

Poland's Transition in Business Education
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Abstract

Prior to Poland's transition from central planning to a market system, which began in 1990, schools of business were non-existent in that country. Instead, university level instruction on economics during the socialist period was closely tied to ideological priorities, and limited to imparting skills suitable for planned economy. All universities were owned by the state, heavily politicized, and solely focused on supporting a centrally planned economy. There was no meaningful attempt to impart, or even describe, market oriented theories, leaving Poland almost wholly without the basic human capital needed to run a market economy.

This backdrop makes higher education reform particularly crucial for Poland's continued economic development and, to date, marketization has fundamentally transformed that sector. Poland's current higher education system is now compatible with those of many Western European countries, relies on standard Western curricula, and enjoys significant academic autonomy, which exceeds that of some more developed Western countries. This sector has also seen an unprecedented growth in economics and business programs enrollments, along with the formation of private universities. Indeed, the depth and rapidity of Poland's progress in reforming higher education stands in marked contrast to that of other former centrally planned economies, and may serve as an interesting case study for potential reforms in Russia and other former Soviet republics.

In this paper we describe the progress and effects of several major reforms in Poland's higher business education, examining changes in funding, potential funding sources, the structure of faculty governance, educational programs and degrees granted, the formation of new curricula, and Poland's system of faculty promotion.

Following this examination, we identify and discuss a number of continuing systemic obstacles to further progress in this area, and discuss how they might be addressed. In addition, we apply Western metrics to assess and evaluate the impact of reform on the current and future quality of Poland's business education.

One consequence of Poland's transition to a market economy is its high level of governmental involvement in income redistribution policies, and a quasi-monopolistic position regarding the provision of such services as for example, health care, and quality higher education. Because these governmental policies have parallels in the experiences of European countries, those experiences provide insights into possible outcomes upon which various policy recommendations for Poland may be drawn.