

# Academic Inbreeding in Ukraine

Ilona Sologoub and Tom Coupe, KEI

December 2013

*In Ukraine, having a university degree only provides a noisy signal of one's productivity, which means social ties and personal relations play a relatively more important role in the Ukrainian economy in general. Therefore it should not come as a surprise that inbreeding is very common in Ukrainian academia; for example, about 50% of faculty obtained their university degree from the university that employs them. Given the absence of clear "quality signs" for fresh university graduates, inbreeding can be viewed as a second-best option for hiring decisions. Our econometric analysis shows that inbred faculty does not differ in its (observable) quality from non-inbred faculty. At the same time, ceteris paribus, inbred faculty has somewhat lower salaries. We also find that the extent of inbreeding is slightly higher in universities with a "national" status and lower in very small universities (of less than 1000 students).*

Academic inbreeding is the practice of universities hiring their own graduates to academic positions. Inbred faculty is thus faculty employed at the same university from which they graduated. Inbreeding implies a low level of competition for faculty vacancies possibly resulting in low quality hires. However, inbred faculty can be cheaper, reduce the chance of a mismatch between university and faculty member, and can be better "tailored" to the needs of a certain university or discipline. For some specific narrow disciplines inbreeding can be the only way to hire faculty (for example, if only one university in a region provides courses in a certain discipline, teachers of that discipline most probably will be inbred). In research, inbreeding can help to pass on tacit knowledge but it can also prevent "fresh blood" and new ideas from entering into the university. In developed countries, universities usually try to limit inbreeding in order to first, "disseminate" their graduates and earn a good reputation, and second, hire the best graduates on the market through an open competition. In less

developed countries, inbreeding is more common because of the higher role of personal relations in hiring decisions in general.

Although very widespread, academic inbreeding in Ukraine has received little or no attention from researchers or policy makers. Data on inbred faculty is similarly scarce. There is only one recent exception – in the summer of 2013, the Centre for Social Research surveyed about 400 university professors. The survey contains information on a wide range of aspects of faculty employment, such as working hours, publications, participation in conferences, income size etc., including the question on whether a person works at the same university from which (s)he graduated. We used this data to do an econometric analysis of the factors that determine inbreeding and the impact of inbreeding. We complemented the survey data by data from an online questionnaire we distributed among KSE graduates whom we know work in academia, their acquaintances

and among the network of KSE partners who work in academia (a total of 59 responses).

## Causes of Inbreeding

Besides providing a person with knowledge and skills necessary for a white-collar job, education has several other functions. One of them is signaling, i.e. people who successfully graduate from an educational institution should have higher abilities (*ceteris paribus*) than those with lower grades or dropouts. This function of education is almost entirely lost in Ukraine because of widespread corruption. In Ukraine, good students can obtain good skills and knowledge together with good grades. However, “bad” students can obtain the same grades for money: besides paying professors for exam grades, students can buy a course paper, a diploma thesis and even a doctoral dissertation. Cheating and plagiarism are also very widespread; not only in students’ work, but also in academic research. Hence, based on the diploma alone, a potential employer will have difficulties telling apart a “good” student from a “bad” one. Therefore, other screening mechanisms are relatively important in Ukraine.

Many private-sector employers, for example, will pay more attention to previous work experience and personal recommendations than formal education. For example, the ULMS-2007 survey shows that from 48% to 68% of people found a job through relatives or friends, which is comparable to the extent of inbreeding found by this study in academics (48.6% in the CSR-2013 survey, 68% in our online survey). This situation pushes students, who do not expect to be hired by relatives or friends, to find a full-time job already in the first or second year of studies, providing them with both incentives and funds to “buy” a diploma. This creates a “vicious circle” – the low value of a diploma makes employers looking at previous work experience, and the

need to gain that experience further devalues diplomas.

For universities, “previous work experience” is the student’s performance during their studies. Hence, by inbreeding their own students, universities reduce uncertainty, which they would be facing if they looked for needed candidates on an open market. As the academic career of a person develops, (s)he can develop additional signals of his/her “quality”; first of all, scientific degrees (Candidate of Sciences, Doctor of Sciences) and/or ranks (Docent or Professor) and connected to them publications in Ukrainian and foreign journals (with the last ones being much more valuable). Therefore, as we show, younger and less distinguished faculty (with shorter teaching experience and without a Doctor degree or Professor rank) is more likely to work at a university from which they graduated.

## Estimation Results

Our econometric estimation showed that the extent of inbreeding does not depend on the quality of a university as measured by its rank in Ukraine. Inbreeding is less common in very small universities (of less than 1000 students), and is independent of the university size after this threshold. Universities with a “national” status have slightly higher level of inbreeding.

We also show that inbred faculty does not differ in “quality” (measured as the number of publications in Ukrainian and foreign journals and the probability to get a foreign fellowship) from other faculty, although, *ceteris paribus*, inbred faculty do get lower salaries.

Results from both the CSR-2013 survey and our online questionnaire indicate that personal connections are very important both for entering a university and for further promotion. Usually an academic career starts when a person begins his/her Ph.D. studies; at the same time, (s)he starts working as an

assistant or a lecturer (when admitting students to Ph.D. studies, universities prefer their own MA graduates). To move up the career ladder, a person should earn scientific degrees or ranks, have certain duration of teaching experience and a minimal required number of publications (all the formal requirements for certain academic positions are stipulated in a Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers). According to the law, currently there is no tenure system, and faculty is hired with one-three- or five-year contracts (the longest contracts can last up to seven years, but only in the universities with a “national” status).

## Hiring Procedures at Universities

When a vacancy is open (e.g. a contract expires), a university should make an announcement in a pedagogical journal and/or on its website; then candidates should be interviewed at a chair meeting, and a selected candidate should be approved by the faculty dean. A candidate should have a required teaching experience and publications. There are about 1500 journals on the list of Higher Attestation Commission (the body that organizes the dissertations defense), which means that practically all universities issue at least one journal, and very few of them are refereed. This means that publishing in the home university’s journal is the cheapest and easiest way for a faculty member to get the needed number of publications. Therefore, publications are very often of very poor quality and do not contain any real research, especially in social sciences. To mitigate this problem, the Ministry of Education and Science introduced a new requirement for scientific degrees – since 2013, 20% of publications should be in foreign-refereed journals.

When hiring, all formal requirements and procedures are typically observed – a competition is announced, the chair meeting

held, the candidate has the required duration of work experience and the number of publications (their quality is discussed above). However, in reality there is very often just one candidate “for” whom the vacancy is opened, and outside people, even if they apply for a vacancy, are ignored. Usually a chair meeting supports the opinion of a chair head, but either way, a dean could overturn a chair meeting decision, so despite seemingly open procedures, in reality a person’s employment depends on his/her relations with a chair head and/or a faculty dean. Studying at a university is the most common but not the only way to establish these relations. A person can get acquainted with a chair head or a faculty dean at a conference, be his/her relative or friend, or be recommended by his/her relative or friend.

Such a widespread reliance on personal connections is a legacy from the Soviet times when personal ties replaced market mechanisms, and students were allocated to their first workplaces rather than hired on a competitive basis. Since universities were situated in cities, staying at a university implied a better living environment, and salaries were also good. Therefore many students tried to stay at their alma mater by establishing good relations with a chair head or a faculty dean. Nowadays, university salaries are not competitive so students staying at universities are not necessarily the best ones. However, they are not the worst ones either because otherwise they would not be offered a position.

## Concluding Remarks

In Ukraine, academic inbreeding provides universities with a relatively cheap and well-prepared workforce. On the other hand, it also fosters isolation of universities and conservation of existing “traditions” – whether good or bad. Given low academic mobility of both students and professors, this situation prevents dissemination of knowledge and

lowers competition, which necessarily leads to degradation.

Currently, inbreeding is not on the agenda of either researchers or policy makers. In fact, no one seems to have considered it as a problem. Perhaps, it will not be discussed as a problem any time soon because there are many other “bigger” problems in Ukrainian higher education. To name a few, these are:

- high centralization and insufficient level of university autonomy;
- low salaries and high teaching workload of professors;
- low extent of university research and very low quality of the existing research, especially in humanities and social sciences;
- high corruption and low standards of studying and research work (ubiquitous cheating and plagiarism);
- low sensitivity of educational programs to the needs of modern economy.

Perhaps, introduction of formal limits on inbreeding (setting a quota for both MA graduates admitted to Ph.D. programs and for Ph.D. graduates hired to teaching positions at the same university) could bring some “fresh air” into the system. This measure would extend the pool of candidates available to a university and introduce an element of competition between them. It would also create incentives both for universities to improve their Ph.D. programs and for students to put greater effort into studies.

▪

## References

Bilyk, Olga and Iuliia Sheron (2012) Do Informal Networks Matter in the Ukrainian Labor Market? EERC Working paper No 12/11E.

Coupe, Tom and Hanna Vakhitova (2010). Recent Dynamics of Returns to Education in Transition Countries, KSE/KEI Working paper.

Osipian, Ararat (2009). Corruption and Reform in Higher Education in Ukraine, Canadian and International Education, vol. 38, pp. 104-122.

Shaw, Marta, Chapman, David and Nataliya Rummyantseva (2011). The Impact of the Bologna Process on Academic Staff in Ukraine, Higher Education Management, vol. 23, pp. 71–91.

Stephens, Jason, Romakin, Volodymyr and Mariya Yukhymenko (2010). Academic Motivation and Misconduct in Two Cultures: A Comparative Analysis of US and Ukrainian Undergraduates, International Journal for Educational Integrity, vol. 6, pp. 47–60.

## Tom Coupé

Kyiv School of Economics  
(KSE)

[tcoupe@kse.org.ua](mailto:tcoupe@kse.org.ua)

<http://www.kse.org.ua>



Tom Coupé is Associate Professor at the Kyiv School of Economics. Tom obtained his Ph.D from the Free University of Brussels (ULB) in 2002. His research interests include economics of education, labor economics and political economics. Tom has published his academic research in the Journal of the European Economic Association, the Journal of Economic Perspectives, Research Policy and others. He regularly writes columns and articles for newspapers and magazines and has done consultancy work for the European Economic Association, Routledge, UNESCO and the World Bank.

## Ilona Sologoub

Kyiv Economic Institute (KEI)

Kyiv School of Economics  
(KSE)

[Inoskova@kse.org.ua](mailto:Inoskova@kse.org.ua)

<http://www.kse.org.ua>



Ilona Sologoub is a Research Associate at the Kyiv Economics Institute (KEI) of Kyiv School of Economics (KSE) since 2011. Before that she worked as a risk analyst at a commercial bank and at the Ukrainian Parliament. She obtained her MA degree from the KSE in 2002. Her research interests include labor economics, economics of education and demographics. At KEI, Ilona took part in research projects on the impact of economic crisis on education and labor migration studies. Her recent paper on fertility determinants in Ukraine can be found at <http://www.eerc.ru/paper>.