

Igor Greenwald

**A University's Rebirth:
International Kiev-Mohyla Academy
mixes Ukrainian nationalism
with Western-style teaching ***

A top the university's main building, a quotation from Lenin – left over from the Soviet era – trumpets the dominant role of the Communist Party. Inside, officials of the institution are working diligently to make sure those days do not return.

This is the new Kiev-Mohyla Academy, and it could teach an old Bolshevik a thing or two about revolutions. The pedantic higher-education system inherited by Ukraine from the defunct Soviet Union has never seen anything quite like it.

The Mohyla Academy is at once Ukraine's oldest and one of its youngest universities. Founded by 17th-century Orthodox priests and shut down by 19th-century Russian masters, the academy was revived in 1992 to educate the newly independent nation's academic elite, its leaders for the 21st century.

Like most Eastern European reform efforts, the academy is very much a work in progress. There is still no master plan, no endowment, and hardly anything that can be called a budget.

But Mohyla has come a long way in the four years since a few liberal academics promised its rebirth. Back then, there was no money, no campus, not even a phone line. Now the institution has three faculties, 900 students – who are considered among the brightest in the nation – and its first handful of alumni.

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For its curriculum, it borrowed heavily from the American liberal-arts tradition.

For its one-square-block campus, Mohyla reclaimed the original academy's buildings and grounds from a school for naval commissary – officers responsible for political indoctrination. (The commissars, however, have thus far refused to relinquish a piece of property adjoining the campus that also has been claimed by Mohyla.)

An Anti-Communist Activist

Classes started only 12 months after plans to reopen the institution were hatched. That year of preparation proved more difficult than anticipated. “We simply didn’t realize then what it would take to revive the academy, to create a university,” says Viatcheslav Brioukhovetsky, Mohyla’s president. “If we had, maybe we would not have tried.”

Like the other founders of the new institution, Mr. Brioukhovetsky was an activist in Rukh, a coalition of democratically minded Ukrainian nationalists that was formed to oppose Communist and Russian rule. The group’s members saw the re-establishment of Ukraine’s once-famous academy as their contribution to nation building.

The original, 17th-century Mohyla via academy demonstrated that it was possible to combine national consciousness with intellectual curiosity. Its founder, Petro Mohyla, an Orthodox bishop, shunned the staid Byzantine educational model then dominant in Ukraine and patterned his academy on Europe’s Jesuit institutions. This helped the academy to become a scholarly powerhouse that attracted students from all over Eastern Europe. Yet it maintained its distinctly Ukrainian heritage and its close ties to the Cossacks, who gave the country its first taste of statehood.

After the 1991 declaration of Ukrainian independence, those traditions helped insure support for the revived academy from nationalist politicians. They also attracted more-selfless patrons, from George Soros, the Hungarian-American financier and philanthropist, to a local peasant woman, whose contribution came in the form of strawberries. Zbigniew Brzezinski lent his name and time to the college’s international advisory board.

So far, the institution has managed to balance its twin commitments to internationalism and Ukrainian nationalism. It has two official languages of instruction, Ukrainian and English, and applicants must have a command of both. Four years of English-language study

and two of a second foreign language are required to graduate. Chinese and Japanese are offered, but Russian – the language of Ukraine’s former rulers and one that still drowns out Ukrainian in the streets of Kiev – is not.

System of entrance exams

From the outset, the academy was determined to avoid the web of nepotism and corruption that has ensnared Ukraine in general and its education system in particular (*see story on following page*). It set up a system of entrance examinations that are graded anonymously. To prevent versions of the tests from popping up for sale in the city’s markets, administrators duplicate them in house, in the dead of night. Today, Mohyla is widely recognized as one of the very few higher-education institutions in

Ukraine’s Re-Opened Kiev-Mohyla Academy takes a Western-Style Approach to Education

Ukraine where admission decisions are based on a student’s ability rather than on cash.

“It is a terribly complicated problem in our country,” says Ser-hiy Ivaniouk, Mohyla’s rector. “We all have friends and relatives, and we all have lived by other rules. That’s why we have made a lot of enemies. Because when my friend comes to me and says, ‘My daughter is going to apply,’ and I can’t do anything special for him, no matter how much he trusts me, he stops trusting me. He does not believe that I, as a rector, cannot help a friend’s daughter. It doesn’t fit the old Soviet mindset.”

Institutional Autonomy

In other ways, too, Mohyla has more in common with Western institutions than with local ones. It is among the few colleges here that have won complete autonomy from the Ministry of Education. The real power at Mohyla is held by a Senate, made up of trustees and faculty members, which is responsible for electing the president and the rector.

The institution also has introduced the concept of elective courses. “We saw it as a step toward democracy,” says Mr. Ivaniouk. “We had to give students a choice.”

Traditionally, he says, a Ukrainian university student enters a rigidly prescribed program. “He knows what he will have to study for

the next five years, and can't stray at all. He travels a narrow hallway, and to make a turn is to slam into a wall. We wanted the student to decide his own fate, to pick his own courses."

Mohyla still has more requirements than most U.S. colleges do. But the fact that it offers any choice at all, that it encourages debate and individuality, clearly marks it as an outsider in a system that still places a higher value on rote memorization than on critical thinking.

Strained Relations

In large part because Mohyla has dared to be different, its relations with the education establishment are strained. Mr. Brioukhovetsky, the academy's president, says he no longer attends the meetings of the Ukrainian rectors' council. "I went several times. The people are predominantly those who were appointed by the Communist Party. And they don't want to change anything. Why should they? They have a quiet life."

Ukraine's education officials reciprocate. Yuri Bugai, until recently the deputy education minister, claims that Mohyla lags behind Kiev State University and wonders what niche the academy could possibly hope to fill.

Mohyla's answer is that the system is full of niches, and that it is seeking to fill more than one of them. Already it has opened the country's first graduate school of social work. Next year it will join the few institutions in Ukraine offering master's degrees.

Roland Pietsch, a philosophy professor from Germany who has lectured at Mohyla, says the fledgling institution cannot be compared to a Western university: It needs more expertise, more research, and more time.

He praises the intellectual curiosity and motivation of its students. But he notes that they sometimes wait until the end of the lecture to ask questions that the Western counterparts would pose immediately. "They are the children of this country," Mr. Pietsch says, "and the professors, too. They are familiar with freedom, human rights. But the process in the Western world to find these principles was long and hard. It is not possible to take over only the results of this process. You have to repeat it, more or less."

Mohyla's students are trying. They have their own government, a television show, and a film magazine. They also are learning ways to finance such activities – they are avid grant seekers.

Money is tight. Annual tuition at Mohyla is \$200, a considerable sum in a country where the average worker earns \$50 a month. The institution relies on the government for three-quarters of its \$2.5-million annual operating budget, but depending on the all-but-empty national treasury is a risky business.

Taxes Discourage Donations

Mohyla's president tells of private donors in Ukraine who can wire \$100,000 to the institution's bank account on an impulse. But such benefactors are rare, in part because high taxes and arcane regulations have driven many businesses into the shadow economy.

Many of the institution's other problems are tied to Mohyla's transition from an intellectual experiment to a full-blown university. But such difficulties don't perturb a college convinced of its lofty destiny. When last year's freshmen were polled on their career plans, 11 per cent said they planned to seek Ukraine's presidency.
