

# **Two-Year US Institutions: A Model to Facilitate Access to Higher Education in Azerbaijan**

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## **§1. INTRODUCTION**

In order to support the process of modernization of higher education in Azerbaijan, this article attempts to shed light on issues that should be urgently addressed in institutions of higher education.

Nowadays experience and researches, focused on practical effectiveness and expansion of boundaries of availability of university education (see, for example, [1-4]), convinced us once again that it is possible and, moreover, necessary to speed up the process of qualitative development of the Azerbaijan universities by the reasonable adaptation of the competitive American models of higher education.

## **§2. BACKGROUND OF THE ARTICLE PROPOSAL AND ITS MOTIVATION<sup>1</sup>**

Azerbaijan population: about 8,730,000, including 1,070,000 youth of age 18-24, that makes 12.3% from all population; the capital city is Baku with population about two million. Besides capital, there are 8 cities in Azerbaijan, with population of more than 50,000 people.

GDP per capita (official exchange rate) was US\$5,404. The average wage was 261 manat (US\$326) per month or 3,132 manat (US\$3,912) per year (dollar USD - manat AZN exchange rate was stable as approximately USD/AZN = 0.8)

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<sup>1</sup> Resource of the used statistics (2008): The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan:

<http://www.azstat.org/statinfo/education/az/034.shtml> February 26, 2010.

*School education:*

Secondary education consists of total eleven years in Azerbaijan. At the end, students receive a Certificate of General Education (equivalent of a High School Diploma). In order to continue education as an undergraduate student at the accredited University, they must pass a National Entrance Examination.

After 9th Grade, students may opt for specialized secondary education and continue their education at professional lyceums, where they study for three years, or technical and vocational schools, where they study for one or two years. Professional lyceums offer both vocational and general education courses while the others only offer technical/vocational courses. After passing a state final examination, students are given the title of the "minor specialists".

In 2008, 150,655 students finished secondary education in Azerbaijan; 28,765 of them were enrolled in universities with 25,622 in state, and 3,143 in private universities, correspondently. Thus, just 19% of students completed secondary education had become university students.

*Higher education:*

After the restoration of its independence in 1991, Azerbaijan has started to change its obsolete education system. Before 1991, all universities in Azerbaijan were established exclusively by the government; since 1991, new public and private universities began to appear in the country and among them only few of the private universities demonstrated competitiveness.

Azerbaijan is still a country with a transition economy, and this transition character is influencing its education system with the corresponding restrictions and barriers.

At the same time, Azerbaijan is a country with the world-record growth of gross domestic product in the past years<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, the issue of the co-ordination of higher education with rapidly changing market demands becomes critical.

The Azerbaijan higher education system has the following structure: a basic two-level professional training, which is carried out consistently as a four-year-long baccalaureate, completed with a bachelor degree and a two-year-long master's program, completed with a master's degree, which can be followed by a three-year-long post-graduate education to carry out scientific research, leading to a doctoral (PhD) degree.

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<sup>2</sup> The State Committee of Statistics: <http://www.azstat.org/macroeconomy/indexen.php> or UNDP Azerbaijan Development Bulletin: <http://www.un-az.org/undp/bulnews53/en3.php>

In 2008, there were 34 public and 14 private higher institutions in Azerbaijan located mainly in the capital city, Baku, (to be more exact, only 7 small universities are located outside of Baku); there were about 12,500 professors and teachers of higher education in the public sector; and 2,000 in the private sector. Approximately 1,000 of them had a doctor of sciences degree, and 5,570 had a candidate of sciences degree (similar to PhD). Due to the low pay in the education sector, the majority of the teachers had to work several jobs at various universities. The student faculty ratio for day-time education was, on average, 9:1. The total number of students was 136,587 with 115,994 students enrolled in public universities and 20,593 in private universities; approximately 83% of all students were enrolled in public universities.

It is easy to calculate, that only 2% of all population was university students, and student population ratio is about 156 students on 10,000 inhabitants.

Among the reasons of such low parameters characterizing population's involvement in the process of obtaining of higher education we shall note the following:

- presence of a wide layer of the population with limited financial means, not allowing them to receive higher education in universities;
- a problem of geographical availability of universities for main part of population;
- hyper-concentration of universities in one city - Baku.

Thus, **the essence of the existing problem:** university education is not widely accessible to population (see student population ratio and average wage above) and still very formal and detached from practical reality.

This double problem should be recognized as serious challenge which is lowering the competitiveness of the educational environment of Azerbaijan.

In this connection, it is necessary to attract new and effective forms/formats of higher education which would allow carrying out more flexible policy on expansion of availability of higher education especially for regions of the country. Learning on tendencies of the past years development process of the American higher education sphere, on the one hand, and bear in mind currently stage of the process of modernization of the education system in Azerbaijan, on the another hand, this article concentrates on the fundamental goal which is expanding availability and strengthening of competitiveness of higher education in Azerbaijan on the basis of experience of the USA two-year colleges (also called as community colleges, technical colleges, county colleges, junior colleges or a city colleges).

### §3. AMERICAN EXPERIENCE ON DEVELOPMENT OF WIDELY ACCESSIBLE FORMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE FORMAT OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

*Some general official facts concerning Higher Education environment of the USA with population about 304,060,000 in 2008<sup>3</sup>:*

- The most common degrees include associate, professional, bachelors, masters, and doctorate. There are over 7,000 higher education institutions in the U.S.
- The percentage of high school graduates enrolling in college in the fall following high school graduation was 68.6% in 2008 (compare with 19% in Azerbaijan).
- Two-year colleges (further - community colleges) usually offer an associate's degree such as Associate of Arts (A.A.). Community colleges are often have open admissions, with low tuition.
- Four-year colleges (which usually have a larger number of students and offer a greater range of studies than two-year colleges) offer a bachelor's degree, such as Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.S.).
- Many students earn an associate's degree at a two-year institution before transferring to a four-year institution for another two years to earn a bachelor's degree.
- And more detailed valuable for this project information (in 2008):
- Public 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions' students (approximately): 6,470,000.
- Private 2-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions' students (approximately): 308,000.
- Total: 6,778,000.
- Public 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions' students (approximately): 7,092,000.

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<sup>3</sup> Used sources: NCHEMS Information Center for Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis  
<http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?submeasure=331&year=2007&level=nation&mode=data&state=0>  
<http://nces.ed.gov/FastFacts/display.asp?id=372>  
[http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?\\_bm=y&-state=gct&-ds\\_name=PEP\\_2008\\_EST&-\\_box\\_head\\_nbr=GCT-T1&-mt\\_name=&-\\_caller=geoselect&-geo\\_id=&-format=US-40&-\\_lang=en](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-state=gct&-ds_name=PEP_2008_EST&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-T1&-mt_name=&-_caller=geoselect&-geo_id=&-format=US-40&-_lang=en)  
<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/projections/projections2018/tables.asp>

- Private 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions' students (approximately): 4,330,000.

Total: 11,422,000.

Thus, 2-year and 4-year degree-granting postsecondary institutions' students total were 18,200,000 in 2008.

It is easy to estimate that 3.7% of all population were 4-year university students with student population ratio was about 376 students on 10,000 inhabitants and 2.2% from all population was 2-year college students with student population ratio was about 223 students on 10,000 inhabitants, correspondently. Total 5.9% from all population were enrolled in the higher education with student population ratio was about 599 students on 10,000 inhabitants

In the past years, the USA statistics shows, that the role of two-year colleges as a tool of more accessible form of higher education in the USA grows from year to year (currently, there are about 1,200 two-year colleges; enrollments: 2000 - 5,948,000; 2005 - 6,488,000; 2007 - 6,494,000; 2008 - 6,574,000).

It is very important and useful for Azerbaijan case study to know that "historically, the mission of community colleges has been to provide postsecondary schooling - usually through open admissions - for low-income students who have few other options. Most community-college students are employed adults who attend classes part-time; according to some studies, more than half need remedial courses before they can tackle college-level work."<sup>4</sup>

According to the president Obama: "In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as jobs requiring no college experience. We will not fill those jobs, or keep those jobs on our shores, without the training offered by community colleges".<sup>5</sup> The USA administration openly demonstrates growing importance of the two-year colleges for national economy and society, and is going to provide US\$12 billion to two-year colleges.

In general, the attitude of the USA government to two-year colleges (which are much cheaper than universities) is based on crucial necessity of strengthening of

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/education/15college.html>

The New York Times; "A Boon to 2-Year Colleges, Affirming Their Value" By Tamar Lewin, Published: July 14, 2009

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/15/education/15college.html>

The New York Times; "Obama Attacks on Economy and Seeks Billions for Community Colleges" By Jim Rutenberg, Published: July 14, 2009

competitiveness of the American economy which has reached that stage of development when the average level of knowledge of workers of different professions should not be lower, than the knowledge provided by 2-year colleges.

The American format of two-year college is analyzed by education experts of other countries in order to adapt this model to the conditions of these countries. Efficiency of this system of colleges becomes the reason of accruing the world interest to it. Such countries as Korea, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Venezuela, the Netherlands, and China create system of 2-year colleges of the American model.

#### **§4. WHAT SHOULD BE RESEARCHED AS OBJECTIVES, STRATEGY AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES?**

Research of strategy and practices of American two-year colleges with the purpose of subsequent adaptation of this experience for elaboration a model of two-year college for education system of Azerbaijan is urgent (see [5 - 7] in Bibliography). For this task, the following principal questions/objectives, concerning American two-year colleges, have to be investigated:

- What is an enrollment policy?
- What are cost of tuition and financial aid?
- What is a structure of educational programs?
- What is a management of 2-year colleges?
- How are organized studying demands of employers?
- How are involved instructors - practitioners for teaching?
- What are opportunities for graduates of 2-year colleges to continue their education in university? What is the transferring credits mechanism? What are demands needed for affiliation with university for transfer favorite? What is a transfer program?
- What is statistics of employment of graduates of 2-year colleges?
- What are general requirements for international students (in particular - for citizens of Azerbaijan)?

Moreover, some additional objectives could be outlined as follows:

1. To study the linkages between 2-year college and local Community;

2. To assess the role of the Government and Community in the development of 2-year colleges;
3. To learn:
  - how 2-year colleges staffed and funded?
  - what forms 2-year colleges accreditation takes?

As a whole the various dimensions of 2-year colleges should be investigated including functioning of educational process and its financial maintenance, technical maintenance of educational process, principles of formation of educational programs and their maintenance with a teaching materials (textbooks, articles, abstracts, etc.), forms of state control and the basic educational standards, the mechanism of how educational process reacts to the demands of the local markets, etc.

## §5. CONCLUSION

A working model of the American format's 2-year college, elaborated in details for its implementation in Azerbaijan, will be an efficient and practical achievement.

Possible scenarios of the model's realization.

*The first scenario.* On the base of affiliated university/ies in the USA, a 2-year college will be created in Azerbaijan with observance of all standards of the model, including requirements shown to international students in the USA. The main language of education will be English. It will allow graduates of this college to transfer directly in affiliated university in the USA in order to complete a bachelor's degree in two additional years.

*The second scenario.* On the base of affiliated university/ies in Azerbaijan, a 2-year college will be created with observance of all standards of the model. The main language of education will be Azerbaijani. It will allow graduates of this college to transfer directly in affiliated university in Azerbaijan in order to complete a bachelor's degree in two additional years.

*Mixed scenario.* There will be Azerbaijani division with the first scenario and American division with the second scenario.

Admission in this American formation college should be carried out by means of existing uniform National Entrance Examination for universities; an applicant should mark in introductory documents the corresponding two-year college.

The most favorable variant of realization of the model of the American format's 2-year college in Azerbaijan is possible through the partnership of three socially significant parties:

- **State** (possibly Ministry of Education; Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism; Ministry of Economic Development; Ministry of Agriculture; state university/ies),
- **Business Community** (possibly local companies, enterprises and private universities), and
- **Local Authorities** (including municipalities).

And finally, long-term effects from the mentioned model's implementation could be:

- Expansion of availability of higher education in the country, especially for the population of Azerbaijan regions;
- Strengthening of competitiveness of the system of higher education;
- An opportunity to use an operational experience for creation of a network of American format's 2-year colleges in Azerbaijan.

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## **Summary**

### **Two-Year US Institutions: A Model to Facilitate Access to Higher Education in Azerbaijan**

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This article devote to the fundamental goal which is expanding availability and strengthening of competitiveness of higher education in Azerbaijan on the basis of experience of the USA two-year community colleges.