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# Artes Liberales

*An Association for the Furtherance of Liberal Education and Democratic Values in Post-communist Societies*

**Artes Liberales** was founded in Prague in January 1997 as a cooperative endeavour of educational leaders from Central Europe, the Baltic States, and Ukraine. As a regional educational association, **Artes Liberales** sponsors regular professional exchanges and other collaborative programs to promote liberal education and democratic leadership among scholars and institutions of higher learning in post-communist countries. **Artes Liberales** encourages colleges and universities to adopt innovative liberal arts curricula as a counter-weight to the premature and often excessive specialization typical of communist and post-communist pedagogy. **Artes Liberales** is actively engaged in expanding cooperative ties with other liberal arts institutions, both in the region and in the United States.

Members of the **Artes Liberales** steering committee: Samuel Abrahám, Director, Society for Higher Learning, Bratislava; Jerzy Axer, Director, Centre for Studies in the Classical Tradition, Warsaw; Cesar Birzea (chairman), Director, Institute of Educational Sciences, Bucharest; Agnes Erdelyi, Director, Invisible College, Budapest; Serhiv Ivaniouk, Rector, University of Kiev-Mohyla Academy, Kiev; Peteris Lakis, Rector, Latvian Academy of Culture, Riga; Rein Raud, Rector, Estonian Humanities Institute, Tallinn; Jan Sokol, Minister of Education, Czech Republic, Deputy Director, Institute of Fundamental Learning, Prague; and Julia Stefanova, Executive Director, Bulgarian-American Commission for Educational Exchange, Sofia; Stasys Vaitekunas, Rector, Klaipeda University, Lithuania.

US Representative: Nicholas Farnham, Director of Educational Programs at **The Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation**, will act as the Foundation's program liaison with **Artes Liberales**. His New York office will serve temporarily as the organization's secretariat.

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## CONTENTS

**Alexander L. Gungov (Bulgaria):** Fostering Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe Through Liberal Education (p. 102)

**R. Shannon Duval (USA / Germany):** Liberal Education in a Changing World (p. 103)

**Jan Sokol (Czech Republic):** What is Liberal Education About? (p. 106)

**Harry C. Payne (USA):** What Liberal Arts Colleges Do? (p. 106)

Results of **Artes Liberales** Survey (cont.) (p. 107)

# *Artes Liberales* • *Artes Liberales*

ALEXANDER L. GUNGOV, SOFIA, BULGARIA

## **FOSTERING CIVIL SOCIETY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE THROUGH LIBERAL EDUCATION**

**T**he Third Fulbright conference on Education and Civil Society in the Post-Totalitarian World was held in the Bulgarian capital of Sofia on May 14-17. The meeting attracted prominent academics, policy makers, and businessmen from nine countries, including the United States, Bulgaria, and many other Central and Eastern European states.

Opening addresses were made by several highly respected guests including Mr. Vesselin Metodiev, Minister of Education and Vice Prime Minister of Bulgaria; Ms. Avis Bohlen, American Ambassador to Bulgaria; Professor Ivan Lalov, Rector of Sofia University; and Dr. Julia Watkins, President of the American University in Bulgaria. All agreed that the further development of civil society remains one of the most pressing needs for the region at the present time.

The development of civil society cannot be separated from the need for reforms in education. The countries in Central and Eastern Europe are strongly committed to completing their societal transformations and to joining the European Union and NATO. For these reasons, these nations need to cultivate a new generation of entrepreneurs, civil servants, professionals and academics.

The keynote lecture, *The Post-Totalitarian Condition of Education*, was presented by Professor Georgy Fotev, Director of the Bulgarian Institute of Sociology. In this wide-ranging assessment of the current challenges and prospects for educational reforms, Professor Fotev addressed a variety of issues, including the relevance of different educational models to current local conditions; reconciling national and religious identities with democratic values of tolerance and diversity; the changing role of the social sciences and humanities in today's global world, and the prospects for instituting liberal arts education in Central and Eastern Europe.

A theme common to many of the discussions was that citizens should be educated not only for freedom but for responsibility as well. The liberal arts tradition, and the interdisciplinary approach that inspires it, offers a broader range of intellectual opportunity and encourages students to develop skills in critical thinking, which will better prepare them to meet the challenges of developing and sustaining civil society and democratic

participation. The totalitarian system of education did not teach students to make distinctions between fact and opinion, nor did it encourage them to develop critical thinking or individual initiative to undertake social action.

Overcoming these deficits will require, at least as a first step, a new system of university-level accreditation in which liberal arts curricula are paramount. In addition, new teacher training strategies ought to be adopted, so that teachers will be better prepared to take new ideas and practices to students at the middle and high school level. Not only will this strategy offer immediate benefits to these students and their institutions, but in the longer run, it will have a multiplier effect on the reform process in universities, as these new students enter into undergraduate and graduate programs.

The participants agreed that educational reform in Central and Eastern Europe will benefit from expanded participation in international academic networks and scholarly exchanges. One of the most effective avenues currently available for this kind of collaboration is the Fulbright program. Since its establishment in Bulgaria five years ago, the Fulbright program has already sponsored more than one hundred Bulgarian exchanges to the US, while some sixty American colleagues have studied in Bulgaria. Another invaluable source of support for international education is the Soros Foundation Network, which currently embraces all countries in the region.

Artes Liberales, an Association for the Furthering of Liberal Education and Democratic Values in Post-Communist Societies, used the conference as an opportunity to familiarize the participants with its mandate and activities. Mr. Nicholas Farnham, Executive Director of the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation and founder of Artes Liberales, said his objective was to help revive the liberal tradition in Central and Eastern Europe, and expressed the belief that cultivating imagination and critical thinking and expanding educational opportunities will help improve the human condition.

Mr. Farnham presented the results of a survey carried out by Artes Liberales, in which 132 academic and political leaders provided an assessment of the state of education in ten countries in the region. In particular, the survey sought to elicit their views on which sorts of reforms in curriculum and pedagogy over the next ten years were both intellectually desirable and economically and practically feasible, given prevailing constraints and opportunities. (*Editor's note: The survey results*



# *Artes Liberales • Artes Liberales*

*have already been published in the regular Artes Liberales section of K&K 1/98)*

Professor Julia Stefanova, Executive Director of the Bulgarian Fulbright Commission, echoed the shared consensus of the conference when she asserted that the problematic social and intellectual legacies of communism can only be surmounted through the cultivation of a robust civil society, and that such a society depends on a new type of education, one that integrates pedagogical innovation, international openness, and the liberal arts tradition.

All sessions stressed the difference between narrow specialized training and an education in the liberal arts tradition. While the first approach provides students with practical information and professional expertise, only a broad-based liberal education can nurture well-rounded individuals, capable of creative innovation and responsible social activity. The value of a liberal education lies in its marriage of the pursuit of scientific accuracy and the cultivation of civic values through broad exposure to the humanities. This combination provides a solid foundation for education for democratic citizenship in a world of technological change. Since the liberal tradition offers the most ready means of teaching civic values of social justice, respect for human dignity, and the protection of various human and civic rights, the participants agreed that governments in the region should reconsider their funding priorities and allocate more resources for liberal arts programs. Accordingly, they agreed to bring to the attention of relevant government agencies in the region the resolutions on this matter which were prepared at the meeting. As Professor Adam Yarmolinsky observed in his closing remarks, the vivid and inspirational discussions that took place in both the formal sessions and in the corridors offered a perfect example of the value of the liberal arts to education.

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## **LIBERAL EDUCATION IN A CHANGING WORLD**

*Presented at Third Fulbright Conference  
in Sophia, Bulgaria, May 1998*

In addressing the role of a liberal education in building a civil society I would like to focus on two aspects: the role of a liberal education in developing our moral and

civic identities and the role of a liberal education in building communities. By way of practical example of the role of liberal education in the development of identity and community, I will examine the role of a liberal education in assessing the adoption and use of technologies, which I argue is a fundamental part of the society we are creating.

I suggest we examine the role of liberal education in assessing technologies because in this increasingly complex technological age the adoption and use of technology poses deep challenges to the consistency and coherency of moral response and human sociability. Technology affects the pace of our life, the pace of our thoughts, the duration of our activities, our very ways of conceiving the order and flow of events and thus our capacity to reflect and ponder. As the distinctions between the "natural" and the "artificial" are eradicated, the distinctions that have traditionally defined our self understanding and our moral communities are erased. In changing the pace of our thought and activities, our communal spaces, our expectations for contact, technology changes the boundary conditions for self understanding and rootedness in our communities. In so doing, it challenges our ethical sensibilities and moral understanding. Whether this challenge will be largely liberating or largely oppressive will depend a great deal on how we educate ourselves to respond, and how we are able to re-shape our moral and civic identities.

What do I intend by moral and civic identity? I intend our self-understanding as regards our own sense of moral worth as well as our capacity to position ourselves morally with respect to other human beings and the environment. The extent to which we feel responsible for our actions, and the scope of a moral community are part of the specific content of each person's moral identity. Although it has been traditional to pose rationality as the criteria for moral identity, I would like to propose reflection as essential to moral identity and civic action. By reflection I intend meditative thought or "thought with care" as distinct from calculative thought or information transfer.<sup>1</sup> Reflective thought leads to wisdom, rather than to computation or cleverness. This reflective thought, I suggest, is the hallmark of a liberal education.

Both our use of technologies and our encounters with technological systems have a part in shaping the contours of this identity. Our capacities for reflection are shaped by our sense of time. The pace of thought, the

# *Artes Liberales • Artes Liberales*

rhythm of life, the spaces in which we meet, the tempo of work and play emerge as patterns given their definition by an increasingly technological age and determine our capacity to reflect and to ponder. The extent to which our lives are ordered, structured, divided deeply affects the types of thought of which we are capable. Our ability to be present, attentive, and participative is shaped by the amount of time we are used to devoting to activities. How long, we might ask by way of example, is a long conversation? Thirty minutes? One hour? Several days? Several weeks? Several generations? What is our sense of having spent "enough time" on a problem, decision or issue? Our sense of time, in turn, has been highly refined or redefined by each successive time keeping device. Intercity, international, and now intercontinental transportation gave rise to the standardization of time in different localities. There are definite and obvious ways in which the qualities of our lives have improved with the increase in efficiency made possible by new technologies. At the same time, we cannot ignore the fact that the space for reflection has been colonized as time has become commodified. We speak in terms now of buying time, spending time, having free time, precious time, even doing time. This commodification of time and experience both poses a strong challenge to and belies the need for liberal education in the changing world.

Our moral and civic identities are also crafted by our sense of public and private space. This includes our contact with other people, our sense of rootedness or attachment to a common place, and the types of boundaries geographical, social, or virtual that determine the size of that place. The number of places we live, or expect to live, the length of time we stay there, and the number of people that share that space with us create the contours of our inner landscape. The relationships of technologies to privacy is complex and difficult to characterize. What is clear, however, is that our sense of what is public and what is private and the pressures put on the resources of our public and private worlds are deeply affected by the technologies we choose, and so, in turn, is our moral identity. The role of a liberal education is to cultivate our resources for understanding these pressures and reorganizing them into the type of civil society we want to live.

We are deeply dependent on our technologies for both comfort and survival. In maintaining them, we

maintain our way of life. In improving them, we open new possibilities for our selves. A liberal education in an increasingly technical society equips us to assess these new possibilities so that we might deepen our moral understanding and make ethical choices for ourselves and build civil communities through an examination of the values inherent in the artifacts we design and adopt. Furthermore, a liberal education creates the foundation to bring these technologies in line with a civil society – and by this I intend a community that is just, democratic, and purposeful.

A liberal education reminds us that technologies and artifacts contain within them a set of values. These values, in turn, express the support for or rejection of certain political goals. To make this claim is to say something more than to say that objects can be employed towards political ends. It means, rather, that we can excavate an object and reveal something about the value system of those who design, adopt, and use it.

Consider, for example, societies which organize themselves around the use of a car. For many, the car has become a symbol of freedom. With a car, we are free to travel privately. We are free to travel to suit our schedules. Many of us feel a greater freedom in our choices of where to live and work. Many people think nothing of living distances greater than thirty miles from their place of employment. However, upon closer inspection we see that the car symbolizes other things as well. The car symbolizes our sense of entitlement to more than our share of natural resources. Cars are expensive and symbolize status and power. They also symbolize the privileging of the private over the public. Many people feel they "have" to have a car because towns and cities are increasingly organized around automobile travel rather than public transportation. The town square and public markets are overwhelmed by suburbs and strip malls. These developments change the character of community life and experience.

Thus we can see that in creating technologies we are also creating social, moral, and civic life. We demonstrate who we are and who we want to be. Perhaps one of the best expressions of this idea can be found in Langdon Winner's essay, "Artifacts/Ideals and Political Culture"<sup>2</sup>. If we apply Winner's ideas to technology assessment, we could argue that when we educate ourselves liberally we teach ourselves to question the ways



# *Artes Liberales* • *Artes Liberales*

in which our design, development, adoption, and use of technologies affect our shared experiences of privacy, freedom, authority, community, and justice.<sup>3</sup> Where we find instances of technological use which are incompatible with our espoused ideals regarding liberty, equality, sociability, and democracy a liberal education drives us to address and change these uses in a manner that brings them in line with our civic ideals.

Continuing Winner's analysis, we could say that in looking at a civil society, we must look carefully at which roles, responsibilities, and possibilities are delegated to technological things rather than to people. For example, what social roles are now delegated to computers? Do they function as servant, controller, guard, supervisor, or assistant? Telephones, answering machines, mobile phones, fax machines, pagers, and email build the expectation that we should be available to our professional associates twenty-four hours a day. They indicate that we value our freedom of movement, but never wish to miss out on a phone call or sacrifice a potential opportunity. An ethic of infinite opportunity without apparent sacrifice begins to emerge. Naturally there are sacrifices, of quiet, reflection, privacy and intimacy for example, but these values are often considered intangibles that fade away in the face of accomplishments that can be measured and recorded by the machines upon which we rely.

It is also significant to ask whether human beings are giving order to machines or receiving orders from them. We must note whether the human being assumes an active role interacting with technology, or a passive one. Technologies are not only sophisticated tools that we pick up and use, and then set down. They make up a "form of life" in which people, artifacts, and systems are linked in various relationships which determine the possibilities for value in that society.

Our artifacts reveal where we are situated in a social order, what is normal, what is possible, and what is excluded. The foundations of a civil society suggest that people flourish when they are self-reliant, and enjoy the conditions of freedom, equality, justice, and self-government. Yet, many of our technologies do not communicate these values. Rather, they engender dependence over self-reliance – often because they are expensive and complicated to produce and difficult to repair. Winner points out other common values inherent in the

technologies we adopt and which stand in contradiction to civil democratic ideals:

- Power is centralized
- The few talk and the many listen
- There are barriers between social classes
- The world is hierarchically structured
- Good things are distributed unequally
- Women and men have different kinds of competencies
- One's life is open to continual inspection<sup>4</sup>

We might add to this list the notions that we should always be available to others, that entertainment should be available to us twenty-four hours a day, that we should enjoy complete control over our environment, and that we should not ever have to be uncomfortable or to suffer pain.

Where we find these discrepancies between these values expressed by our technologies and civil ideals we must engage in informed and responsible decision making processes. It is crucial to implement an educational system which teaches scientists and engineers to design technologies which cohere with democratic ideals, and at the same time educates citizens who do not embrace technologies which make them feel passive, superfluous, stupid, disconnected, or incapable of meaningful action. The design process itself is an ethical activity – and we must educate ourselves liberally as scientist, humanists, and citizens to participate in generating designs which are reversible and allow flexibility and creativity.

Whether the interests of ordinary citizens will play a meaningful role in creating our communities depends on our capability through our education process to become knowledgeable, skilled and active in areas that have been either appropriated by or abandoned to "experts." A liberal education should inspire responsibility and accountability because it situates knowledge in the particular contexts of personhood, community, culture, and society. Humanistic knowledge always comes from somewhere, and thus stands as opposed to the objective "view from nowhere". Humanistic knowledge teaches that we are responsible for what we learn how to see, and what we learn to ignore.

The goal of civic society in a rapidly changing age is textured with paradox, and so, most likely, has been the

# *Artes Liberales* • *Artes Liberales*

question of civic society in any age. In changing the pace of our thought and activities, our communal spaces, our expectations for contact, our adoption of technologies changes the boundary conditions of self understanding and rootedness in communities. In so doing, it opens a space for the evolution of moral identities and sensibilities. Whether this evolution will be largely liberating, or largely oppressive will depend a great deal on how we learn to see, and how we learn to share what we see. The standards for privacy, health, freedom, and social welfare are being decided as we adopt new techniques in the workplace, computerized systems of information management, biotechnologies, and communication and media devices in our homes. If we do not care to actively define and shape the values within these systems, they will define us. Alternatively, we may seek creative responses to the roles technologies play in our lives and engineer a world friendly to human growth and sociability. The role of the a liberal education in the 21st century is to equip us to choose the latter.

1) See Martin Heidegger's "Memorial Address," in *Gelassenheit*. (I'm using English edition – *Discourse on Thinking*, translated by John M. Anderson.)

2) Winner, Langdon. *Artifact/Ideas and Political Culture in Whole Earth Review 73* (Winter) p.18-24.

For a more extended discussion of these and related ideas, see Winner, Langdon. *Autonomous Technology. Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought*. MIT Press. 1992.

3)See Winner. *Ideas/Artifacts*.

4)See Winner. *Ideas/Artifacts*.

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## **WHAT IS LIBERAL EDUCATION ABOUT?**

*From Budapest Conference, October 1996*

**T**he Greek word *Schole* meant originally leisure as opposed to work or duty. How is it possible that in the course of time this meaning turned almost to its exact opposite? With the growing complexity of life and specialization of work the shortsighted idea prevailed, that good education means a great mass of facts. The

amount of positive knowledge of facts and ready-to-use techniques (such as arithmetic, science, history or foreign languages) was supposed to be the measure of the quality of education. Absolutist governments of the 18th century viewed university education as professional education of capable, universal and interchangeable state officials, be it judges, doctors, teachers, officers, clerks or priests.

But the number of professions needed grew steadily, as well as the bulk of knowledge necessary to master for each one of them. Thus no wonder that even the specialization in universities grew over all limits, until the present state has been reached. At present, at the School of philosophy, CU Prague, students have to choose among more than 70 different and mutually exclusive lines, at the age of 18. Their curricula, prepared by specialists, are supposed to cover the sum of positive knowledge of their teachers, thus leaving almost no space for own critical and creative work, for experiments and free exploration of the own terrain, and perhaps of its neighborhood.

Liberal education is not education for any particular job, at least not in the first place. It is education of critical and creative persons, who start by exploring a fairly large area and only gradually find their own path and special domain. All this would be of course impossible without factual knowledge, but the leading idea is that of critical and competent thinking of understanding and individual creativity, not the illusion of completeness. Thus it is by reverting to the original sense of *Schole* that the liberal education hopes to cure at least some of the feebles of the present educational system.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning some of its dangers as well. It is exacting for the teacher, because it cannot be reduced to a sort of routine. Students are to be led individually by knowledgeable persons, for they can get lost. It is perhaps not for everybody and cannot be imposed by authority. But according to my personal experience, the number of young people for whom it fits well is growing from year to year. As to us, teachers, I am not so sure.



# *Artes Liberales* • *Artes Liberales*

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## **WHAT LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES DO?**

*From Budapest Conference, October 1996*

**T**here are many variations of the tradition of liberal arts education. I know best that variation known as the "liberal arts college" where students spend four academic years in residence at an independent college. I would describe the task of such colleges as follows:

- To create a curriculum which requires and encourages students to explore widely across the liberal arts and sciences, prior to any specific professional or technical training for career; the areas of exploration characteristically include the basic disciplines of the pure natural sciences and mathematics, social sciences, language and literature, philosophy, and the fine arts.
- To create a curriculum which allows students to study one of these disciplines in significant depth, typically occupying one-quarter to one-third of their total.
- To create a curriculum which provides the necessary intellectual tools to allow students to pursue professional training and schooling after their liberal education.

- To nurture through this combination of breadth and depth, the intellectual virtues of strong argument, disciplined reasoning, cogent expression, open-minded tolerance of other ideas, critical standards for judging intellectual and aesthetic quality, intellectual curiosity and flexibility.

- To create a diverse residential community in which students are expected to take substantial responsibility for the organization of their lives through student government, clubs, athletic teams, residence halls.

- To nurture in students an interest in public affairs and public issues through curriculum and other activities - in the understanding that liberal arts education is a preparation for leadership and responsibility in government, business, and civic organizations.

Obviously these are ideals not always achieved. Also, institutions of higher learning can partially seek these goals while also pursuing more professional education, an approach which is more typical of higher education in the United States. Still, I think it useful to look at the paradigm and its implications.

## **NICHOLAS FARNHAM RESULTS OF THE ARTES LIBERALES SURVEY**

*February 18, 1998*

In October of 1997 *Artes Liberales*, a network actively encouraging discussion of new ideas among university educators in Central and Eastern Europe, sent out a survey to try to find out from the region's educators their opinions as to what concepts and reforms might be both desirable and feasible in preparation for a regional meeting of *Artes Liberales* next October.

The survey was sent out to 132 academic and political leaders as well as some journalists in 10 countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. The 61 who responded, represented a 46% return. They were asked to rank - on a scale of "1" to "5", from negative to positive - 21 conceptual changes as to (A.) desirability from an educational point of view and (B.) feasibility given social, economic and political expectations over the next 10 years. The average responses as to both desirability and feasibility for each change are shown in the list below. One may assume that the changes with the highest combined total of desirability and feasibility would be the ones perceived to be easiest to adopt. Using this assumption, the list below organizes the changes in ascending order of perceived difficulty of adoption. This is not, of course, the order in which the questions were asked, which is indicated by the number to the left (Q#).

The high response rate for this survey suggests that there is great interest in these changes. Of course the survey went out to a limited group of leaders. The results cannot be said to have broad statistical significance. However they do clearly suggest what some prominent and highly knowledgeable officials feel about directions for changing the way education is offered in the area. ☛

# *Artes Liberales • Artes Liberales*

Q#	CHANGE (ASCENDING ORDER OF DIFFICULTY OF ADOPTION)	A	Desirable B	FeasibleTotal A&B
18	Use a greater variety of methods to grade students: essays, exams, participation in class discussions.	4.3	3.7	8
14	Concentrate learning based more on critical thinking than memorization	4.5	3.2	7.7
11	Introduce interdisciplinary programs, e.g. a course in international relations which includes courses from history, political science, economics and other disciplines	4.4	3.3	7.7
15	Expand student participation by means of class discussions and discussion sections for lectures	4.3	3.4	7.7
19	Integrate research and teaching more closely	4.4	3.3	7.7
2	Make the curriculum more flexible	4.1	3.4	7.5
17	Require more writing by students as a teaching and learning device	4.1	3.3	7.4
7	Implement "core courses", i.e. courses that provide a common basis of knowledge for all students	3.9	3.5	7.4
4	Increase the number of business and professional programs	3.8	3.5	7.3
1	Increase the level of autonomy over curriculum at the department and faculty level	3.5	3.6	7.1
8	Expand opportunities for students to take courses outside of their faculty/department to broaden their perspective	4.3	2.8	7.1
13	Increase the number of seminars and discussion classes	4.0	3.1	7.1
12	Implement courses that cut across disciplines, e.g. "Classical Civilization" or "Ways of Knowing"	4.1	3.0	7.1
5	Increase the number of programs in the sciences and humanities	3.7	3.3	7
6	Institute a credit system which will be the basis for degrees instead of comprehensive examinations	3.8	3.2	7
10	Increase the number of elective courses within a students program	3.7	3.3	7
20	Increase the number of programs explicitly designed to help professors and lecturers improve their teaching style.	4.1	2.9	7
9	Require students to take courses outside of their faculty/department to broaden their perspective	4.1	2.8	6.9
3	Expand higher education and increase enrollment	3.8	2.8	6.6
21	Institute a program of community service opportunities for students as part of the curriculum	3.8	2.8	6.6
16	Increase student involvement in curriculum development	3.3	3.1	6.4

As is apparent, the survey was not about pre-vocational or specialized educational objectives, but rather general education objectives that lead to fostering in a responsible citizenry qualities such as intellectual curiosity, critical intelligence, judgment, imagination and sympathy for the varieties of the human condition.

Based on the outcome of this survey, one would expect that the easiest reform to implement in the Central and Eastern European context would be to require the use of a greater variety of methods to grade students. The most difficult reform would be to develop a process ensuring the increase of student involvement in curriculum development. Teaching reforms, such as increasing the number of seminars, encouraging critical thinking, expanding student participation in class, requiring students to do more writing, integrating research with teaching, are seen as somewhat easy, but establishing a formal program to help teachers with their teaching style more difficult. Offering interdisciplinary courses and programs are seen as relatively easy, increasing the number of sciences and humanities programs relatively hard. Expanding higher education and instituting community service are seen as very hard. One way of analyzing these results is by their probable costs, which has undoubtedly influenced their rankings. With a few notable exceptions it would appear that most of the changes at the top of the list would require comparatively fewer resources than those at the bottom. This suggests that priorities will likely change as economic circumstances become less harsh.





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