that, given the size of the country and the large number of regional centers, it was more cost-effective to educate journalists at their home institutions.

According to a 2008 survey by Nemecek et al., 20 universities in Kazakhstan offered journalism education, most within faculties of philology. At least two departments (at Aktobe and Kokshtau) have since been closed by the ministry because they did not meet the quota for faculty with graduate degrees. Five are at private institutions, all in Almaty; the state institutions are in Almaty (KazNU) and Astana (ENU) and the following regional cities: Atyrau, Karaganda, Kostanay, Kyzylorda, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, Semey, Taraz, Ust-Kamenogorsk and Zhezkazgan<sup>5</sup>. The strongest, with large enrollments, are at Karaganda, the fourth-largest city in the country in the northern industrial belt, Kostanay, Pavlodar, Semey and Ust-Kamenogorsk. Surprisingly, there is no journalism department in Shymkent, the third-largest city and the major center in southern Kazakhstan.

### NATIONAL CURRICULUM

All universities follow the ministry-mandated national journalism curriculum, which is designed by the journalism faculty at KazNU. It consists of general education courses, core journalism courses, sequence courses, an internship and final exams. In principle, students can select one of six sequences: periodical press, television journalism, radio journalism, international journalism, mass media management and marketing, and Internet journalism. In practice, most departments at regional universities offer no more than two or three sequences; not only do they lack qualified teachers, but they cannot afford to offer sequence classes for a handful of students. They are also limited in their ability to offer electives. Unlike U. S. and European universities, where students take courses in departments outside their major, most courses (including general education courses) are taught within the department, so the students are learning history and philosophy from journalism (or philology) teachers. This is primarily a function of the group system, in which students take most (if not all) their coursework with the same group of fellow students throughout their college career. This is a serious structural limitation: not only are students taught by a small group of teachers, but they interact on a daily basis with the same group of peers. The group system provides a comfortable, supportive environment, but limits students' exposure to other teachers and perspectives.

Students in Kazakhstan, as in other former Soviet republics, spend on average about twice as long in class each week as their counterparts in North America or Europe. For each credit hour, a student has 45 hours of class time. This is divided between lectures and supervised and unsupervised practice. A typical three-hour class requires 135 hours. The bottom line is that if a student takes the standard 12 credit hours in a 15-week semester, s/he will be in class an average of 36 hours per week (a total of 540 hours for the semester). This emphasis on classroom time has several consequences (apart from a six-day week, including Saturdays). Most significantly, it leaves little or no time for outside work-reading, papers, projects or, for journalism students, researching and writing stories. In other words, it does not provide the opportunity for the independent research and critical thinking that is viewed as critical in Western journalism education. Almost all work has to be done in class, often without the help of books or computers; by contrast, in North America and Europe, many students are expected to work an average of two hours outside class for each hour of class time. It is almost impossible to assign homework without placing a heavy burden on students. As Shafer and Freedman note in their analysis of journalism education in Uzbekistan, "[I]nstruction generally follows the top-down model that most of the faculty had been educated under. Tests usually ask for facts and statistics, not analysis. Students are not assigned research papers or presentations"<sup>6</sup>. Assessment is based on what is covered in class, not on other course resources. Although some teachers administer written exams, many prefer the устный экзамен, the oral examination given at the end of the semester. Teachers are in class as many hours as the students; even if the students wrote articles or papers, they would not have time to grade them.

In 2008, Nemecek et al. surveyed 85 journalism educators in Kazakhstan. More than half said they planned to leave teaching because of inadequate salaries. Only a few reported that they kept up on methods of research and scholarship. However, they "registered strong support for journalism education," saying that journalists should be educated at a journalism school. Most said they taught the difference between news and opinion, and about journalists' rights and ethics. On curriculum, "they supported teaching journalism skills in a converging media environment, requiring student internships and updating the curriculum to include new media. Yet they strongly agreed or agreed teaching national history and culture should be required, and students should be trained to report the country's accomplishments"<sup>7</sup>.

Kazakhstan has made a technical conversion to the ECTS system required by the Bologna Process and has ambitions "to make Kazakhstani degrees recognizable in the world"<sup>8</sup>. What it has not done – and cannot do, unless it reforms the curriculum, group system and classroom hours requirement – is to measure education not by time spent in class,





but by competencies. Under the Bologna Process, a series of general competencies for undergraduate education has been developed. Despite claims by successive education ministers that Kazakhstan has adopted “a competence based model”<sup>9</sup>, learning continues to be measured by hours in class, lectures delivered and rote repetition of material. Bologna’s general competencies are supplemented by disciplinary competencies – the knowledge, skills and values that students are expected to achieve by the time they graduate. This is accomplished through the so-called “tuning process”, in which competencies for a discipline are specified. Journalism has not yet gone through the tuning process. However, there are several models that could be followed. In June 2006, the European Journalism Training Association (EJTA), meeting in Estonia, issued the Tartu Declaration. It describes the role, rights and social responsibilities of journalists, then lists 10 basic competencies. On graduation, students should be able to:

- 1) reflect on the societal role of and developments within journalism;
- 2) find relevant issues and angles, given the public and production aims of a certain medium or different media;
- 3) organize and plan journalistic work;
- 4) gather information swiftly, using customary newsgathering techniques and methods of research;
- 5) select the essential information;
- 6) structure information in a journalistic manner;
- 7) present information in appropriate language and an effective journalistic form;
- 8) evaluate and account for journalistic work;
- 9) cooperate in a team or an editorial setting;
- 10) Work in a professional media organization or as a freelancer<sup>10</sup>.

In June 2007, over 400 delegates from 45 countries met in Singapore for the first World Journalism Education Congress. They reached consensus on four essential elements of journalism education<sup>11</sup>:

1. Provide a balance of theory and practice. Delegates complained that too many universities focused on theory, while others focused only on skills without examining the history, ethics or societal role of journalism.
2. Emphasize the core skills of reading, reporting and writing.
3. Give students grounding in additional disciplines such as law, economics, politics and science.
4. Give students experience through classroom labs and internships<sup>12</sup>.

Journalism education in Kazakhstan is still a long way away from meeting international standards. The Soviet literary tradition, strict ministry requirements for academic qualifications, a lack of teachers with practical experience, a mandated national curriculum, the group system, a heavy class schedule that limits outside study, and a lack of competency-based learning outcomes prevent universities from providing students with the knowledge

and skills they need to work in the media industry. A resolution from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Central Asia media conference on journalism education, held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in October 2009, urged journalism schools to give “a high place in the curricula” to investigative journalism to promote “democracy and as a tool in combating corruption”<sup>13</sup>. It is a noble goal, but under present conditions, unrealistic.

## TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCES

Even if students had time outside class to read, there’s often not much useful material in the university library. Although larger institutions have invested in research libraries and online databases, most regional universities lack recent books, and have few (if any) journal subscriptions. The situation is puzzling, given the traditional emphasis on print materials for education and research. In its guidelines for faculty research and “high-impact factor” academic journals, the ministry refuses to count publications in peer-reviewed, electronic journals as faculty research output. Everything has to be in print.

Internet and database access has been improving, although the number of work stations at many universities is still insufficient, and lab hours are often limited. The number of copyright-free, downloadable Russian-language sources on media and journalism has also been steadily increasing, and several online libraries offer a wide range of resources, including materials on economic, business, environmental and science reporting. Many of these are listed in the recommended and week-by-week readings for courses in the Russian-language version of the *UNESCO Model Curricula on Journalism Education*. For students in Kazakh-language journalism tracks, fewer print and online resources are available. A project, supervised by KazNU and funded by UNESCO, began in 2011 to identify and collect available online Kazakh-language sources; a team of Kazakh-language journalism educators and journalists is also developing new materials. Some Kazakh-language class assignments, developed in workshops by the Kazakhstan Newspaper Publishers Association, are available on the *UNESCO Model Curricula* website<sup>14</sup>.

## THE IMPACT OF MEDIA CONVERGENCE

As already noted, Kazakhstan’s journalism curriculum is organized into six traditional sequences. This is mirrored by the division of the faculty or факультет into several departments, each with a заведующий (department head). The assumption is that students will follow different career paths, and therefore need different, medium-specific skill sets. The rapid economic and technological convergence of media has challenged this assumption. In Kazakhstan, as in other countries, many media compa-



nies own several outlets, including print, broadcast and online. Employers want college graduates with the skills to work in all media – to shoot pictures and video, and adapt a print or TV story for online media. Converged news demands a converged journalism curriculum in which students gain information-gathering, reporting, interviewing and writing skills, and are able to work across platforms. Although several universities claim to offer sequences in Internet journalism, lack of faculty expertise and inadequate technical facilities mean that few students are ready to work in online journalism. A few trainers are teaching students and young journalists how to build websites, do blogs and use social networking, but most of this instruction is in training sessions sponsored by donors, outside academic settings. The 2009 OSCE declaration urged governments to help pay for IT equipment and Internet access at universities, and called on universities to incorporate “Internet and online tools, including Web 2.0, Twitter, YouTube, social networking sites and other user-generated resources into the curriculum”<sup>15</sup>.

#### **INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS AND THE ROLE OF DONORS**

It is difficult for universities to bring in working journalists to teach practical courses because of academic credentials and poor pay. Media organizations in Kazakhstan complain about theory-dominated curricula and claim that journalism graduates lack basic skills in reporting, writing and media production. However, few media organizations have invested resources in universities or training for their staff – either in-house or through professional media associations. At an August 2010 forum on journalism education at Barnaul near Pavlodar, participants called for reform of the curriculum and for better collaboration with the media industry. In a declaration forwarded to the Ministries of Education and Science and Communication and Information, universities, mass media and international organizations, they stated that journalism “should become a service component of the media industry, able to respond to its real needs”. They called for “an open discussion about state education standards”, the right of universities to design their own curricula, and improved cooperation between universities, employers and media NGOs. Specifically, they called on the Ministry of Education to base curriculum on the *UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education*, and the Ministry of Communication and Information to use indicators adopted by UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication to monitor and assess media development. They asked universities to include media practitioners and NGO representatives on advisory councils, and to make pay scales for part-time teaching high enough to attract professionals. Major reforms were needed to address “the colossal gap between theory and prac-

tice, journalism education and the realities of the media industry”<sup>16</sup>.

Journalism students gain some experience through practical work and internships in media, mostly during the summer break. After local media complained in a meeting with the rector of Kostanai State University that “for many students, work practice is becoming a mere formality, recorded in the reports”, the university started a program where students spend one day a week at a local media outlet; the model shows promise because it gives the students ongoing experience while still adhering to ministry requirements<sup>17</sup>. However, the criteria for placement, the work assigned to students and the level of faculty supervision and involvement vary widely. Few faculty have time to improve their own professional skills with summer internships because they are under pressure to do research and often need income from summer classes.

Some practical training needs in Kazakhstan are met by media NGOs, such as MediaNet in Almaty and Decenta in Pavlodar, and by workshops funded by donors including UNESCO, UNDP, the Soros Foundation, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), Deutsche Welle and others. Most are intended for working journalists, but in recent times some university teachers have had access to training. The most ambitious and long-term project is by Decenta, which in 2008 received a 250,000 euro grant from the European Commission to expand the range of courses taught to journalism students. Decenta, working with MediaNet and eight media NGOs, designed courses on topics that are not in the national curriculum, including reporting on business, investigative reporting, journalists’ rights protection and new media, and planned to pilot them at eight universities. For now, they can only be elective courses because they have not been adopted into the national curriculum.

#### **LACK OF INDEPENDENT STUDENT MEDIA**

Given the lack of professional media experience of teachers, student media could offer a potential (if partial) solution to help students build their skill sets. However, there is no tradition of independent student media in Central Asia. Journalism departments publish occasional magazines, newspapers and newsletters (almost always print versions) with stories by students, but there is almost no serious news reporting. Some of these are student-oriented, featuring profiles of student leaders, music and movie reviews and interviews with talent contest winners; others are simply PR vehicles for the university or department. The publications are financially supported by the university and editorially supervised by faculty members. In the hierarchical management system (at both state and private institutions) they are careful to avoid any stories that would not reflect well on the institution. Students lack both editorial freedom and financial control. Student media do not



give them the opportunity to explore political, social and economic issues—and certainly not institutional policies and budgets—or gain experience in managing a media business. While KIMEP was wracked by a budget crisis, the revocation of its license by the ministry (later overturned by a court ruling) and a series of financial and sexual harassment scandals, the *KIMEP Times* was cheerily delivering upbeat messages from the university president and interviewing the winner of the Miss KIMEP competition about her plans for a modeling career. To be fair, journalism students had no part in the sorry venture; in 2010, editorial management of the *KIMEP Times* was transferred from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication to the College of Business.

### Примечания

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An ability to think critically, incorporating skills in analysis, synthesis and evaluation of unfamiliar research materials, and a basic understanding of evidence and research methods;  
An ability to write clearly and coherently, using narrative, descriptive, and analytical methods;  
A knowledge of national and international political, economic, cultural, religious, and social institutions;  
A knowledge of current affairs and issues, and a general knowledge of history and geography.
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- <sup>16</sup> *Кунгурова О.* Роль медийных НПО в решении проблем журналистского образования // Байтурсыновские чтения : материалы Междунар. науч.-практ. конф. Костанай, 2011. С. 73.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.