

ABSTRACT

CAN WE TEACH SOVIET STUDENTS WESTERN BUSINESS METHODS?

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Universities in the U.S.S.R. have been given permission to enter into agreements with academic institutions outside their borders without supervision by the Soviet Ministry of Education. During the eight month period following the policy 14 institutions in the U.S. had signed agreements with Soviet universities. Because the U.S.S.R. has been closed for so long little is known about their educational system except what is published officially by the Soviet government. Soviet universities will seek business professors who can teach business on their campuses. If business educators are to teach Soviet university students on the U.S.S.R. they will need answers to two questions: 1. Are Soviet business students any different from U.S. business students? 2. Can U.S. business educators teaching in the U.S.S.R. use the same teaching methods they use in the U.S.? We found no current literature which provided insights to either of these two questions.

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of a survey of the attitudes of "business" students at Kalinin State University in the Soviet Union and those of "business" students at Eastern Washington University and to suggest appropriate considerations in teaching business to the Russians.

Are Soviet business students any "different" from their American counterparts? Based upon our survey the answer is yes. The level of agreement on 11 of the 14 statements differed significantly between the two groups of students. American university business educators must be mindful of these differences if they are to anticipate the reaction of Soviet students.

In the U.S. business educators are often accustomed to giving frequent examinations. In the Soviet Union examinations are less frequent in most courses because duplicating facilities are nearly non-existent. In a closed society what few printing and duplicating facilities are available are generally under tight control. Consequently, American university business educators teaching in the U.S.S.R. will have to adapt to this system. When multiple copies of anything are needed much time must be allowed. This lack of frequent examinations may explain why Soviet students do not

feel as much pressure for good grades as their U.S. counterparts. But because there are so few examinations the Soviets recognize the importance of each grade and feel more pressure to cheat to get good grades.

Students in the U.S. seek a University education for a variety of reasons. Over half the respondents to our survey indicated that an increase in one's earning power was a primary benefit. Far fewer Soviet students felt that way, probably because of the egalitarian nature of the U.S.S.R. Once in the university system the Soviet students must maintain reasonable grades to graduate. After graduation they are assigned a job consequently the drive to excel in hopes of landing a better position characteristic of many American business students is not as pronounced in the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, far fewer Soviet students in our sample felt optimistic about their future when compared with American students. This is probably true because Soviet young people are less capable of controlling their own future. Consequently, motivating Soviet business students may be more difficult. Business educators will have to show Soviet students how their education can benefit them both financially and otherwise as their once rigid system moves toward a market driven economy.

Far fewer Soviet students believe that an individual can bring about changes in society or that the education they are receiving will leave them well prepared for life. We believe this attitude is the product of the system. In a free society individuals have the right to vote and to protest when they disagree. In a tightly controlled system these freedoms are suppressed. In addition, education in the most U.S. business schools has direct relevance to the real world and frequently examples and cases are used to illustrate the application of principles to practice. U.S. business educators teaching Soviet students must steadfastly encourage students to question things and help them relate what they are learning to the real world.