

## **Ruslana Kostina: Do you feel like discriminated against?**

You will now think ‘Oh, you, Ukrainians, you are always complaining! What is it now you feel discriminated about?’

I would rather say this is not a complain, this is a great hope for future. Because you’ll never meet a better optimist than I am, as I always believe everything’s for the best! І все буде добре для КОЖНОГО з НАС :)

But to make things better we should be fully aware of our weak points. Let’s not be afraid of them! Let’s confess and distinguish them and be ready to change the situation!

There are lots of universities in Ukraine. All of them are different but stereotypes and conservatism are unfortunately the same.

I believe the worst problem is that the people on the top of university are mostly those from the times of socialism. They are not changed as they seem or pretend to be. They are the same: awfully afraid of all the new, creating around themselves teams of personal supporters, appointing ‘necessary people’, stealing vocational packages, using privileges, receiving endless money prizes, traveling, doing nothing, being terribly proud of their respectability. I can hardly believe they know who their students are, no matter if they are talented or not. Only ten years later when these students become known all over Ukraine or even over the world they consider it to be their own achievement. But is it really so?

I am convinced a new generation of administration should rule the universities, or there will be no crucial change!

Now, let’s take the system of education itself. I myself have nothing against the innovative Bologna process. It has lots of advantages and gives more opportunities to our students... But if only you saw the frightened eyes of our teachers when they look at these strange tables that give instructions how to count points... I should tell you every teacher creates his own system of evaluation. This is funny if not ridiculous! If only they were trained better we wouldn’t have this strange mixture of East and West.

Then about the teachers themselves. As for me I am studying at the Applied linguistics department. A year ago my group received a task. We were to create a portrait of an ideal teacher. As a result we got to know that each of us had different point of view. Second, there was no person like that who would meet everyone’s demands. Recently a young professional qualified and appropriate teacher has become a problem. Young people are afraid to teach as well as they are afraid to work for any state establishment or organization. To become a teacher, regardless all that system of vocations, social protection, retirement fund, almost means to agree to stay on the verge of poverty. While I am a student I am working part-time as a methodologist for my department and get 200hvn per month which is even not enough to get to the university. A common teacher can hardly receive twice of the salary of methodologist – about 800hvn. Further degrees can only miserably influence the number of banknotes received.

...But still I am looking forward to continue working on my grades and degrees to get an opportunity to teach, just because my heart is longing to it! I’ve said, I am an optimist :)

Because of all of that the level of teaching is decreasing, respect for teachers is becoming lower and less essential. Besides nowadays more and more students prefer working during their studies. This is another problem by the way. And if earlier teachers used to forbid their students to work, invented different punishments to prevent it, now they are becoming more and more loyal and understanding, providing their own children have to do the same. And this tendency can really be understood. We

all clearly know what the value of a diploma without work experience is, no matter how red it is. A number of companies even intentionally don't except workers with an excellent diploma being afraid he/she knows nothing except theory. So why struggling for this useless piece of paper then?

If you want my opinion I would suggest our universities to give their students a real practice. A lot of students are already ready to work; they are rather qualified and smart. If to give them proper guidance, a little money and great encouragement, they would work better than highly professional experienced workers who are tired of their day-to-day duties. Besides, there would be no lack of enthusiasm, activeness, fresh ideas, and gratitude in students' eyes.

As for me, this is the best way to combine theory with practice, keeping students in classrooms, especially if to consider this activity a work experience.

If to touch a financial side we will have to confess about lack of books in the libraries, lack of computer laboratories, modern equipment, absence of out-of-school activities, an insignificant stipendium, no holidays opportunities, not even mentioning poor sport facilities, awful organization of food providing, unbearable conditions in the dormitories, ancient conditions in the classrooms, bad organization of work etc. I would also like to touch the problem of scheduling separately. What do I mean? The subjects that are chosen to be taught in universities. Have you ever thought how many useless lessons we are attending? I am lucky to be studying at one of the most innovative departments of our university. But even here we have a lot of unnecessary subjects. I can agree with history, literature, religion, culture, philosophy, psychology, methodic of teaching, logic, etc. Still there are too many of them... Why studying pedagogics, economics, political science, sociology, law, higher mathematics, theory of probability, ecology, and especially civil defence, protection of labour, life and health protection??? I can assure you that students of almost all departments are obliged to study these 'useful' subjects. I myself have nothing against their importance. But what's the use of taking exam in protection of labour after the fourth year when there are more important things to be learnt, like Business English for example for which we have only one semester because of the lack of hours! I truly believe that first, compulsory subjects should not be substituted by some optional ones, and second, students are to have the freedom to choose optional classes up to their liking and plans for future.

As for the process of evaluation... I have already mentioned that each teacher chooses and invents their own system of evaluation. It is mostly subdued to their preferences and interpersonal relationships. It is well known that a person attending all classes is 99% likely to get the highest mark, especially if he is active enough, especially on the last years of studies, no matter how bright he is and how correct his answers are. Teachers are usually content enough with his activeness. I was plenty of times present on the seminars when students were talking just for talking and got excellent marks, while their groupmates, smart and intelligent, got nothing for not raising their hand or just because they were speaking in an unfriendly, not so-to-say smiling enough way. And it results in final marks. You are aware of this 'automat' phenomenon, when hardly everybody can explain why this person received his credit without passing the exam, and another one – didn't.

I would also like to mention the diploma and scientific works theme. First, there is an unofficial permission to use plagiarism, which is mildly called 'to use quotations' or 'to refer to a more authentic and reliable source'. But it doesn't change the essence. Besides, the teachers tend to be slightly interested in such works. First, they don't have time; second, they don't have desire. Besides they are not paid for reading our masterpieces, as they like to call it. They don't organize team work, cooperation of students and teachers, they don't hint on what to do or where to look for. I have just two explanations, either they don't know it themselves (which is inappropriate) or they have chosen the wrong profession if they are not interested in the most interesting things (which is even more awful). As a result, the majority of students' works are of a miserable quality and of a little interest to the scientific world, moreover students tend to loose interest in such kinds of activities. What else can be expected if they are not praised and not supported in their expectations?! Students just pass it

as another burden that should be done to receive a diploma.

I would offer special masterclasses, especially for those who are interested, and also a team work with individual tasks as a variant. It will on the one hand increase interest and involvement, and on the other, make an accent on importance and responsibility of each participant.

The time has come to describe the situation with international exchanges and co-operations. I don't know how it is in other universities, but mine is from the most ancient times, of deep socialism and communism, and as a matter of fact we don't have right to dream about dangerous West. Of course, it is not written on the walls, there are no official directives about that, but everyone knows about it, and when, for example, coming to the dean's office you ask for a seal that you're a student of this university, even not mentioning the aim of it, you become an enemy number one; from that crucial moment you are followed with suspicion, envy, anger, mockery and so on and so force. How dare you?! Magic words like 'America', 'Europe', 'trips', 'scholarships', 'grants', 'programs' create an effect of an explosion! ☺ You may try to check it! It is really funny. That's why advanced students should invent different methods how to get a desired confirmation of their status. Why is our administration so afraid of foreign countries?! May be because people who visit them will feel what the democracy really is, will understand the value of true education, will feel the falseness of our slogans and the blares of the trumpets, will have an opportunity to compare and to give own objective judgment of the situation. They explain it by telling that our education is anyway better, that there's no need to waste time anywhere else. But again, there are a lot of points to argue about! I am persuaded, if our administration have nothing to be afraid of, if they are so much sure of their superiority, then there are no reasons to hold back students who just want to know more. There is nothing wrong in broadening mind and horizons. As many cultures (as well as languages) you know, as many times you are the person.

But again, how strange it may seem, it is not encouraged to take part even in Ukrainian conferences! The lack of money is an official reason, the dislike to smart people is the real one. When I expressed my desire to take part in the TESOL conference this year I could hardly get a support. I don't know if the director of Humanitarian institute sighed this 'obscure' document, said his secretary looking through my application. When I entered her cabinet half a month later with another one to the Olympiad in linguistics I thought I will be eaten or bitten. I am happy that my first prize has saved me from this unoptimistic fate :)

But as you see, the situation is difficult. I have nothing but to advise students not to be frightened, to be ready to defend their position, principles and legitimate rights, paying no attention on how hard it is.

I would avoid with pleasure the issue of corruption, but I am afraid it is important. It begins with the very first day of studying, even earlier – before entrance exams (we all know how impossible it is to enter university without connections, relatives, money of influence), and continues up to... I am afraid, there is no 'up to'-point... and continues forever. This is the first situation where I am just confused to give any way out. It can only change with our mentality or when we all earn a lot enough not to sink for bribes.

And final and the most crucial issue for me is the atmosphere prevailing in our establishments or to call it right the mentality mentioned above. I don't want to describe it in details. We all know what is going about. I will just enumerate the things that are not appropriate for the place intended to bring up elite of nation: secretaries always shouting at you, rubbish near the university, chewing gums under the desks, smoke of cigarettes in the bathrooms, delays of salaries, disrespect. I will also want to express my deepest anger about the things our administration and teachers allow themselves to do. During the Orange revolution, there was a strong propaganda of a definite party – unfortunately even not a democratic one. And poor those students are who were against it and rejected to take part in different meetings and manifestos. I am sure, if you don't know how to do something right, better

keep it to yourself, but not make a fool of yourself and especially try to implant your own thoughts and ideas over other people. Better separate politics and education at all to prevent misunderstanding. I just at least don't want to be pursued for speaking Ukrainian! To tell you the truth I am tired of it.

May be now you are reading and have a thought what if I have invented half of the facts. I can agree to you. Rereading the essay it seems almost impossible for these issues to exist in real life. But just come to our university and see it your own eyes.... Oh no! Better not do it! You will just meet another portion of flattery, image of wealth, peace and order. Everybody is content, everybody is happy.

If to return back to the topic of the essay I still don't know if it is appropriate to call it discrimination, I would prefer another term – 'temporary inconvenience'!

No matter how desperate and doom the picture seems I believe that the situation will change. It is already changing, gradually but very powerfully. Times are changing, stereotypes are breaking. We just need time and more understanding, intelligent, enthusiastic young people ready to act and be not afraid to speak their minds. I wish to continue building my career here. I want my children to be happy with their education in Ukraine. I want them to wish to go abroad only to develop personally and to boast about the excellent education they received at home. I don't know for sure yet when I am going to give birth to my first child, but just wait a little bit. I assure you it is soon enough :)