

CIHE
Perspectives
No. 5

The Challenges of Academic Integrity in Higher Education: Current Trends and Prospects

Elena Denisova-Schmidt



The Boston College Center *for*
International Higher Education

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This series of studies focuses on aspects of research and analysis undertaken at the Boston College Center for International Higher Education.

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FOREWORD

It is my great pleasure to present this fifth issue of *CIHE Perspectives*, a series of studies focusing on aspects of research and analysis undertaken and coordinated by the Boston College Center for International Higher Education (CIHE).

This issue is written by CIHE Research Fellow Elena Denisova-Schmidt, lecturer at the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland), who is taking care of the Higher Education Corruption Monitor (HECM) of CIHE. This *Perspectives* addresses the issue of ethics and values in international higher education, an increasing concern in an area of massification, privatization and globalization in higher education.

The purpose of *CIHE Perspectives* is to serve as a resource for policy and research, but also to stimulate debate and interaction on key issues in international and comparative higher education, and the challenge of academic integrity is one of those key issues. I want to thank Elena Denisova-Schmidt for this contribution, and Lisa Unangst, doctoral student and graduate assistant at CIHE, as well as Helene Bernot Ullero and Laura Rumbley for their careful editing of this issue of *CIHE Perspectives*.

The purpose of *CIHE Perspectives* is to serve as a resource for policy and research, but also to stimulate debate and interaction on key issues in international and comparative higher education.

Hans de Wit

*Director, Boston College Center for
International Higher Education*

June 2017

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THE CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: CURRENT TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Corruption is often defined as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (Transparency International). In higher education, corruption is also “the lack of academic integrity.” Corruption might take place in many countries at different kinds of universities: public and private, mass and elite. Corruption might be monetary or nonmonetary; it might take various forms, ranging from bribes and the misuse of university funds to fake degrees, plagiarism, ghostwriting, and cheating. Corruption might take place with or without a student’s direct involvement.

(Elena Denisova-Schmidt, HECM <http://www.bc.edu/research/cihe/resources/hecm.html>)

1. Introduction

In many countries, more than 30 percent of the 18–21 age cohort enroll in higher education (Trow 1973/2011). The massification of higher education is a revolutionary change that can be compared to the establishment of the modern research university in the early nineteenth century by Wilhelm von Humboldt (Altbach, 2016). On the one hand, the massification of higher education is a necessary and important part of the global knowledge economy; on the other hand, it has a significant impact on its quality. In some places, quality among faculty and students is decreasing dramatically. Some institutions have failed under global pressure and are becoming more prone to a lack of academic integrity (Heyneman, 2009, 2013). Corruption often seems to be an effective instrument for managing the entire higher education system in several countries—both for keeping the system running and for gaining domestic and international recognition (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016d).

Transparency International (TI), a well-known

and highly respected NGO with headquarters in Berlin (Germany), provides research and data on corruption worldwide. TI defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain.”¹ This is a common definition, widely used among scholars, policy makers, and practitioners. TI refers to corruption through bribery, collusion, conflict of interest, cronyism and nepotism, fraud, gifts and hospitality, lobbying, money laundering, revolving doors, vote rigging, and other forms (Corruption in the U.K., 2011). Given that corruption is an umbrella term covering many different activities, it can sometimes be an unwieldy term, even for experts in the field. Not all forms of corruption are illegal per se, but each of them might be questionable from an ethical perspective.

1.1 Corruption in the Higher Education Sector

Imagine a student who plagiarizes his or her paper. He or she copies and pastes from other sources without acknowledging them and submits the results as his or her own work. He or she receives a grade for it. This is fraud, one form of corruption. A faculty member who consciously ignores the plagiarism in such a paper misuses an entrusted power for private gain in the broader meaning of this expression. It does not necessarily mean that the faculty member is bribed to do this by a student or by someone else. Other reasons explain explicitly ignoring plagiarism in a student’s paper, such as lack of time and/or will to investigate the plagiarism, or lack of importance placed on teaching as a personal career path. Both represent forms of “private gain.” Table 1 provides additional examples:

¹ http://www.transparency.org/whoweare/organisation/faqs_on_corruption

TABLE 1. Selected Examples of Corruption in Higher Education

Terms	TI Definitions ²	Examples
Bribery	The offering, promising, giving, accepting, or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action that is illegal, unethical, or a breach of trust. Inducements can take the form of gifts, loans, fees, rewards, or other advantages (taxes, services, donations, etc.).	A student bribes a professor to change a grade in his/her favor; A faculty member bribes a ghostwriter for his/her own publication; University administration demands bribes from service suppliers.
Collusion	A secret agreement between parties, in the public and/or private sector, to conspire to commit actions aimed to deceive or commit fraud with the objective of illicit financial gain. The parties involved often are referred to as “cartels.”	Faculty members ignore or pretend to ignore students’ academic misbehavior; Faculty members are involved in “citation” cartels: citing each other’s works/journals without necessity; Administration chooses the winner in an open tender, based on a preagreement.
Conflict of interest	A situation where an individual, or the entity for which this person works, whether a government, business, media outlet, or civil society organization, is confronted with choosing between the duties and demands of their position and their own private interests.	A high-ranking official responsible for accreditation is placed in charge of a university, for which he and/or she recently worked; A professor grades his/her nephew/niece or supervises a thesis written by his/her fiancé; A university manager responsible for catering buys food from his/her relatives only.
Favoritism	<p>Patronage: form of favoritism in which a person is selected, regardless of qualifications or entitlement, for a job or government benefit because of political affiliations or connections</p> <p>Nepotism: form of favoritism based on acquaintances and familiar relationships whereby someone in an official position exploits his or her power and authority to provide a job or favor to a family member or friend, even though he or she may not be qualified or deserving.</p>	A student is admitted, or a faculty member is hired/promoted, based only on his/her personal connections and/or family relations; academic achievement and other relevant competencies are not considered.

²The Anti-Corruption Plain Language Guide. TI. 2009. http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/the_anti_corruption_plain_language_guide

(continued) TABLE 1. Selected Examples of Corruption in Higher Education

Terms	TI Definitions	Examples
Fraud	To cheat: the act of intentionally deceiving someone in order to gain an unfair or illegal advantage (financial, political, or otherwise).	A student cheats in his/her written assignment, or a faculty member plagiarizes in his/her paper; A staff member falsifies an admissions application; A significant amount of a research grant goes to other purposes than what is indicated in the research proposal; Universities expect a contribution from students receiving financial support
Lobbying	Any activity carried out to influence a government or institution's policies and decisions in favor of a specific cause or outcome.	Some industries support research projects expecting positive and/or promising outcomes for their products/services.
Revolving doors	An individual who moves back and forth between public office and private companies, exploiting his/her period of government service for the benefit of the companies he/she used to regulate.	An influential government official opts for employment as a university rector.

Some scholars working on corruption in higher education tend to differentiate between “petty” corruption and “grand” corruption. Other scholars consider cheating and plagiarism to be distinct from corruption. Still other scholars apply the term corruption only to monetary forms and call other specific forms of malpractice and unethical behavior “lack of academic integrity” (see recent discussions in Golunov, 2014, Chapman and Linder, 2016, Denisova-Schmidt, 2016a, Denisova-Schmidt, et al. 2016a) (see Box 1).

The current article does not aim to suggest the best solution in terms of a definition. It combines all approaches and refers to corruption as both “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain” (TI) and “lack of academic integrity.”

When analyzing corruption in the educational sector today, scholars work with several definitions. Amundsen (2000) emphasizes the different forms of corruption and focuses on embezzlement, bribery, fraud, extortion, and favoritism. Tanaka (2001) highlights some areas of corrupt behavior: procurement, administration, and classroom. Hallak and Poisson (2007) also work with areas of corrupt behavior, but provide a much broader definition. They indicate “finance,” “allocation of specific allowances,” “construction, maintenance and school repairs,” “distribution of equipment, furniture and materials,” “writing of textbooks,” “teacher appointment, management and training,” “teacher behavior,” “information systems,” “examinations and diplomas, access

Box 1: Academic Corruption and Its Typology

to universities” and “institutional accreditation” as areas of possible corrupt behavior. Chapman (2002) stresses several forms of malpractice at different levels: ministries, regional/district and international agencies, as well as in the classroom. Rumyantseva (2005) distinguishes between corruption with and corruption without student involvement. Both forms of corruption influence the students’ culture and attitudes; the first one does it directly, and the second indirectly. Osipian (2009) defines corruption in education as a system of all informal relations aimed to regulate “unsanctioned access to material and nonmaterial assets.”

Source: Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016a

1.2 Was Corruption Always Considered Corruption?

Corruption in (higher) education is not a new phenomenon (Osipian 2007, Heyneman, 2009, 2013). But the definition of the term “corruption” has evolved significantly over time. Higher education was not free of charge in the Middle Ages; students at European universities could be charged for admission and graduation, for the issuing of study documents and occasionally for university ceremonies, in addition to other costs of learning. At some universities, students had to pay their professors lecture fees—a practice that would be considered questionable today. After a 1392 decree by King Juan I, law students in Lisbon–Coimbra, for example, paid up to forty pounds. The price varied depending on the students’ status: ten pounds for “poor” students, 20 pounds for “middle-class students” and 40 for “rich” students (Verger, 1992). Students paid salaries to university officials, which “cost the students little, but examination and graduation fees, and gifts

in kind to masters and beadles, were a burden to candidates” (Gieysztor, 1992, 133). This was most likely one of the main reasons for the limited number of masters and doctors at that time: many potential candidates simply could not afford it. There were “instances of the more adroit or the richer managing, by fraud, corruption, or a special dispensation, to acquire degrees fairly easily” (Verger, 1992, 147). There is, however, no concrete evidence of a significant amount of corrupt activity among students. In fact, Chinese archival material demonstrates the opposite, showing strong reproaches for officials accepting bribes and/or supporting various malpractices (see Box 2).

While it may not have amounted to corruption, many historians argue that students from the upper class often received preferential treatment at European universities (cf. Ridder-Symoens, 1992), a practice that would be considered unethical today. It was not only the students from the upper class who were privileged: higher education used to be the domain of one gender only, with half of the population

Box 2: Cheating and Bribery during the Ch’ing Dynasty (the last Chinese dynasty) [1644–1912]

Su Shun was effective and ruthless. He concentrated on a single, highly visible case of corruption involving the imperial civil service examination. The examination was given annually and touched the lives of thousands throughout the country. In his report to Emperor Hsien Feng, Su Shun charged five high-ranking judges with accepting bribes. In his report, he also presented ninety-

one cases in which test scores had been mishandled, and challenged the past year’s first-place winner. To restore the reputation of the civil service, the Emperor ordered the beheading of all five judges and the first-place winner. People cheered the action, and Su Shun became a household name.

Source: Min, 2004, p. 150

Box 3: Cheating at Universities: Global Trends

Are more students cheating now than before? Not according to a recent study by Curtis and Vardanega (2016), who actually observe a downward trend among students at Australian universities in 2004–2014 with some forms of plagiarism that can be detected by specialized software. At least some forms of plagiarism can now be detected. Scholars have raised the alarm, however, indicating that about 70 percent of students do not consider all types of plagiarism to be wrong (see Table 2). In another study, Curtis et al. (2013) found that only 25

percent of first-year students at Murdoch University recognize all practices considered to be plagiarism; this percentage increased to 50 after the students completed courses on academic integrity. Curtis and Vardanega (2013) argue that text-matching software and educational interventions help protect standards of academic integrity and are among the most successful mechanisms for positive change.

Source: Denisova-Schmidt, 2016d

excluded from accessing higher studies by the other half, protecting their privileges—also an issue of failed ethics. Swiss universities were among the first to open their doors to women: Susan Dimock was the first American woman to receive a doctorate in medicine from the University of Zurich in 1871, after being rejected by Harvard Medical School.

2. Types of Academic Corruption

2.1 Students

Academic misconduct with the students' involvement includes various types of cheating, such as plagiarism and attending classes or sitting for examinations on another student's behalf (impersonation), as well as services, gifts, informal agreements, or payments in exchange for admission, grades, advance copies of examinations and tests, preferential treatment, graduation, and sham degrees (Denisova-Schmidt, 2016a).

Recently, the *Wall Street Journal* raised the alarm: international students enrolled at US universities typically cheat more frequently than their domestic counterparts. According to the newspaper, US public universities recorded about five cases of alleged cheating for every 100 foreign students—and only one for every 100 domestic students—in the 2014–2015 academic year (Jordan and Belkin, 2016). Chinese students were the most frequent violators. The *Wall Street Journal* suggests several reasons for this, ranging from insufficient English language skills to the pressure to pass an examination and/or to receive only excellent grades, to the belief that cheating at universities in the United States is as widespread as cheating at universities in China. One of the students interviewed for the article confirmed that “in China, it’s OK to cheat as long as you’re not caught” (Jordan and Belkin, 2016). One additional reason might be that the academic freedom widely enjoyed in the United States, which enables students to choose their own courses, prioritize their assessments, balance between university and social obligations, and think and analyze, is relatively new to China, where students are traditionally expected to follow strict guidelines given by the institution, and learn by rote and reproduction. Cheating might

start with application essays: “The twentieth century was the century of physics and the twenty-first century will be the century of science” was a sentence Purdue University Professor David Sanders found in applications from many Chinese students (Jordan and Belkin, 2016). The Chinese academic culture indeed encourages collective support in examinations and the preparation of various assignments. This support could be a simple “copy and paste” from the Internet, from a neighbor, or from other sources—something that Chinese children start learning unconsciously when they learn the alphabet, as it is only in this way, by copying and pasting, that one can get accustomed to using pictographs.

It should be mentioned, however, that almost all of the above cases involved types of academic misconduct that could be easily identified as such. What about other variations, such as ghostwriting, especially through services offered by professional individuals or agencies? Geoffrey Alderman, from the University of Buckingham (United Kingdom), refers to it as “type-2 cheating.” In one interview for *The Guardian*³ he also complains about cheating among overseas students at universities in the United Kingdom. Indeed, *The Times of London* revealed that almost 50,000 university students were caught cheating in the period between 2012 and 2015. International students, especially from non-EU countries, were “champions” among cheating students, according to the newspaper (Mostrous and Kenber, 2016). Are international students really more likely to cheat than their domestic counterparts? Or are they just more often caught because they cannot afford “type-2 cheating”? Domestic students may also cheat, but choose to do it in a more refined way (see Box 3).

Problematic behavior of domestic students at US public universities have been identified in other areas. For example, dishonesty involving student-athletes can include enrollment in sham classes and/or classes with inappropriate levels of teaching and assignments, various types of plagiarism, and unauthorized grade changes in favor of those students. Mary Willingham, a learning specialist from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

(UNC), was one of those who spoke out publicly about this situation: the majority of student-athletes were not ready for UNC-level courses. In her interview with CNN, Willingham recalled one student who asked her to teach him to read; it was meaningful to him to be able to read his news clippings. According to Willingham, of 183 UNC football and basketball players she analyzed from 2004 to 2012,

60 percent read between fourth and eighth-grade levels, while 8 percent to 10 percent read below the third-grade level (Ganim, 2014) (for more information about this case, see the recent discussions in Ridpath et. al. 2015, Ridpath, 2016, Kane, 2016).

TABLE 2: TYPES OF PLAGIARISM

1. SHAM PARAPHRASING	Material copied verbatim from text and source acknowledged in-line but represented as paraphrased
2. ILLICIT PARAPHRASING	Material paraphrased from text without in-line acknowledgement of source
2. ILLICIT PARAPHRASING	Material copied from another student's assignment with the knowledge of the other student
4. VERBATIM COPYING	Material copied verbatim from text without in-line acknowledgement of the source
5. RECYCLING	Same assignment submitted more than once for different courses
6. GHOSTWRITING	Assignment written by third party and represented by student as own work
7. PURLOINING	Assignment copied from another student's assignment or other person's paper without that person's knowledge

Source: Walker, J. (1998). *Student plagiarism in universities: what are we doing about it? Higher Education Research & Development*, 17(1), 89–106, p.103.

2.2 University Administration

In some cases, university staff and administration violate academic integrity by ignoring the students' misbehavior, selling admissions, manipulating accreditation, or creating degree mills (Denisova-Schmidt et al. 2016a).

Recent Reuters investigations conducted by Steve Stecklow, Renee Dudley, James Pomfret, and Alexandra Harney demonstrate that some US public universities engage in questionable practices in their recruitment of international students, particularly Chinese candidates. In October 2016, Reuters published a story about Dipont, one of the leading educational providers in China. At first glance, Dipont seems to be a company helping Chinese students to understand the application process at US universities. Admittedly, this service is needed; many stu-

dents—especially young people from small cities and villages—are disoriented and unprepared, even on the domestic educational market. Some of them could be enrolled at a phony college without even noticing. The fake universities operating in China—which are not uncommon—often choose names that sound almost identical to well-known existing Chinese universities, like the Beijing Institute of Civil Engineering and Architecture (a fake university), which presents itself by using pictures of the 80-year-old Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture (a real university), or the Beijing Tongji University of Medical Science, a bogus college that offers degrees for only 300 yuan (about US\$45) and looks very similar to the Tongji Medical College, one of the best medical schools in China.

Apparently, the services that Dipont offers include more than just guiding Chinese students through the US higher education system. Dipont consultants purportedly write application essays for their clients, make changes in transcripts in their favor, forge recommendation letters, and sometimes more, in order to enroll their clients into prestigious US colleges. Moreover, Dipont offers annual personal meetings with admissions officers from leading US universities. “Just once a year, current admissions officers become your exclusive consultants,” Reuters cited from Dipont’s ad. The journalists found out that Dipont offers perks to its invited guests: either business-class airfare, or an economy-class ticket and an honorarium of US\$4,500. Many admissions officers accepted the offer, arguing that, since their universities were already interested in recruiting international students, they considered the invitation by Dipont to be appropriate, and/or that their universities lacked sufficient resources for travelling abroad for such purposes (Stecklow, et al. 2016).

In another disturbing example, *The New York Times* in 2015 discovered a company named Aexact offering fake online degrees all around the world. The company, headquartered in the Pakistani city of Karachi, made tens of millions of dollars in estimated revenue each year. According to the newspaper, Aexact had websites for at least 370 fake high schools, universities, and accreditation bodies on its rolls (Walsh, 2015, 2016). Some customers understood that they were buying degrees, but many others were misled: “the agents manipulate those seeking a real education, pushing them to enroll for coursework that never materializes, or assuring them that their life experiences are enough to earn them a diploma” (Walsh, 2015). For-profit colleges and universities are another significant problem in many countries, including in the United States (Angulo, 2016). The business model of these schools is to make a profit by enrolling students and keeping them enrolled regardless of how poorly they perform. Admissions officers even have a quota, or a (high) number of students they have to admit each term, and will often use salesman-like tactics to reach these numbers. According to Angulo (2016), for-profit institutions may spend up to 500 percent more on marketing

activities than on instruction. For example, Apollo Education, the University of Phoenix’s parent company, spent almost one billion dollars on the recruitment of students. Angulo (2016) argues that the compensation given to a CEO running a for-profit institution is often significantly higher than that of nonprofit college and university presidents. In 2009, for example, that amounted to US\$42 million (Apollo) vs. US\$800,000 (Harvard University) or US\$1,627,649 (Yale University). Students at for-profit universities are often poorly prepared for the job market and, after paying tens of thousands of dollars (usually in loans), they receive a meaningless degree and cannot get a job. One such example is the former Trump University, which was run by current US President Donald Trump and closed in late 2016.

2.3 Faculty Members

In addition to their ignorance of students’ academic misbehavior, some faculty members might be involved in various other non-ethical activities such as publishing papers in “sham” journals, falsifying data, bribing coauthors, paying ghostwriters, or even stealing papers submitted to them for review and publishing them as their own. (Denisova-Schmidt and de Wit, 2017)

While researching a book on academic integrity at Russian universities, Sergei Golunov found 22 articles on the topic from elibrary.ru, a Russian scholarly database, and ironically identified “plagiarism in four of these papers without making any special searching efforts” (Golunov, 2014, p. 69). If special plagiarism software programs were applied, the result would possibly be worse. Why does this happen? Scholars all over the world are under pressure to publish: it is essential for promotion, for contract renewal, or even as a condition for a salary. The quantity of published papers, their citations and dissemination, and the impact factors of journals often prevail over the quality of the research, or the research interests that the scholars might have. Increased emphasis on journal publications undervalues other forms of publications such as monographs and textbooks.

The current situation creates a fruitful ground for establishing “citation cartels” (Franck, 1999)—excessive boosting of the citations of some authors and/or journals without obvious need and for mutual benefit. Phil Davis (2012), for example, was one of the first to report such a cartel. Davis was surprised that the impact factor of *Cell Transplantation*, a medical journal, had grown so quickly, from 3.482 in 2006 to 6.204 in 2010. How was this possible? One of the reasons for this rise, according to Davis (2012), was a review article by Eve et al. (2010) published in the *Medical Science Monitor*. The article referred to 490 publications, 445 of which were published in *Cell Transplantation* between 2008 and 2009—the time period relevant for impact factor estimated in 2010; of the remaining 45 citations, 44 referred to publications that appeared in the *Medical Science Monitor* between 2008 and 2009. The article was prepared by four scholars; it is interesting that three of them were the members of the editorial board of *Cell Transplantation*. Moreover, one additional review article by Park et al. (2010), which appeared in *The Scientific World Journal* in 2010, was again authorized by the members of the editorial board of *Cell Transplantation*. This review article cited 124 papers, 96 of which were published in *Cell Transplantation*, and of the 28 remaining citations, 26 were from *The Scientific World Journal* from the period between 2008 and 2009.

Without these two publications, the impact factor of *Cell Transplantation* would be only 4.082. Utilizing review articles in this manner seems to be an efficient strategy for increasing the productivity of a journal and is not so easy to unmask as collusion; such articles are not necessarily sent out for an external review, as they may be labeled as “editorial material” (Davis, 2012). At present, Thomson Reuters does not employ tools to identify citation cartels, but the agency is working on it and each year suspends several journals from receiving impact factors for unethical behavior. In 2014, 38 journals were omitted from the Journal Citation Report (JCR): 23 for a high level of self-citation, and 15 for citation stacking or, in other words, “citation cartel” (Davis, 2014).

Another questionable tool for increasing impact factor is “coercive citing”: potential authors may be asked by editors to add citations from their journals.

The practice is ambivalent, in the sense that potential authors might unintentionally overlook previous relevant articles, which editors feel obliged to point out; on the other hand, some editors may push too hard to include citations, which may be considered inappropriate behavior. Wilhite and Fong (2012) conducted a study to examine this issue. The research is based on an analysis of a survey of 6,672 respondents conducted online among scholars and data from 832 journals in the fields of economics, sociology, psychology, and several business disciplines (marketing, management, finance, information systems, and accounting). The results suggest that coercion exists and is more common in business disciplines than in economics, sociology, or psychology. Further, the study suggests that highly ranked journals are more likely to coerce. The design of the study does not fully address this causality, however.

Lastly, peer-review rings, or imitated blind reviews, or situations in which potential authors review their own works under fake names, can sometimes be broadly defined as a sort of positive review (or quid pro quo among colleagues) (Barbash, 2014, Ferguson et al. 2014), which represents another form of unethical behavior. Ivan Oransky, cofounder of *Retraction Watch*, argues: “scientific publishing is becoming more unpredictable, and yes, more dangerous... All of that makes it difficult for researchers to know exactly what they can trust⁴”

3. The Geography of Academic Corruption

Academic corruption takes place in many countries and at various types of universities. The scope, legitimation, and consequences of this corruption may be different, however, as demonstrated by the example of plagiarism (see Box 4).

Box 4: Plagiarism and Its Consequences for Current and Future Leaders

Famous politicians have been implicated in plagiarism scandals. Following the public scandal revolving around plagiarism identified in their dissertations, both German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg and German Education Minister Annette Schavan resigned (in 2011 and 2013, respectively). Evidence of plagiarism was also found in the dissertation of Ursula von der Leyen, the current German defense minister. Igor Danchenko and Clifford Gaddy, scholars at the Brookings Institute, found extensive plagiarism in the dissertation of Russian President Vladimir Putin, titled “Strategic

Planning of the Reproduction of the Mineral Resource Base of a Region under Conditions of the Formation of Market Relations (St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast),” which he successfully defended at the St. Petersburg Mining Institute in 1997. Former US Vice-President Joe Biden was thwarted by a plagiarism scandal that dated back to his law school years and that ended his 1988 presidential campaign.

Source: Denisova-Schmidt, 2016c.

Indeed, in 2016, CNN created a list of the most famous plagiarism scandals involving politicians (Fawzy, 2016). In addition to those mentioned in Box 4, the list included Hungarian President Pal Schmitt in 2012, Senator Rand Paul in 2013, and Senator John Walsh in 2014.

In 2016, Melania Trump, the current US first lady, partly plagiarized a convention speech that had been delivered by Michelle Obama, Barack Obama’s wife, in 2008. This case raised several discussions: some have argued that the incident demonstrates how much these political figures have in common (Carson, 2016). Others—especially academics—thanked Ms. Trump for providing a brilliant example of what plagiarism is, making it easier for them to talk with their students about it (Evans, 2016). Some have even argued that the plagiarism was caused (in part) by Ms. Trump’s educational background: she is originally from Slovenia, in Eastern Europe, where plagiarism seemingly is part of the academic culture. Students in Eastern Europe are often expected to memorize a substantial amount of material without reflecting on it (Nalepa, 2016). This last point in particular was criticized by some Eastern European scholars in an open letter published by Balkanist (Ceric, Grujic, Tumbas, and Videkanic, 2016).

Are some countries indeed more corrupt than others, or are they just more studied and therefore appear more frequently in controversial study outcomes? Conducting empirical studies on corruption is not an easy task. It is especially challenging to analyze corruption in the academic field. Researchers undertaking these studies are often affiliated with higher education institutions, and in some cases may even be offenders themselves—reflecting on their personal experience—or whistleblowers inadvertently damaging the reputation of their employers.

Although the next section focuses specifically on Russia, I am choosing Russia here as an example of a country where corruption is pervasive and as a possible case study for other national contexts with a high degree of public provision. As an independent state (previously the largest member state of the Soviet Union), the current Russian Federation has been considered one of the leading educational systems in the world—particularly during the Cold War, when it was held up in opposition to the United States (Altbach, 2016). After a turbulent period, Russia is now a fast-growing academic superpower. It represents one of the largest higher education systems in the world and probably the only one in which the massification of higher education has become universalized: Russian academic institutions

⁴Ivan Oransky on publication practices and academic fraud. McGill Reporter, 27 January 2017. <http://publications.mcgill.ca/reporter/2017/01/ivan-oransky-on-academic-fraud/>

host almost 80 percent of the 18–21 age cohort, with an insignificant number of dropouts. Universalization, together with the high level of endemic corruption in the country and heightened competition between educational institutions at various levels, has led to the creation of improper dependencies among all actors involved in the higher education sector. As the higher education systems of other countries approach such high enrollment numbers, the prevalence of corruption may appear similar. Hence, the Russian case is instructive. Moreover, Russia is very well researched: almost all areas experiencing challenges to academic integrity with explicit student involvement are addressed in the current research on Russia.

Scholars usually differentiate between nonmonetary and monetary corruption—that is, situations in which faculty members or university administration explicitly demand or expect gifts, services or favors, and/or monetary compensation in exchange for various forms of preferential treatment (e.g., watering down requirements, positive grading without

academic achievement, etc.) In fact, when describing the current situation, many scholars studying Russian corruption refer to “academic collusion”: faculty members and administration act as though they do not notice any unethical activities among the students (Titaev, 2012). Indeed, when faculty members and administrators are involved in various types of academic dishonesty, students are hard pressed to engage in honest behavior (e.g. Golunov, 2014). Figure 1 identifies four main categories of academic corruption with explicit student involvement, which are listed below in order of perceived severity, based on current research (e.g. Galitskii & Levin 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, Leontyeva 2004, Titaev 2005, Fedorenko 2005, Sivak 2006, Leontyeva 2006, Shmakov 2007, Latova & Latov 2007, Galitskii & Levin 2008a, 2008b, Leontyeva 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011, 2013, Oleinik 2012, Osipian 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e, Denisova-Schmidt & Leontyeva 2013, Kalinyllin 2006, Osipian 2012a).

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY	Students cheat; administration and/or faculty members do not notice.
ACADEMIC COLLUSION	Students cheat; administration and/or faculty members pretend not to notice.
NONMONETARY CORRUPTION	Administration and/or faculty members consciously accept gifts, services or favours in exchange for preferential treatment.
MONETARY CORRUPTION	Administration and/or faculty members consciously accept money in exchange for preferential treatment.

Figure 1: Types of Academic Corruption (adapted from Denisova-Schmidt, 2013, 2016).

4. A Closer Look at Corruption in Russian Higher Education

4.1 Introduction

The Russian government⁶ has adopted several aggressive strategies for establishing world-class universities in the country. The results are impressive: today, Russian universities are well-situated in the QS World University Rankings and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (the Shanghai Rankings). The British *Times Higher Education (THE)* World University Rankings included 15 Russian universities on its 2015 list, while only two universities were on this list in 2014. One of the obstacles that several Russian universities still face, however, remains corruption.

Comparing freshmen and graduates in selected public universities in the Russian Far East in 2012, my colleagues and I found that graduates are significantly more aware of bribes at universities than their young colleagues—there is a gap in understanding of 52 percent. Further, our results suggest that the students' acceptance of the use of various cheating techniques increases significantly during their university studies: "using crib sheets and other unauthorized materials during examinations" increases by 12 percent; "copying off during examinations or tests" by 25 percent; "downloading term papers (or other papers) from the Internet" by 15 percent; "purchasing term papers (or other papers) from special agencies or from other students" by 12.5 percent, and "giving a professor fraudulent or misleading excuses for poor academic performance" by 11 percent (Denisova-Schmidt, Huber, and Leontyeva 2016a). A related study conducted three years later, in 2015, also shows how widespread various types of plagiarism and informal agreements have become, in exchange for grades or preferential treatment (Table 3).

Students often have an ambivalent attitude toward various forms of cheating. On the one hand, they condemn these practices; on the other hand, they rationalize their participation by pointing to classes being "unnecessary" and to the need to have a job during their university studies. Very often,

however, students are unaware they are doing anything wrong.

Alexander Trushin, a journalist working for Ogonek, recently discovered a black market for fake diplomas in Russia. According to his sources, one of the main groups of potential clients are people who have a strong field-based knowledge and are qualified to do their job, but who need to show their employers a formal degree for a promotion. There is a "code of honor" on this market, though: no fake diplomas for medical doctors and pilots are sold. The safety of the lives of other people is considered a priority (Trushin, 2015).

Why has this market developed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union? Endemic corruption in the country, increased enrollments in higher education, heightened competition between educational institutions at all levels, and the creation of improper dependencies among all actors involved are the main reasons for widespread questionable practices.

4.2 Endemic Corruption

Previous research has shown that people who have personal experience with corruption and/or who believe that everyone around them is corrupt are more predisposed to corruption in their own activities. TI has ranked Russia as one of the most corrupt countries worldwide. Other international rankings such as the Index of Economic Freedom, conducted by the Heritage Foundation, and the Worldwide Governance Indicators, organized by the World Bank, show similar findings (Table 4). Though these rankings apply various techniques and scales, they all measure corruption in a particular country on a range from "very clean" to "highly corrupt": Corruption Perception Index ranges from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean); Freedom from Corruption from 0 (very clean) to 100 (highly corrupt); and Worldwide Governance Indicators from -2.5 (highly corrupt) to +2.5 (very clean).

⁶This section first appeared in Russian Analytical Digest, 191, 2016, 5-9. This slightly revised version is published here with permission.

TABLE 3: STUDENTS ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Question: How often do you use the following practices?		
Areas	Actions	"not never" responses*
Taking examinations	Using a cheat sheet during examinations.	92.9%
	Copying someone's work during examination of tests	90.8%
Writing papers	Downloading a course paper (or other written work) from the Internet	57.9%
	Buying a course paper (or other written work) from special companies or classmates	32.2%
	Writing a paper on one's own, but copying and pasting some chapters from the Internet	92.8%
Communicating with the professor	Deceiving a professor while explaining problems associated with studies	42.5%
	Asking a professor for preferential treatment.	26.1%

* "NOT NEVER" REPRESENTS THE SUM OF THE RESPONSES "SELDOM," "SOMETIMES," "OFTEN," AND "SYSTEMATICALLY."
 SOURCE: DENISOVA-SCHMIDT E., HUBER M., AND LEONTYEVA E. 2016B.

TABLE 4: RANKING OF CORRUPTION IN RUSSIA: DYNAMICS IN 2011-2015

Indicator (Institution)	Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International)	USA	7.1	73	73	74	76
	Germany	8.0	79	78	79	81
	Russia	2.4	28	28	27	29
	Congo, Dem. Rep.	2.0	21	22	22	22
Freedom from corruption/Index of Economic Freedom (Heritage Foundation)	USA	75	71	71	72	73
	Germany	80	79	80	80	78
	Russia	22	21	24	22	28
	Congo, Dem. Rep.	19	20	20	17.6	22
Control of Corruption/Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank)	USA	1.27	1.38	1.30	1.30	1.38
	Germany	1.71	1.78	1.80	1.80	1.82
	Russia	-1.04	-1.01	-1.00	-0.90	-0.86
	Congo, Dem. Rep.	-1.40	-1.30	-1.30	-1.30	-1.25

According to the Levada Center, one of the best-known Russian opinion research institutes, a large number of Russians (42 percent) believe that corruption is ineradicable in the country (*Obshestvennoe mnenie 2015*). Higher education is, indeed, one of the areas most affected by corruption. The Russian federal government responded to this crisis in 2009 with the establishment of the *Edinyi Gosudarstvennyi Eksamen* (EGE, Engl.: “Unified State Examination”), which serves as both secondary school finals and university entrance examination, and is a tool to reduce corruption in the admissions process. However, some respondents to the Levada Center polls believe that current reforms aiming to fight corruption in the sector actually increase it: only 21 percent of the Levada respondents believe that the number of violations in university admissions are decreasing, while 3 percent think they remain at the same level and 25 percent believe they will increase in the future (see Table 5).

The number of students attending Russian universities has reached a high point—as noted above, about 80 percent of the 18–21 age cohort now is enrolled in tertiary education. Not all of them are ready to study at such a high level and universities are in-

creasingly dealing with “unteachable” students: remedial students and those who attend universities for other purposes than to study.

“Forest science,” “metallurgy,” “maritime studies,” and “agriculture and fish industry” are the fields that admit the highest number of underachieving students—that is, students with low *EGE* scores among *budgetnye mesta*.⁸ The tendency has been growing: low achievers in school often choose technical disciplines as one of the most secure options for gaining university admission. In a personal conversation with the author, one professor complained that some senior-level students in electrical engineering are not able to define what is measured by a volt and what is measured by an ampere—which is basic knowledge for an electrical engineer, and is actually part of the high school curriculum in Russia.

Further, my empirical data from 2015 shows that some students choose to attend university for purposes other than study: “self-expression in sport and creativity”—such as participation in *Universiada*, the Olympics, and KVN⁹—is among the most important reasons cited. These students do not dedicate time to academics, but are important for the universities’ marketing purposes.

TABLE 5: QUESTION: “BY INTRODUCING *EGE*, THE NUMBER OF BRIBES, *BLAT* AND OTHER VIOLATIONS BY FINISHING SCHOOL AND ENTERING UNIVERSITIES WOULD/ARE ...”

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
increase/increasing	25%	27%	30%	35%	30%	25%	25%
decrease/decreasing	17%	15%	17%	16%	13%	15%	21%
remain/remaining the same	36%	31%	33%	31%	34%	38%	31%
hard to say	23%	28%	20%	18%	24%	22%	23%

4.4 Improper Dependencies

All actors involved in higher education—students, faculty members, and university administration—suffer from improper dependencies based on problematic budget allocations and systemic social issues. Young people without higher education have very few prospects on the job market in Russia. In spite of a great demand for qualified workers, blue-collar professions are looked down upon within Russian society at large. The results of the surveys conducted by the Levada Center show that only 6 percent of Russians wish their children to become qualified blue-collar workers (*Obshchestvennoe mnenie* 2015); young people, then, are pressured to pursue postsecondary education almost regardless of their academic qualifications. Faculty are under pressure from their university administration not to expel students for underachievement. How can they do this? They may water down their requirements, ignore or pretend to ignore plagiarism, or expect (or even demand) gifts, services, or money from students in exchange for better marks and/or preferential treatment. Administration, in turn, is under pressure from the ministry of education. Public universities receive their budget allocation according to the number of students enrolled. If they were to expel students, they would need to return the funding they received from the state for those students. This is hardly possible, given that the allocation is already in use to cover costs. It would also mean that, in the following academic year, the budget might be cut by

the state, and personnel and material costs would have to be reevaluated, likely leading to the dismissal of faculty or staff or the closure of academic programs.

4.5 Consequences

The status quo at Russian universities has consequences not only for national economic growth, but also for international cooperation: corruption can be exported and/or imported. In some cases, Western universities find it difficult to cooperate with Russian universities given widespread corruption, or at a minimum perceive the need to justify any such partnership to external and internal partners.

In the past, for example, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has had to justify its cooperation with SkolTech University, a newly established school in Russia. According to Russian sources, MIT received US\$7.5 million from SkolTech for both a development strategy and a road map for a joint project. Critics called the MIT grant a “bribe” to get a prestigious university on board. Another example from Europe is the case of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, which decided to award an honorary doctorate to Vladimir Medinsky, the Russian minister of culture since 2012. This decision provoked strong protest among students and faculty in Italy. One of the primary reasons was the accusation by *dissernet*, an online community of experts and journalists investigating plagiarism in theses, that Medinsky had committed plagiarism in his dissertation. The Ca’ Foscari administration was pressured into

⁷*Blat*: the use of personal networks for getting things done in Soviet Russia (Ledeneva, 1998).

⁸Russian universities offer two types of admissions: *budgetnye mesta*—admissions for students who have their tuition fees paid by the state, and *platnye mesta*—admissions for students who pay their own tuition fees.

⁹KVN ‘Club of the Smart and the Merry’, a popular Russian TV show where Russian-speaking students compete with each other in wit-tiness, dancing, and music performance.

reexamining its decision, and as a result, the ceremony was moved from Venice to Moscow, and one of Ca' Foscari's vice-rectors was forced to resign (retire).

The situation may become worse—especially at Russian mass universities, which, if current trends continue, will host more and more “unteachable” students. The Russian government is partly responsible for this problem, as it is in the government's advantage to keep its vulnerable youth engaged with higher studies for four to six years lest they become unemployed, criminals, or alcoholics. Russian universities seem to acknowledge this dire reality as part of their social mission. Indeed, they seem to perceive that being engaged in higher education may be the only way for young people to leave what can sometimes be unhealthy home environments.

The main problem, however, is not corruption per se, but the various functions that corruption serves. The quality of education is increasingly assessed through quantitative instruments. This encourages secondary schools to focus on achieving good *EGE* results, while universities aspire to be recognized as effective on the next monitoring conducted by the ministry of education. Students themselves are becoming less and less important in this numbers-driven race. Corruption seems to be the only effective instrument to manage the entire system of higher education—to keep the system running and to gain recognition domestically and internationally.

5. How to Examine and Measure Corruption

In spite of the many challenges faced by academic inquiry in this field, corruption in higher education has been studied widely. On behalf of TI, Gareth Sweeney, Krina Despota, and Samira Lindner edited the latest “Global Corruption Report: Education” in 2013. In this report of almost 500 pages, scholars and practitioners demonstrated that corruption exists at all levels of education, from primary school to university, throughout the world (Sweeney, et al. 2013).

In addition to numerous studies applying qualitative and quantitative research techniques to studies of corruption across industries (see recent discussions in Chapman and Lindner, 2016), a few experiments have been conducted on corruption in the educational sector (Barr and Serra, 2010, Armantier and Boly 2011, 2013, John et al., 2014, Denisova-Schmidt et. al. 2015, 2016b). Experiments on corruption are new trends in the study of this phenomenon, despite concerns about ethical issues. One of the reasons behind this development is that such experiments address causality and, for that reason, are very helpful for educators and other practitioners (see, for example, discussions in Serra and Wantchekon, 2012, Findley et al. 2013, Holmes, 2015).

Armantier and Boly (2011) conducted a field experiment among educators grading the national examination in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, which students must pass in order to move from one school type to another. Teachers are supposed to evaluate the students' dictations. The text selected for the examination was based on a newspaper article (290 words in total) in French, a language with a challenging orthography. More than 15 spelling mistakes meant that a candidate would fail. Any attempt to defraud the test would lead to failure. After the examination, graders received the dictations for grading, including some “special papers” with 20 mistakes and a bribe accompanied by a handwritten note: “Please, find few mistakes in my exam paper.” The study results suggest, among other things, that larger bribes influence educators to “ignore” some mistakes. Moreover, the graders who accepted bribes became less accurate in their subsequent grading. In the end, 49 percent of the subjects accepted the bribe. The probability of accepting the bribe decreased with age, religiosity, and ability at the grading task. The same experiment was repeated in a laboratory in Ouagadougou and later in Montreal, Canada, with almost identical study outcomes (Armantier and Boly, 2013). Further, in their laboratory experiments with Oxford undergraduates in 2005 and 2007, Barr and Serra (2010) found that willingness to engage in misconduct correlated with the Corruption Perception Index (TI) of their coun-

try of origin; this link disappeared, however, when experiments were conducted with postgraduate students. One of the possible explanations for this gap between undergraduate and postgraduate findings

may be the strong influence of the new host country.

Box 5: Effects of Anticorruption Information Campaigns among Students

Several experiments have been conducted on the effectiveness of anticorruption information campaigns among students in Khabarovsk, Russia (n=350) and Lviv, Ukraine (n=600). The results suggest that such campaigns might be counterproductive and even “promote” corruption. The latter was more evident in Ukraine: students who were not previously engaged in monetary corruption in their dealings with faculty learned about the pervasiveness of corrupt behavior through anticorruption campaigns, and their acceptance of corruption increased significantly. However, students who were previously engaged in monetary corruption in their dealings with faculty were more ready

to participate in anticorruption campaigns. The intervention influenced students who stated that they purchased term papers (or other papers) from special agencies or written by other students: the number of students who believed that “corruption is a crime” and “corruption is evil” increased, while the number who believed that “corruption is a means to solve problems” decreased. Students without such experiences were more likely to believe that “corruption is a means to solve problems” than “corruption is evil” after the intervention.

Source: Denisova-Schmidt et. al. 2016b.

6. Remedying Corruption in Higher Education

The author recommends that faculty present their expectations more clearly to students, elaborating on the heterogeneity of their educational and cultural backgrounds in an effort to combat corrupt practices. For example, in some academic systems, students are expected to repeat—often word for word—what the teachers or lecturers say, without challenging assumptions. This is often considered to be the only “correct” position. In addition, faculty members ought to stimulate classroom discussions about academic integrity and include expectations about integrity in their syllabi. Further, faculty might consider randomized seating during examinations and the preparing several versions of the same examination (if possible), preventing copying from a neighbor. In some cases, amphitheater-shaped examination rooms are less helpful and even “encourage” students to look around, especially those seated above. Further, employing large numbers of proctors is a useful measure to supervise examinations.

But as demonstrated by an episode in Freiburg in 2007, when a disabled student was not allowed to leave the examination room to go to the restroom (*Handelsblatt*, 2007), a proctor’s control may be excessive and must be exercised within reason.

Many experts argue that increasing the salaries of teaching staff serves as an effective strategy to reduce corruption (cf. Golunov, 2014). A low salary not only “forces” some faculty members to look for additional income; it also “justifies” accepting bribes in exchange for a better mark. Increasing salaries may at least reduce the incidence of “market compensation bribes” (Roberts and Orttung, 2015). Some experimental studies show that increasing salaries may have an ambiguous effect, however: a salary increase may reduce the willingness to accept a bribe, while at the same time making it more likely that those who still accept bribes will feel obligated to reciprocate (Armantier and Boly, 2013). An adequate and competitive salary is, however, crucial to attracting and retaining talented employees (Altbach et al. 2012 and Altbach, 2016).

Measures to combat corruption are also required at the federal level. In the 2014–2015 academic year, the department of immigration in Australia decided to cancel the visas of more than 9,000 international students involved in academic misconduct (Akerman, 2016). In many post-Soviet countries, the introduction of national tests such as the Unified State Examination in Russia have significantly reduced bribery and other malpractices related to university admissions, providing a “best practice” for other systems with significant public provision.

7. Conclusions and Prospects

According to the World Bank, corruption is “the single greatest obstacle to economic and social development.” Some rank corruption as the second worst global problem overall after terrorism (Ledeneva, et al. 2017). Corruption is indeed dangerous, especially in higher education. Many young people complete their socialization by learning, explicitly or implicitly, that corruption is “normal.” Myriads of studies conducted in endemically corrupt environments confirm that knowing that corruption is widespread

often leads to its acceptance and increase (John et. al. 2014, Corbacho et. al. 2016). Students who cheat may transfer this behavior to their professional lives and encourage corrupt practices in the organizations where they will work. Students who cheat will hamper economic and social development, both in their home countries and globally (Heyneman et al. 2008). As Martin Luther, 500 years ago, had doubt about the practice of indulgences—the “pardon” of sins—so should educators start questioning the current situation in academia. Even when “paved with good intentions” (Schwartz, 2017), corruption leads to reputational damage and distrust among all actors involved in higher education, as well as in society in general.

For more information about corruption in higher education, follow @BC_HECM for news and trends. The Higher Education Corruption Monitor collects news and research on various types of corruption and anticorruption policies and initiatives from all around the world.

Box 6: More Tools to Mitigate the Lack of Academic Integrity?

In cooperation with the German Embassy in Beijing, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) established the Akademische Prüfstelle (APS) in 2001. This agency is responsible for validating all certificates earned in China and conducting interviews with interested students in a discipline they studied in their home country. This “double check,” together with language tests, is often a requirement for Chinese students to enroll at German, Austrian, Belgian, and Swiss universities. For students already enrolled at universities, various antiplagiarism policies and procedures integrating the use of antiplagiarism software programs like Turnitin or Unplag, are helpful to detect fraud. Faculty should present their assignments and expectations more clearly, elaborating on their own cultural and educational back-

ground and encouraging students, in turn, to reflect on their own academic backgrounds. Such discussions may help to prevent misunderstandings. This may be difficult to expect and demand from faculty. Tenure-track faculty are under pressure to publish, and non-tenure-track faculty are under pressure to extend their contracts; teaching may seem less important for promotion. Further, administration is not likely to dismiss international students, who contribute an important part of the university’s budget. Moreover, not everyone is ready to talk openly about academic misconduct among international students, given that some dialogues on the topic may reflect (or be perceived as reflecting) racist undertones.

Source: Denisova-Schmidt, E. 2016a.

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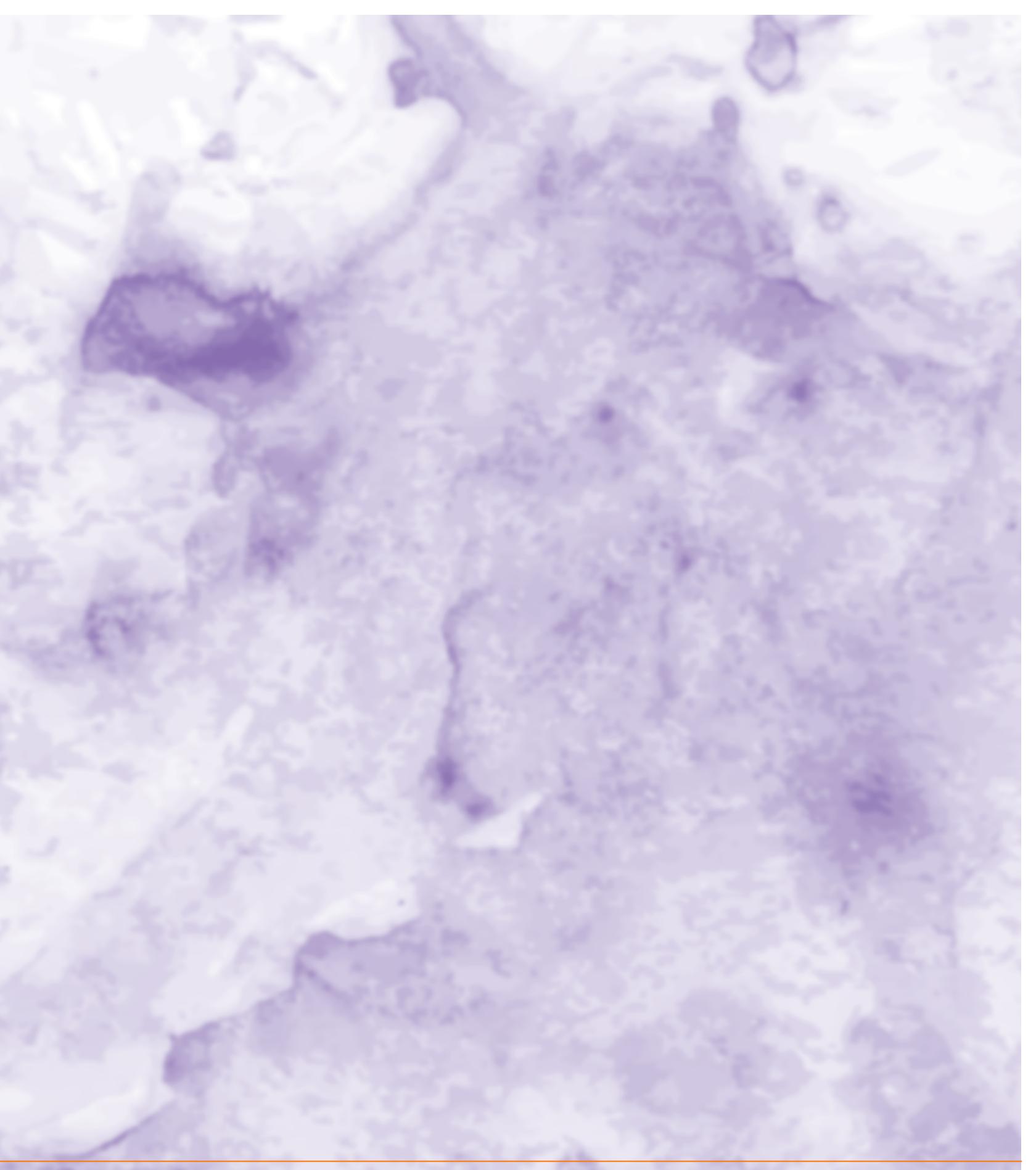
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ISSN: 2475-2657 (Print)
ISSN: 2475-2657



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International Higher Education