

# Education for Librarianship in the Russian Far East: An Update on the Vladivostok State University of Economics and Services

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During the Spring 2005, I returned to Russia for the fifth time and the third time to Vladivostok, in particular. This brief communication, based on my short-term Fulbright lectureship, is an update to my earlier 2002 report, published in *JELIS*.<sup>1</sup> Since that article employed a detailed STEPE analysis, this time I shall more briefly provide a SWOT analysis at the end of this article as well as cover the university's mission, goals and objectives, curriculum, faculty, students, and facilities. Allow me to address these points seriatim.

## VSUES Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The youngest of the five universities in the city, Vladivostok State University of Economics and Services (<http://www.vvsu.ru/>) was founded in 1967 as the Far Eastern Technological Institute; VSUES was granted university status in July 1996 by the federal government.<sup>2</sup> Today, VSUES, with branches in Artyom and Nakhodka, enrolls more than 26,000 students (of which 6,000 are on campus in Vladivostok) and has an academic staff (i.e., faculty and staff) of more than 1500. Along with elected members from faculty, its rector (a.k.a. president) and prorectors (a.k.a. vice-presidents) serve as the Academic Board of the university. The sixty-five Board members serve for a five-year period and meet on the last Thursday of each month. The University's 1997 financial situation showed a positive balance of 0.5 billion rubles based on a revenue of 41.6 billion rubles and expenses of 41.0 billion. Federal sources provide 50% of the revenue while student tuition covers the other 50%. More recently, the university reports 0.8 million rubles earned on revenue of 80.7 million rubles and expenses of 75.8 million. Now, "student tuition provides 33.6 percent of the revenue, government funding another 40%, and the remaining 26.3 from city governments"<sup>15</sup>. The university's website is posted at <http://www.vvsu.ru/index.asp>.

Administratively, the University has a President, Dr. Gennadii I. Lazarev, who has served since 1988. Dr. Lazarev is assisted by five vice presidents. Organizationally, the university has six institutes and one center, headed by

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Deans, including an Institute of Information Science, Innovation, and Business Systems. Today, the University Library reportedly contains more than 875,000 items, including 44 full-text periodicals along with 600 print-based periodicals accessible via an alphabetical and systematic catalog. The collection is now entirely bar coded for circulation<sup>3</sup>. Recently, the library developed their own automated in-house library circulation system for registered users; the director of the University Library is Tat'iana Grekhova, who earned her doctorate in 2005. The library's Webpage is <http://lib.vvsu.ru/russian/> and the electronic catalog can be found at <http://tricon.vvsu.ru/catalog/zgate.exe?Init+tricon.xml,simple.xsl+rus>.

The administration has positioned the university in an entrepreneurial way and is dedicated to "pursuing the ideals of truth, independence and justice [and] has committed itself to developing creative people with the broad and profound knowledge, the professional competence and the independent judgment which will enable them to become the future leaders of the New Russia."<sup>4</sup>

## VSUES Faculty

At the Soviet on 29 April 2005, the Rector promised 20% salary increases this academic year as well as another 40% for 2006/07. Russians working in the state sector have made great gains in recent years, but the average monthly wage is around 8295 rubles (about \$277) per month for January-November 2005.<sup>5</sup> In the documentalist program (headed by an assistant director), there are 40 faculty members; 60% are professors while the remainder are aspiranta and Candidat Nauk holders, earning their degrees from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Khabarovsk, or Vladivostok.

## VGUES Curriculum

In general, Russian higher education is responding to the EU's 2000 Bologna Process, but VSUES' main challenges are: (1) the proposed three year baccalaureate in EU countries whereas the Russian diplom is five years long, (2) the demographic decline<sup>6</sup> in the number of university students is projected to be 50% less in the near future, and (3) charting a course between its public service role and crass commercialization.<sup>7</sup> The EU's Tempus Tacis higher education program proposes to refocus VSUES' curriculum on distance education, making the university a "center of excellence" in the Russian Far East. At the Soviet, one of the top-level VSUES

administrators, V.V. Krukov, gave a presentation on the past, current, and future IT infrastructure strategy which must be in place for all of this planning to happen. Furthermore, the Rector expects all of the faculty to develop PowerPoint course lectures which will be mounted on the university's intranet at <http://abc.vvsu.ru/>. Those who fail to do so may find themselves teaching in another of Vladivostok's local universities; a lengthy, and rather familiar, discussion arose at the Soviet: the technology does not work, nobody is responsible for help desk support, there are too many incomprehensible acronyms, and a few neo-Luddite staff who don't want to learn anything new. At the point, many of the courses require students to purchase unbound booklets which support the curriculum. These booklets range in price from six or seven rubles to seventy-five rubles, depending upon their length.

### **VSUES Students**

The current student body is still overwhelmingly Russian, even given the university's interest in attracting nearby Chinese students, assuming a Russian diploma would appeal to them.<sup>8</sup> In any event, this year students have plastic identification cards as well as bank debt cards which they need to receive their stipends. The idea of credit cards is still foreign, probably due to the lack of collateral. Outstanding students receive 1170-to-1500 rubles per month (about \$39-50) while less qualified students may even be paying for their education (about \$100 per year). Students may work part-time in the library and they are paid 1500 rubles (about \$50) per month. Some students complain that too many special admit students, such as sportsmen, are allowed into the university. Otherwise, an American visitor will be impressed by the women students' fashion sense while the male students seem to be emulating dark characters from "The Matrix" or gangsters.

### **VSUES Facilities**

The university is composed of several interconnected buildings located in the Lenin region of town between two hills. The university is on a WAN built with the help of the University of California; the library is located in building number one at the east end of the university. The library has three reading rooms with 600 seats total. Its holdings can be searched via seventy-two computer terminals at <http://lib.vvsu.ru/russian/> since 1992. Items circulate using barcodes, a project implemented in 1998 and recently finished. Notably, I saw many undergraduate students on e-chat, though, and playing computer games. The facilities are looking much better this time, due in large measure to the Rector's enforcement of subbotnik, a student community service requirement of one day per academic year. One sees students washing the floor, painting the walls, and picking up trash; 6,000 student days can make a huge difference.

## SWOT Analysis

SWOT is a simple, but useful, tool for assessing the current situation by examining the internal (strengths and weaknesses) versus external (opportunities and threats) strategic factors which may affect the university.<sup>9</sup>

As for its internal strengths, the institution projects itself as a young and vigorous institution. Competent staff have created a solid information technology infrastructure and thus, the university has reliable Internet access and a significant Web presence. On the other hand, some of the major weaknesses include its dependence upon a declining federal budget for higher education as well as a lack of spending on the regional infrastructure.

Opportunities: wages have been increasing since the 1998 economic crisis; hence, the university could count on more paying students, locally or internationally. Furthermore, the 1998 formal needs assessment suggests that the university could offer an information science program focusing on management leadership in business environments, especially marketing. The university should seek partnerships with other institutions to achieve this goal.

Some of the significant external threats include the small regional population of 2.2 million people in the Russian Far East, which is shrinking due to ageing as well as a dramatically declining fertility rate. Finally, the rule of law, where people expect it to be followed and obeyed, is not present yet; hence, the region has a wild west feel or one of gangsterism and cronyism.

## Conclusion

In summary, VSUES appears to be improving, making progress towards its goals. The enhanced physical infrastructure is most encouraging and their youthfulness cannot hurt. As identified above, however, there are significant challenges ahead, the two most significant of which may be the declining population and continuing lawlessness. Finally, though it may sound like a cliché, I believe it is true that the rest of us in LIS will watch with interest to see how things develop for them.

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## References

1. John V. Richardson Jr., "Recent Developments in the Russian Far East: The State of Education for Librarianship," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 44 (Summer 2003): 137–152.
2. As of January 2002, Russian "universities trained 110,636 postgraduate students, 77,794 of them full time students . . . , and 3,977 Doctoral students," according to Jan Sadlak, "Doctoral studies and Qualifications in Europe and the United States: Status and Prospects (Bucharest: UNESCO CEPES, 2004), p. 159.
3. Tatyana V. Grekhova, "International Cooperation as a Development Factor of Far Eastern Libraries: By the Example of Vladivostok State University of Economics and Services Library," (Vladivostok, Russia; VSUES, undated but circa 2003).
4. "Alma Mater" at [http://www.rusalma.org/cgi/php/spec\\_by\\_reg.php3?c\\_id=23](http://www.rusalma.org/cgi/php/spec_by_reg.php3?c_id=23) (accessed 23 May 2006). By the way, the university's mascot is Archimedes (a large reproduction of Raphael's "School of Athens" is prominently positioned just inside the university's main entrance), while the school's colors are blue and white.
5. The Central Bank of the Russian Federation, "Social and Economic Situation in January–November 2005," at [http://www.cbr.ru/eng/analytics/macro/print.asp?file=macroeconomics\\_jan-nov\\_05.html](http://www.cbr.ru/eng/analytics/macro/print.asp?file=macroeconomics_jan-nov_05.html) (accessed 29 March 2006).
6. One of the most devastating projections can be found in Murray Feshbach, *Russia's Health and Demographic Crises: Policy Implications and Consequences* (Washington, DC: Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute, 2003).
7. Sergey Sevastyanov, "International Cooperation in Education as a Means of Reacting to the Challenges of Globalization" (June 2004) at [http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/TURIN\\_Sergey%20SEVASTYANOV\\_Russia.1086786511612.ppt#258,4,MAIN\\_CHALLENGES](http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/TURIN_Sergey%20SEVASTYANOV_Russia.1086786511612.ppt#258,4,MAIN_CHALLENGES) (accessed 28 March 2006).
8. International enrollment has been growing from China, South Korea, Vietnam, the USA, and India; and ranging from 23 in 2001/02, 79 in 2002/2003, 282 in 2003/2004, to a projected 480 in 2004/2005. In 2003/2004, these students represented almost 7% of the university's income.
9. Edmund P. Learned, C. Roland Christiansen, Kenneth Andrews, and William D. Guth, *Business Policy, Text and Cases* (Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1969). In 2002, Anastasia Prokopchuk, a VSUES Diplom student, prepared her own SWOT for a management class. In it, she administered an *anketa* (i.e., questionnaire) to several VSUES groups in order to develop a strategic forecast.