



The Universities Project of the Salzburg Seminar Visiting Advisors Program

Report of the Visit to the Belarusian State Medical University, Minsk November 10-14, 2003

Team members:

Robin Farquhar (team leader), Professor and former President, Carleton University, Canada

Jaak Aaviksoo, Rector, University of Tartu, Estonia

Pero Lucin, Vice Rector for Organization, University of Rijeka, Croatia

Anna Glass, Coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe, Visiting Advisors Program, Universities Project, Salzburg Seminar

Introduction

As a part of Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project, the Visiting Advisors Program (VAP) offers assistance to higher education institutions in Central and East Europe as well as the Russian Federation that seek to advance the process of institutional self-assessment and change. The VAP consists of consulting visits, at the request of the host institution, by an international team of experienced university leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to provide strategic support and advice to their colleagues in developing new approaches to concerns expressed by the host institution. In doing so, the Salzburg Seminar hopes to promote a broader understanding of the challenges that HEI in the respective regions are facing in renewing their higher education systems, to share examples of good practice, to strengthen the reform impetus at the given HEI, and to encourage professional and institutional linkages.

It was within this context that the Belarusian State Medical University (hereafter referred to as "BSMU" or "the University") invited a team of Visiting Advisors from the Salzburg Seminar. The visit took place from November 10 to 14, 2003. BSMU is the leading medical university in the country and has a long tradition of providing an excellent standard of training to the future doctors and dentists of the country. However, like all educational institutions throughout Europe, BSMU also faces substantial and in some cases overwhelming movements toward reform. The leadership of the University has decided to enter proactively into the process of reform, a perspective commended and supported by the Visiting Advisors on this team.

During the three days of meetings at the University, the Visiting Team noted with appreciation the many areas of excellence at BSMU. We held a series of discussions with the Rector, Vice Rectors, Deans and faculty members of the University, and also had a conversation with several students of different

Faculties. The intense meetings at the University were nicely balanced with a cultural program organized by the International Office, which included a ballet and (for those of us who arrived early) an opera at the Opera House as well as a trip to the Chatyn memorial on our final day in Belarus. Although the length of the visit was short, the intensity and range of the discussions were such that we came away with the sense that we had obtained a distinct understanding of the University's structure and the context of its current condition.

The Visiting Team wishes to thank Rector Pavel Bespalchuk and his staff for giving us such a warm and kind reception. We appreciated the generous hospitality extended to us by everyone at the University. Our special thanks go to First Vice Rector Sergei Denisov, who attended a symposium of the Universities Project in Salzburg and on whose initiative our visit took place. We also thank Professor Vassili Roudenok for his tireless attention to all the details of our visit, both before and during our stay in Minsk.

In preparation for our visit, leaders at the Belarusian State Medical University had identified the following three issue areas for consideration:

1. University Development and Structure (specifically for a medical university)
 - A: Management structure
 - B: Strategic planning
 - C: Reform toward "Europeanization": European credit transfer system
 - D: Practical usage of international collaboration (especially in programs TEMPUS, SOCRATES/ERASMUS)
2. Communication, Quality and Evaluation
 - A: Communication between students and teaching staff
 - B: Recognition of students' opinions on the educational process
 - C: Teaching competence of faculty, quality control
3. University Autonomy
 - A: Finance (sources of income, university budget)
 - B: Academic freedom

However, while we touched on all of these topics during our deliberations, certain issues and questions emerged during the discussions that were of particular interest to our hosts and on which our attention was consequently focused. Accordingly, our commentary in this report is organized with reference to those subjects of special importance to them. Thus, we begin by addressing two matters on which specific advice was requested (internationalization and examinations); we then explore three responses to what appeared to be the University's major developmental priority: faculty rejuvenation (teaching load, supplementary enhancement, and university profile); and finally, we examine the views expressed by a group of students with whom we met. We conclude our report with some remarks from a strategic perspective, outlining our opinions on the current state and prospects of BSMU.

Commentary

Let us reiterate at the outset our recognition that, because none of us is an expert on higher education in Belarus (this was the first visit to the Republic for all of us) and only one of us (Pero Lucin) has first-hand familiarity with medical education, our ability to comment on the circumstances of BSMU (following a visit of only a few days) is severely limited. Thus, there are some important and relevant aspects which we shall not address in our report (either because we are unqualified to do so or because we have learned that governmental regulations would render such comments irrelevant at present) – including the precise curricular content of specialized courses (particularly in the medical sciences), the organization of medical education in Belarus (notably its jurisdictional placement under the Department of Health rather than of Education – and its provision on direct entry from secondary school, which differs from arrangements in western countries where students are admitted only after completing basic university studies in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences), and the frustrating restrictions of certain legal requirements (such as the large number of prescribed hours that students must spend in designated classes, the rigid limitations on immigration of foreign students, and the constraints to institutional autonomy in determining curricula). We are, however, competent to discuss issues of concern to university managers generally – and most of the topics that were raised with us fall into this category. Accordingly, we focus below on two specific subjects on which our advice was requested, on an area which appears to constitute a major priority concern for BSMU leaders, and on the opinions that students shared with us during our visit.

Specific Advice Requested

We were asked for our answers to two questions of immediate concern to our hosts: How would you advise us to foster the internationalization of our University? What are your views on examinations for admission to and graduation from BSMU? We address each of these questions below.

Internationalization. The BSMU management expressed their wish to expand international cooperation and to be an active participant in the international education process. This intention is incorporated into the long-term strategic activities and policy of BSMU.

Significant steps towards internationalization of BSMU have already been taken by offering higher education provision to foreign students at the Faculty for Foreign Students and by establishing the Department for International Relations. Foreign students are taught separately in order to minimize language barriers, but this approach of separation does not produce added value in terms of curriculum development, improvement of educational process or development of a quality culture. It is mainly focused on educational service in the Russian language, which creates a number of challenges and, according to the reporting of BSMU management, resulted in a crisis two years ago. This activity of BSMU is significant, and should be extended and “marketed” to a wider range of applicants, primarily from the

Russian language-speaking populations in different parts of the world (perhaps in partnership with well-established medical schools in those areas).

BSMU has already established cooperation with the Universities of Nagasaki and Wuerzburg in clinical exchange. This kind of cooperation is extremely important for training both students and teaching staff, and should be extended and intensified. Rapid development of basic biomedical sciences, clinical sciences and biomedical technology is challenging for any higher education and medical institution, and it is clear that no institution is able to triumph alone. Therefore, strong partnerships and alliances with compatible institutions would help to develop medical practice, medical education and the acquisition of biomedical technology. This is of particular importance for developing postgraduate education and training in terms of high quality learning linked to research, and for pursuing the provision of lifelong learning for medical practitioners. In addition, strong partnerships would enhance the scientific influence of BSMU.

International cooperation, successful benchmarking and external assessment in combination with staff education within the institution were helpful in the process of substantially reforming dentistry education a decade ago. This is a good example of how to generate a drive for changes in education within the conservative medical community, which, in all countries, is a force of inertia and resistance to changes, usually resulting in a rather conservative medical curriculum that is inadequate for the 21st century doctor's training.

Among their first priorities for discussion with our VAP team, student representatives at BSMU pointed to inadequate participation in student exchange programs and insufficient access to modern medical information through the Internet, as well as to medical journals in an electronic version. BSMU management pointed out that informaticization was among the first priorities of their strategic plan, and it is apparent that a significant effort in this direction has been made recently. However, it seems that students' desires go beyond current resources and engagement by faculty members. It is recommended that the University intensify its activities in enhancing the electronic infrastructure and in expanding access to all free Internet resources, particularly the great number of high-quality medical journals that are available without cost (for example: www.freemedicaljournals.com).

Each university should respond to the demands of society, and therefore must be flexible and dynamic. This is of particular importance for medical schools since the development of biomedical sciences in the post-genomic era will raise a number of challenges for society, especially on the economic and humanistic facets of healthcare. Therefore, it is becoming apparent to biomedical faculty members worldwide that curriculum reform in biomedical studies is absolutely necessary and should be a continuous process in curriculum development. All medical schools should incorporate the concept of flexibility in curriculum building and continuously assess the type and level of competences acquired during medical studies. This applies to all universities and other tertiary education institutions, particularly in Europe. It is recommended, therefore, that BSMU embrace the basic principles of the Bologna Process, which was initiated in order to establish a European Higher

Education Area and make European higher education more competitive, comparable, and flexible. The internationalization of higher education is employed in a number of European countries as a driving force for change and reforms. Mobility of students, teachers, and administrative staff should be used for the purpose of institutional and curriculum development.

It is further recommended that attention be given to adopting the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). ECTS credits are values allocated to course units that denote the student workload required to complete a given specialization. They reflect the quantity of work each course requires in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution – in lectures, practical work, seminars, private work in the laboratory, library or at home, and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only. ECTS promotes study abroad as a means of improving the quality of academic operations by bringing benefits to students and higher education institutions. Studying abroad can be a particularly valuable experience; it is not only the best way to learn about other countries, ideas, languages and cultures, but it is also an increasingly important part of professional and academic career development. ECTS helps higher education institutions to enhance their cooperation with other institutions by improving access to information on foreign curricula and by providing common standards and procedures for academic recognition. The use of ECTS can also be a catalyst for reflection on course curriculum structures, student workload, and learning outcomes.

Internationalization and quality of higher education are closely linked together, and it is widely accepted that internationalization enhances the quality of higher education. Thus, internationalization could be considered as a means toward improving quality, rather than an end in itself. In the context of internationalization, quality assessment implies comparing approaches and results as well as learning from good practices. It is necessary and beneficial to extend international co-operation among institutions in order to implement quality assessment and assurance mechanisms, improve the assessment of academic programs, share assessment methods, and exchange instructional systems. The goal of quality assurance is to improve education and, therefore, it should take place on all levels (course, Faculty, and institution) and the system should be incorporated throughout the institution.

Quality assurance is a prerequisite to achieving transparency. Transparency should be dialectical, meaning that the quality assurance should make institutional management visible, and quality assurance also should itself be a transparent process, allowing the outcome to be shared among the participants. The players within higher education institutions are the students, teachers/professors, researchers, and other staff. All these players can have different views and perspectives on higher education. The need for student expertise in assuring the quality of education and in the organization of higher education institutions is evident. Students should be involved in the system of quality assurance; they are partners when it comes to assuring the quality of education. If the practices in higher education institutions are contradictory to

the students' interests, they will be the first to notice. Students are also important experts on the criteria that a good learning environment should fulfill. The students' perspective is essential when planning the criteria of a quality assurance system.

Examinations. While students are examined on their knowledge at many stages during their academic program, there are two particular points on which our advice was sought. The first is prefatory to university studies and concerns a recent government decision to administer a centralized national examination, which is used for both secondary school graduation and higher education admission purposes. Such an instrument must, of necessity, be general in nature and, with its implementation, there is no longer an opportunity for particular universities to influence the content of entrance exams – a notable problem for specialized institutions like BSMU whose students normally proceed directly from high school to medical studies. Moreover, this is a written examination with no oral component (an important element in determining a candidate's suitability to become a doctor or dentist). Also, it is employed unequally in that the scores of certain candidate groups are interpreted preferentially in recognition of the fact that they pursued their secondary education in areas where the quality of teaching is known to be inferior – which means that the test results may qualify some ill-prepared applicants for university entrance while excluding others with better backgrounds from the admission quota. What, we were asked, would we advise the University to do under these difficult circumstances?

Because this unified examination is now a feature of government policy, BSMU must obviously comply with it – although it should, perhaps jointly with the country's other specialized higher education institutions, endeavour through prudent lobbying to advocate changes that would render it more suitable for their purposes. It might also be observed that the differential interpretation of test scores as an attempt at "affirmative action" (admitting under-qualified applicants from under-privileged areas) is misdirected and that such preferential treatment could better be focused on improving their secondary education rather than favoring their university admission. But the most promising response in our opinion would be to seek an arrangement whereby the uniform general examination could be supplemented by a subsequent approach through which those candidates who meet an initial standard of qualification could be further tested, both orally and in writing, to determine their suitability for specialized studies in medicine. Such a supplementary examination might appropriately be developed and administered by BSMU's Preparatory Faculty.

The other examination-related question raised with us pertains to testing for graduation at the end of university studies. We were informed that there is a current debate at BSMU about whether it is best to administer one comprehensive final exam or a series of more specific ones in the various fields of specialization, and we were asked for our opinion on this. A common practice in doctoral programs at western universities is to do both – devote one full day to testing of a broad nature on knowledge related to the academic field in general, and a second full day to more focused testing on those areas

in which a student has specialized during the program. We see no reason why this two-stage approach could not be applied to medical studies at BSMU, and our advice in response to this question is that serious consideration be given to implementing this arrangement if possible.

Major Priority Concern

It became apparent to us that the BSMU management has (correctly, in our opinion) identified as its major developmental priority rejuvenating the role of faculty members. Institutional vitality is dependent on the eager commitment, active engagement, and professional responsibility of the professoriate – the people who teach the students, conduct the research, and perform the service which constitute the essential mission of a university. Such vitalization is onerously difficult to achieve in a situation where discretionary funds for stimulation are in short supply, where salaries are not competitive with those of alternative employers and supplementary jobs are necessary in order to “make ends meet”, and where governmental mandates necessitate so much time in the classroom that little opportunity remains to undertake significant research or attend to the individual needs of students; it can also be a challenge when the absence of mandatory retirement and the inadequacy of pension incomes render faculty renewal difficult. This is the situation in which BSMU finds itself at present, and its leaders quite rightly asked us for suggestions on how to address it. Our responses fall into three categories, or “handles,” that could be manipulated to achieve some measure of professorial rejuvenation by increasing the attraction to and retention at the University of well-qualified scholars – teaching load, supplementary enhancement, and university profile.

Teaching Load. The government-prescribed programs for medical education in Belarus are extremely classroom-intensive – around 36 hours per week, and reaching program totals that far exceed those in North American universities (e.g., about 7000 compared to 5000 hours in dentistry). This mandated curriculum comprises humanities as well as medical courses, and the early years also commendably include required classes in Belarusian and a foreign language as well as in physical education – all of which is supplemented by whatever clinical experiences can be accessed and squeezed in. There are no “open elective” options available to students in this crowded program, and their opportunities to pursue independent studies and develop practical skills are severely limited. A result of this heavy program concentration on classroom instruction is that faculty members at BSMU carry very large teaching loads by western standards – approximately 750 hours per year, almost half of which (up to twenty hours per week) are devoted to classroom instruction; the remainder are applied to such teaching-related duties as lesson preparation and assignment grading. This robust teaching load constitutes a serious burden for faculty members, particularly when viewed in the light of other functions that they are expected and may wish to perform – especially research activities and clinical practice (which can generate much-needed supplementary income for them); it therefore serves as a disincentive to pursue or continue careers in the University and, consequently, it works as an inhibitor of faculty rejuvenation.

We can conceive of two major approaches to ameliorating this problem, the best of which would be some substantial restructuring of the curriculum. In this respect, the most popular target at BSMU seems to be the humanities requirements; these courses are viewed by many as largely irrelevant to medical education, and there is widespread support for reducing the amount of class time devoted to them. However, we would advise caution in this regard: study in the humanities is an important component of any university experience (including for future doctors and dentists) and, given that the total amount of classroom time in the program is prescribed by government, lessening the humanities hours would probably serve only to augment the time devoted to other courses – thus increasing rather than decreasing the teaching loads of medical faculty. Rather, because the humanities courses are offered by a department within BSMU the University should be able to directly influence the presentation of these courses in ways that would increase their relevance to medical education (through the instructors' use of illustrations that are pertinent to medicine and dentistry, for example).

A better target for curricular restructuring in our opinion would be the content of the medical courses. There is a natural tendency in academe toward increasing specialization; new medical discoveries lead to new units of instruction, and such additions to the curriculum are seldom counterbalanced by corresponding reductions elsewhere. But if a resulting increase in the classroom hours of students is to be avoided (or a decrease sought) then intensive efforts must be made to review the total curriculum with the intent of further integrating and rationalizing it, weeding out unnecessary duplications and eliminating unessential elements. We understand that this kind of review was undertaken in dentistry a decade ago, but the progress of its implementation has apparently been stalled in recent years; this is reportedly due to the imposition of increased governmental regulation, which does not bode well for any further such efforts in the immediate future. However, it seems inevitable that Belarus will eventually move its higher education system toward closer compliance with the Bologna process and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS); and when that happens, we believe this kind of curricular restructuring will become unavoidable. Accordingly, we urge the University to undertake a comprehensive curriculum review at the earliest possibility so that it will be well prepared to introduce a more rational and better integrated program (with its attendant reduction in teaching load for faculty members) as soon as the opportunity arises to do so.

For the present, however, a second and more promising approach to this objective would seem to involve some increase in class size. If (as we were told) the number of faculty that can be employed depends on the number of students who are enrolled, then the former should not be diminished as long as the latter does not decline. Thus, if class sizes are increased the amount of teaching time required of faculty will be reduced (without jeopardizing the required hours of instruction that students must undergo). During our visit we observed several classes in which the group sizes were remarkably low but, while this may contribute to the learning environment, it might be a luxury that the University can no longer afford to the current extent. A modest increase in these group sizes need not significantly affect the quality of education, but it

could certainly provide some relief in terms of teaching load – and thereby improve the attractiveness of a university teaching career, thus enhancing faculty rejuvenation.

Similar results could be achieved by greater use of instructional approaches that do not require the constant presence of an instructor, such as utilizing the Internet and other contemporary information and communication technologies (ICT). Some of this is now happening at BSMU, and we would urge the management to promote and facilitate more of it – especially by those (often younger) faculty members who are inclined in this direction already.

Supplementary Enhancement. Another “handle” for fostering the attraction and retention of able scholars as university professors is to provide various enrichments in their work situations. By this we mean the offering of inducements that make their jobs more interesting, enjoyable, and easier – especially in relation to alternative employment settings. We understand that, notwithstanding the University’s challenging financial circumstances, its managers are now able to accrue some limited discretionary funds and allocate them in productive ways to help meet priority needs (erecting the sports complex and creating the computer network are examples that were mentioned to us).

It is our recommendation that, to the fullest extent possible, such resources be appropriated in the interest of faculty rejuvenation. For instance, a fund could be established under management’s jurisdiction to which professors could apply on a competitive basis for grants to purchase desirable professional equipment (e.g., computers) and materials (e.g., books), to support travel costs and Internet access, or to offer salary bonuses and retirement incentives. These grants could be awarded in recognition of exceptional performance, thereby serving the purposes of both quality improvement and faculty rejuvenation.

University Profile. Finally, a university’s ability to attract and retain good faculty members depends to a considerable extent on the opinion people have of that institution – its reputation and prestige. Employees naturally like to be associated with a workplace that is widely known and well respected among those whose views they value, be they fellow scholars, community leaders, or friends, relatives and neighbours. Thus, a positive public profile can be instrumental in pursuing faculty rejuvenation.

There are two essential stages in achieving such a profile, the first of which is to provide a high-quality “product” and to garner some external verification, validation, and affirmation of its superiority. We believe that BSMU has already accomplished this to a considerable degree – through such means as its designation by government as the nation’s principal medical university, its selection by some renowned international institutions as an exchange partner, and its now close association with the Salzburg Seminar. The second phase is to ensure that this stature is broadly recognized – i.e., that its “product” is well “marketed”. To achieve this, a skillful and continual promotion campaign is necessary – which requires the expertise of a professional public relations specialist. We noted that the University does not currently have a central

office devoted exclusively to this communications function, and we urge consideration of establishing such a capability (even if it initially involves only a single officer with the requisite competencies). If effective, this initiative not only would contribute to the enhancement of faculty rejuvenation by improving the attractiveness of BSMU as a place to work but it also could stimulate an expansion of the institution's international relations by increasing the countries in which its good name is known.

Representative Students' Views

During our visit we had the distinct pleasure of meeting for almost two hours with about twenty students chosen by their Deans to represent various Faculties, some of whom were leaders of student scientific societies. We were immediately impressed with their courtesy and candour, their insight and commitment, and their happiness and pride in being students at BSMU. We began by explaining our mission and inviting them to express any views that they would like us to convey (anonymously, of course) in our report to the Rector – an invitation that clearly encouraged them to be critical, which means that the following comments should be considered as being offered constructively by generally satisfied individuals.

The majority of concerns they expressed reflect the challenging financial circumstances in which the University must operate and the constraints imposed by governmental regulation, rather than dissatisfaction with institutional management; indeed, we know that many of them are shared by the BSMU leadership. Thus, with respect to curriculum students worry that they are required to study several subjects that will be of little value to them as medical practitioners (including various humanities disciplines) with some of them expressing a preference for the western approach in which such studies precede admission to schools of medicine – and conversely, that they have too little opportunity for clinical practice during their program (and the practical skills they need are difficult to develop because of the limited access they have to convenient clinical settings, given the initiative and effort necessary to find appropriate locations). Correspondingly, they would prefer to begin their specialized studies and clinical experiences earlier in the program and to have more and better research tools available for their use on campus. They do not appreciate having to purchase their own equipment at an early stage in the program (particularly in dentistry) and they lamented a paucity in the provision of medical information – both through the library to journals and through computers to the Internet – especially in the English language. They also dislike the government's practice of delaying its decision on where they will practice until the end of their program and its failure to take their preferences into account in making that determination.

When asked the hypothetical question of what their spending priorities would be if substantial new funding were to become available to the University, their most common response was to establish a teaching hospital on campus where they could conveniently practice their clinical skills. Also, these students (like the University's administration) wish that more opportunities for study periods at medical institutions in other countries were available to them.

With respect to student participation in university affairs, they expressed satisfaction with the opportunities for them to attend faculty council meetings through representation from their scientific societies, but they complained that the agenda items seldom include issues related to students' concerns. Similarly, they were happy that students can contribute items to the University's weekly newspaper – but one wonders if a distinct student-produced weekly (or monthly) might add a worthwhile enhancement to their freedom of expression. The many examples of small-group instruction at BSMU and effective use of the Internet and multimedia approaches by some (although too few, it was claimed) of the younger professors were commended, but they noted the lack of a systematic and regular approach to student evaluation of teaching performance – although it was pointed out to us that some teachers initiate such reviews themselves and that, if students seriously complain about a faculty member's teaching, something is usually done to rectify the situation. Should the University become interested in introducing a program for student evaluation of teaching, as is done in most western universities, our team leader would be pleased to provide an example of such a system that works well at his own institution.

Conclusion

The conclusions of our Visiting Team begin by expressing our respect for the Belarusian State Medical University. The commitment of the Rector and Vice Rectors, deans, students, and staff to solving the problems of the University and their openness in discussing matters with the Visiting Team are clear indications of a dynamic academic community. We are convinced that BSMU is an outstanding medical university with a clear vision as both a national centre of medical studies and a member of the international university community.

It is important to mention that in the contemporary world of growing international cooperation and globalization, BSMU is strategically very well positioned to pursue its academic goals. Being the leading medical university in a country with a population of ten million people, it may rely on both the potential of the youth of Belarus and the long traditions of the University. We are equally convinced that the University can develop and strengthen its status not only as a leading national institution but also as an international medical university, provided that its cooperation with other universities and medical higher educational institutions is developed and deepened. It became clear to us that BSMU builds first of all on the strong traditions of medical education in the country by placing emphasis on the quality of education. BSMU has recently shaped and continues to reorganize its academic life and internal structure by analyzing the modern trends in medical higher education worldwide. However, we have the impression that in recent years the pace of change and reforms has slowed somewhat.

The Visiting Team advises the University to continue with its planned reforms, combining the institution's own historic development with international experience in countries both close and distant. It is extremely important to take into account the international trends in higher education policy, on both

the global and European scales. It is clear that higher educational systems as well as universities must develop towards increased comparability, compatibility, and transparency. For the Republic of Belarus and BSMU it is important to consider the participation of Belarusian higher education in the Bologna Process, which is going to reshape fundamentally the European higher education area in the next decade. It is crucial to contribute to developing a higher education space and higher education culture that clearly reach beyond national boundaries. With other European countries becoming part of the Bologna process and the recent accession to it of the Russian Federation, it is essential for Belarusian universities to become actively involved in this movement as well.

The Bologna Process is aimed at increasing the compatibility of higher education systems while it supports the development of mutual trust and understanding among higher educational institutions, thus contributing to greater mobility of both students and academic staff. The Visiting Team is convinced that BSMU can clearly gain from this process. At the same time, we wish to express our clear understanding that the future of any university in any country is first of all dependent on the direct experience and best understanding of the institution itself. No international experience, advice, network, or organization can provide ready-made solutions. External contributions can be useful only if they are critically analyzed from the point of view of an institution's own experiences and policies. From our discussions with the Rector and Vice Rectors, the deans and students, we were convinced that BSMU has every opportunity to make use of that experience and become an outstanding member of the university community in Europe and worldwide.

To summarize our previous advice, we encourage the University to continue with its reforms by analyzing and modernizing the curricula and by reconsidering the study loads as well as the content and methods of instruction. We think that the institutional autonomy of Belarusian universities in both academic and financial matters needs to be strengthened - not as an aim in itself, but rather as a means to enhance the University's capacity to develop better quality programs and make more efficient use of its resources. We think that it would also be beneficial to pay more attention to increasing the flexibility of internal regulations and easing the pressure of external regulations, with respect to both the curriculum and the organization of studies. More active involvement of students and other social partners in the University's strategic planning process could also contribute to the aim of becoming an academically stronger institution.

An evident problem is the need for rejuvenation of the academic staff of the university. The members of the Visiting Team understand clearly the complexity of this issue. However, it is unmistakable that the long-term success of any academic institution is crucially dependent on its capacity for attracting young people to pursue an academic career as junior and senior faculty members in addition to a professional career in the medical field, and we have made several recommendations toward this end.

We had no chance to discuss in detail the issues of research during our meetings at the University. Being aware of the research work done there, however, we think that the research profile has to be further strengthened and internationalized. The current excellent co-operation with Münster and Nagasaki may be used as good starting points. In this process, the need for more interdisciplinarity has to be considered. As a specialized medical university, BSMU's contacts with the broad spectrum of biomedical research as well as research in other areas of the natural sciences are more limited than those in classical multi-faculty universities. We think due attention has to be paid to this limitation and cooperation with other universities and research institutions must be pursued.

Last but not least, members of the Visiting Team would like to thank most sincerely the Rector of the Belarusian State Medical University, Professor Pavel Bespalchuk and First Vice Rector, Professor Sergei Denisov, as well as other members of the Rector's team for their hospitality during the visit, for the preparation work done in advance of our visit, and for our participation in the cultural program that we enjoyed so much. We would also like to thank the deans of the Faculties and all the members of the staff who participated in our discussions; their open and cooperative way of presenting the daily life and problems of their Faculties helped us to gain a better insight into the University and also strengthened our conviction that the Belarusian State Medical University is a dynamic, modern institution, capable of addressing and tackling both daily and strategic problems. We are especially thankful for the opportunity to meet with the students, who are so proud of their institution; they also very frankly expressed their concerns, which the Visiting Team understood to have been intended for the improvement of BSMU.

We wish the leaders of BSMU every success as they continue to guide the institution toward a future of continued achievement and accomplishment, and we stand ready to provide further assistance to them through the Salzburg Seminar, should it be requested of us. We look forward to observing the continued progress of this fine University with interest and admiration.

Visiting Advisors:



Robin FARQUHAR (Team Leader) is professor of public policy and administration and served as president of Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada from 1989 to 1996. He was vice chancellor and president of the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba from 1981 to 1989, and has chaired the Canadian Bureau for International Education. Dr. Farquhar is former president of both the Canadian Society for the Study of Education and the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration. He received B.A. (honors) and M.A. degrees in English from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. in education administration from the University of Chicago, Illinois, USA. Dr. Farquhar is a member of the Universities Project Advisory Committee.



Jaak AAVIKSOO was minister of education of Estonia from 1995 to 1996 and currently serves as rector of Tartu University. The vice rector from 1992 to 1995, he remains a professor of optics and spectroscopy. He was an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the Max-Planck-Institute in Stuttgart, Germany from 1987 to 1988, a guest professor at University Paris VI in 1991 and 1993, and research professor at Osaka University in 1993. Dr. Aaviksoo received a Ph.D. in physics from the Estonian Academy of Sciences and is currently one of its elected members. Dr. Aaviksoo is a member of the Universities Project Advisory Committee.



Pero LUCIN is vice rector for organization at the University of Rijeka, where he also serves as professor in the Department of Physiology and Immunology of the Medical Faculty. He is also professor of cell biology at the Medical Faculty of the University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dr. Lucin was vice president of the Croatian Immunological Society for four years and has served as guest scientist at the Institute for Virology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He holds M.D. and Ph.D. degrees in biomedicine from the University of Rijeka.



Anna GLASS is the coordinator for Central and Eastern Europe, Visiting Advisors Program, Universities Project. She began working at the Salzburg Seminar as a program assistant in 1999 and joined the Universities Project in 2000. Originally from Maine, Ms. Glass has lived in Switzerland and France during the course of her studies. She is a graduate of Middlebury College, Vermont, where she studied French, German, and English literature.

Schedule of the Visit:

Time	Topic	Participants	Location
Monday, November 10			
	Team Arrivals		
15.30-16.30	Preparatory meeting	VAP team	Hotel
18.30-22.00	Welcome Dinner	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Head of International Department	Restaurant
Tuesday, November 11			
9.30-10.30	Meeting with the Rector, Presentation of the program.	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice-Rectors (2), Deans (5)	BSMU
10.30-12.30	Tour of University Faculties	VAP team, Deans (5)	BSMU
12.30-13.30	Lunch		BSMU
13.30-15.30	International Students; University Structure	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice-Rectors (2), Deans (5), Head of International Department	BSMU
15.30-16.00	Coffee break		BSMU
16.30-17.30	Debriefing meeting	VAP team	Hotel
18.00-19.00	Dinner		Restaurant
Wednesday, November 12			
9.00-10.30	University Structure: Faculties of the University	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice-Rector for Science, Head of International Department, Deans (5)	BSMU
10.30-11.00	Coffee break		BSMU
11.00-12.30	University Structure (continued)	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice-Rector for Science, Head of International Department, Professors (4)	BSMU
12.30-13.30	Lunch		BSMU
13.30-15.00	Practical usage of international collaboration	VAP team, First-Vice Rector, Deans (5), Vice-Rector for Study, Head of International Department, Students	BSMU
15.00-15.15	Coffee break		BSMU
15.15-16.30	Meeting with students	VAP team, Head of International Department, Students from each Faculty (15)	BSMU
17.00-18.30	Dinner		BSMU
19.00-22.00	Culture program		Opera house
Thursday, November 13			
9.30-11.30	Finance (sources of income, University budget)	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice Rectors (2), Deans (5), Head of International Department	BSMU
11.30-12.00	Coffee break		BSMU
12.00-13.00	Academic freedom	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice Rectors (2), Deans (5), Head of International Department	BSMU
13.00-14.00	Lunch		BSMU

13.30-16.00	Preparation of the Report	VAP team	BSMU
16.30-17.30	Presentation of the Report to the Rector	VAP team, Rector, First-Vice Rector, Vice- Rectors (all) , Head of International Department, Deans (5)	BSMU
18.30-22.00	Farewell Dinner	VAP team Rector, First-Vice Rector, Head of International Department	Culture Center, BSMU
Friday, November 14			
9.00-12.00	Culture Program: Chatyn	VAP team, Staff of International Department	
	Departures	VAP team	Airport "Minsk1,2"

University Participants:

Rector: Professor Pavel Bepalchuk
 First Vice Rector: Professor Sergei Denisov
 Vice Rector for Science: Professor Sergei Kabak
 Vice Rector for Learning: Professor Vladimir Manulik
 Vice Rector for Clinical Work: Professor Alexander Prochorov
 Vice Rector for Organization Work: Mr. Victor Badrak
 Head of Department for International Cooperation: Professor Vassili Roudenok
 Deputy Head of Department for International Cooperation: Dr Michail Golcev

All Deans of Faculties:

Professor Leonid Kasceвич (General Medicine)
 Professor Anatolii Sicorski (Pediatric)
 Professor Nikolai Poloneichik (Dentistry)
 Professor Iosif Romanovski (Preventive Medicine)
 Professor Alexander Glinnik (Postgraduate Students)
 Professor Alexei Volotovski (Foreign Students)
 Professor Innessa Socolova (Preparatory Faculty)
 Professor Alla Sannikova (Preparatory Faculty for Foreign Students)

Heads of Departments:

Head of Department for Academic Work: Mr. Michail Stepanenko
 Deputy Head of Department for Academic Work: Mr. Victor Al'chimovich
 Head of Department for Economic Work: Ms. Elena Serzankova

Professors, Head of Departments:

Professor Boris Sluka (Histology)
 Professor Frantisek Vismont (Pathology)
 Professor Alexei Kubarko (Physiology)

Students and teachers of Belarusian State Medical University

THE UNIVERSITIES PROJECT OF THE SALZBURG SEMINAR

Universities throughout the world are undergoing systemic changes in their governance, academic design, structure, and mission. From 1998 to 2003, the Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project focused on higher education reform in Central and East Europe, Russia, and the Newly Independent States as universities in these regions redefined their relationships with governments and try to become more integrated into the global intellectual community.

The Universities Project was a multi-year series of conferences and symposia convening senior representatives of higher education from the designated regions with their counterparts from North America and West Europe. Discussion in the Project's programs focused on the following themes:

- University Administration and Finance
- Academic Structure and Governance within the University
- Meeting Students' Needs, and the Role of Students in Institutional Affairs
- Technology in Higher Education
- The University and Civil Society

OBJECTIVES

Universities and other institutions of higher learning are seeking to reshape themselves in ways that will prepare them more fully for the twenty-first century. Even as these institutions are considering extensive systemic changes in their academic design, structure, and mission, all desire autonomy in governance and in their intellectual life. Accordingly, the Universities Project aimed to promote the higher education reform process by inviting senior administrators to participate in conferences and symposia concerning issues of university management, administration, finance, and governance.

THE VISITING ADVISORS PROGRAM (VAP)

The Salzburg Seminar launched this enhanced aspect of the Universities Project in the autumn of 1998. Under this program, teams of university presidents and higher education experts visit universities in Central and East Europe and Russia at the host institutions' request to assist in the process of institutional self-assessment and change. By the end of 2003, more than sixty VAP visits will have taken place at universities in Central and East Europe and in Russia. The addition of the Visiting Advisors Program brought to the Universities Project an applied aspect and served to enhance institutional and personal relationships begun in Salzburg.

The Salzburg Seminar acknowledges with gratitude the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which provided funding for the Universities Project and the Visiting Advisors Program respectively.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information regarding the Salzburg Seminar's Visiting Advisors Program, the Universities Project, and Salzburg Seminar programs, please contact one of the Seminar's offices below.

Salzburg Seminar
Schloss Leopoldskron
Box 129
A-5010 Salzburg, Austria

Telephone: +43 662 839830
Fax: +43 662 839837

Salzburg Seminar
The Marble Works
P.O. Box 886
Middlebury, VT 05753 USA

Telephone: +1 802 388 0007
Fax: +1 802 388 1030

Salzburg Seminar website: www.salzburgseminar.org