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## After the Tulip Revolution: journalism education in Kyrgyzstan

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E. Freedman

## **Abstract**

Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution of March 2005 was expected to spur democratization. Many journalists and media experts hoped the change in regimes would lead to improvements in a university-level journalism education system that still closely followed the Soviet model of teaching and emphasized theory rather than development of practical skills and adherence to internationally accepted professional standards. A year and a half later, however, little change was evident at universities in the national or regional capitals, raising questions about prospects for rapid change in journalism education following other revolutionary changes in regime in post-communist countries with no free press tradition.

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## Abstract

Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution of March 2005 was expected to spur democratization. Many journalists and media experts hoped the change in regimes would lead to improvements in a university-level journalism education system that still closely followed the Soviet model of teaching and emphasized theory rather than development of practical skills and adherence to internationally accepted professional standards. A year and a half later, however, little change was evident at universities in the national or regional capitals, raising questions about prospects for rapid change in journalism education following other revolutionary changes in regime in post-communist countries with no free press tradition.

## Introduction

Since the implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, each now-independent constituent republic has moved in a different direction and at a different speed toward creating and sustaining new regimes and giving at least lip service to or a veneer of democratic institutions. Kyrgyzstan started its independence and continued as the most democratic nation in Central Asia, despite pervasive corruption, economic hardships, and the increasing authoritarianism of the Askar Akayev regime that culminated in its overthrow. As the most consistently democratic—in comparative Central Asian terms—of the region's five former Soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan had a reputation for relative liberalism toward the press apart from several years of backsliding in the political and press rights. Kyrgyzstan was the third former Soviet republic—after Georgia and Ukraine—and the first in Central Asia to undergo what the press and Western observers described as a post-independence “revolution” triggered by massive electoral and political corruption.

The country's quick, relatively bloodless popular uprising that ousted Akayev in March 2005 had major implications for the media and press rights. The Tulip Revolution led not only to the country's first comparatively free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, but also to an initial blossoming of press independence in what had been an environment of increasingly tough governmental controls.

Still, more than 15 years after independence, journalism education in state-run universities continues to adhere to Soviet-style teaching methods with a heavy emphasis on theory rather than practice. Central Asia was largely in the direct sphere of Russian control and influence under the czars before the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and was absorbed into the U.S.S.R. The system of journalism after independence and the Tulip Revolution of 2005 still rests solidly on that foundation.

To put the status of journalism education into a broader context, the independent, and market-supported press system that many journalists had hoped for at the time of the Tulip Revolution has largely failed to materialize. Journalists complain of continuing constraints imposed by government, threats and harassment, self-censorship, and financial dependence on foreign funders, governmental agencies, and political groups, although some report improved access to governmental officials, information, and documents (Freedman, 2007). The Institute for Public Policy's training program coordinator, a journalist herself, said, “After the Tulip Revolution we have something like freedom of the press but it's not freedom of the press how Western people understand the meaning. We have no free press. We have no free mass media at all. All mass media are made to order” (Toralieva, 2006). The editor of the independent newspaper *Res Publica* said, “It's very difficult to make any prognosis. However, I am not an optimist and my views are not optimistic. If the general economic problems of the country are not solved, there's no reason to speak of the problems of newspapers. Poor people are not interested in buying newspapers or in television or radio news”(Popova, 2006).

Recent events show there is reason for pessimism about the future of press freedom in Kyrgyzstan. For example in October 2007, the editor of an independent ethnic language weekly, who had aggressively covered human rights abuses, was murdered in Osh, one of the cities where this study took place (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2007). Later in the year, the majority of board of the state-run

National Television and Radio Company resigned after the government failed to take promised steps to convert its television branch into a public-service broadcaster (Mambetalieva, 2007).

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## The Soviet Model

In light of lingering Soviet traditions of journalism education, it is helpful to briefly examine the roots of that model as scholars such as Mueller (1998), Hopkins (1970), and Altschull (1995) described the development of journalism education and professionalization in the Soviet Union. In 1921, the State (or Moscow) Institute of Journalism, or GIZh, was founded as the paradigm of journalism education, accepting students from across the U.S.S.R to produce worker-peasant correspondents. The curriculum combined technical and professional education; the professional aspect stressed theoretical foundations of propaganda creation and dissemination. There was an ongoing struggle at GIZh and similar programs between accepting ideologically sound students and competent ones. Muller cites statistics showing that in 1921, 71 percent of entering students were party- or Komsomol-affiliated, a proportion that topped 90 percent two years later; meanwhile, incoming students from the intelligentsia plunged from 80 percent to 51 percent over the same years. By the end of that decade, applicants needed at least three years' experience in industry, physical labor, or agriculture.

In 1923, the curriculum was expanded to three years. The first years focused on Russian history, language, and literature, while advanced students studied the American and Western European press, especially the history of the workers' press, basic reporting and writing, and technical subjects including layout. Then as now, a major debate pitted proponents of practical training against advocates of theoretical training.

Mueller (1998) recounted a 1925 GIZh forum at which a professor asserted that reporting should be the focus of training because information is the heart of newspapers. Yet faculty members who called for sending students abroad found themselves under fire for promoting the bourgeois press as a model. One professor proposed that instructors specialize, advocated a student newspaper laboratory, and contended that information must be an essential ingredient of Soviet newspapers.

Programs elsewhere in the country also operated with the principal objective of building the party and promoting socialism. However, Altschull cautioned against assuming a totally ideological interpretation of journalism education:

Journalism schools throughout the Soviet empire made a point of teaching "Marxist journalism." Whatever that phrase meant, the idea that "Marxist journalism" began with Marx was a central element of Soviet press doctrine. Yet this is not a valid idea; it is folklore that was politically useful in the Soviet Union just as the folklore of an adversary press is politically useful in the United States. In truth, Marx is as difficult to pin down as Jefferson, who can be found on all sides of the issue of press freedom at different periods of his life (1995, 196).

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Both before and after the Tulip Revolution, the legacy of Soviet journalism education in Kyrgyzstan has been coupled with inadequate resources to acquire the technology that is crucial to contemporary journalism and to adequately train students to use that technology. Many faculty themselves learned journalism before independence, and their pedagogy includes an orientation toward lectures rather than field reporting assignments, toward rote learning of facts rather than critical thinking, and toward discouragement of students from actively questioning their instructors. Kyrgyz universities also lack independent media outlets where journalism students can practice their skills.

The editor in chief of the Jalal-Abad weekly newspaper *Akyikat*—Truth and Justice—who is a former lecturer at a local university, said:

I want my journalists to be educated to write in accordance with international standards and know how to use computers. Take them to an event and show them how it's covered by local press, Russian press and media. I was a journalist during Soviet times and we were taught to write only about the words of authorities, and nobody asked the views of others. We still have some of this, no balance and only the views of authorities. They should ask different sides and collect different facts. Our journalists are accommodating to it very slowly (Stambekov, 2006).

Another barrier to reform is the centralized nature of higher education. The Ministry of Education is primarily responsible for standardizing education, planning, and approving curricula at state-run universities. Writing a year before the Tulip Revolution, Dukenbaev described Kyrgyz educational policy as “highly politicized” and emphasized that the ministry “plays a pivotal role” in political mobilization, nation-building, socialization, and promotion of ethnic Kyrgyz cultural values (2004, 17). Journalism education cannot be separated from larger systemic weaknesses in universities. Wolanin observed in a 2002 article, “National poverty, the introduction of market capitalism, and the legacy of Soviet centralization have produced four severe problems in Kyrgyz higher education: corruption, a lack of connection between higher education and industry and student needs, redundancy in the higher education system, and low quality” (2002). Within that system, corruption and lack of academic integrity undermine the quality of instruction. Jacobson wrote:

Despite some recent changes meant to improve the system, corruption continues to thrive at Kyrgyz universities, with many students paying for entrance, paying for scholarships, and paying for high test grades.... The problem is compounded because the universities are loath to fail students, whose tuition payments are vital for revenue.... The low level of state funding leaves universities short of cash, and low salaries mean that teachers often look for extra income to get by. Many professors are willing to accept bribes simply to meet basic needs. Salaries for typical public employees (teachers, doctors, police officers, government workers) rarely exceed \$100 a month. Interviews with university teachers and other urban public officials indicate that they consider a range of \$100 to \$500 a month...necessary to lead the life of a comfortable, middle-class professional (2007).

While the scope and practical effects of the Tulip Revolution—even the question of whether it was a “revolution” or simply an unscheduled regime change that did little

to alter the system of governance—are widely debated, the event itself provides a demarcation point for examining several essential components of one country's post-communist mass media system, including journalism education.

An independent and trusted mass media system is a key indicator of a country's development of democracy and civil society. Education of students and training of practicing journalists in professional values, techniques, and ethics is an essential element in maintaining that independence and building that trust. Most Western journalists assert that there are universal professional standards to strive for, such as balance, fairness, accuracy, and ethics (Freedman, Shafer, & Rice, 2006), yet national perspectives vary widely on, for example, what constitutes conflict of interest and what obligation—if any—journalists have to bolster the development of statehood and national identity, especially in a comparatively young country such as Kyrgyzstan.

Since independence, Western governmental, multi-governmental, and non-governmental organizations and international development agencies have supported journalism education with an aim to promote “democratic journalism.” Among the goals of donor-driven “democratic journalism” are liberalizing totalitarian regimes, promoting democracy and free market economics, and advocating Western—principally Anglo-American—standards and techniques of professionalism and ethics (Freedman & Shafer, 2006). In other words, foreign funders of journalism education in Kyrgyzstan seek to extend their Western ideologies and political systems, and to further their economic and strategic objectives. At the same time, questions have been raised about the suitability and reality of transplanting Western-style journalistic values and techniques to countries with sharply differing cultural, political, religious, and technological histories and systems. Among them was Brislin, who cautioned about the “futility of attempting to fit indigenous values into a procrustean bed of Western economic or political design. Multiple models of citizen-press-government relations grow legitimately out of indigenous value systems and are enduring within the forces of globalization” (2004, 130-131) Also, Freedman, Shafer, and Rice (2006) have suggested that some elements of the Soviet press model may still be beneficial to Central Asian journalists.

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## Previous Research

In 2000, an Open Society Institute (OSI) international policy fellow, who also was a journalism faculty member in Kyrgyzstan, examined journalism and mass communication education at three universities there, two of them state-run. She observed that journalism education needed to define and implement standards and to identify people to carry out reforms. Most of her report (Kulikova, 2000) focused on the journalism curriculum at the Western-modeled American University in Kyrgyzstan—later renamed American University of Central Asia (AUCA)—which is discussed later in this article. Reeves (2003) wrote about AUCA's journalism education program in the broader context of higher education reform in the country. Her study described the 2001 controversy over a proposed course called “Censorship and Propaganda,” which some outraged faculty members thought would be a “how-to” class “in the same way that a class entitled ‘video-production’ might reasonably be expected to be a training in how to produce videos”; the proponents of the course intended it to be a “critical analysis” of propaganda and censorship.

Overall, journalism education in Central Asia since independence has attracted little Western scholarship. The few scholarly articles and papers about post-independence journalism education in Central Asia include a case study of obstacles to professionalization of the media in Uzbekistan (Shafer & Freedman, 2003); a case study of efforts to implement an environmental and science journalism course at a university in Uzbekistan (Freedman, 2004); and surveys of Kazakh journalism student attitudes toward democracy and advertising (Ketterer & Nemecek, 2001; Fullerton & Weir, 2001).

Meanwhile, researchers have paid closer attention to developments in university-level journalism education and the attitudes of journalism students elsewhere in the former Soviet Union—in Russia itself, and among ex-Warsaw Bloc nations (for example, Aumente et al., 1999; Morrison, 1997; Napoli, 2002; Litvak, Guseva & Ketterer, 2005).

In their 2001 book, Kulikova and Ibraeva wrote about the history and status of the pre-Tulip Revolution media in Kyrgyzstan, including restraints on press freedom, media economics, and relationships between state-run and privately owned news outlets. However, the authors of that book did not examine the education of prospective journalists at universities, including their own.

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## Research Question and Method

This study is based primarily on interviews with a sample of 34 print and broadcast journalists, full-time and part-time university journalism faculty members, and other press experts. Interview subjects were purposefully chosen to include a mix of staff and freelance journalists from private, independent, and state-owned broadcast and print domestic outlets and international media outlets, as well as academics, policy analysts, governmental press secretaries, and other media experts. They were selected in part based on the author's prior experiences with them and in part on recommendations from the former media support center staff member who served as one of the author's interpreters.

The study aims to address the following research question:

What substantive changes, if any, occurred in university-level journalism education in Kyrgyzstan in the first year and a half after the March 2005 revolution replaced an authoritarian regime with a more democratic one?

The interviewees are professional journalists, journalism educators and trainers, press rights defenders, and governmental press secretaries. Some fit more than one category: for example a press secretary who is also a newspaper columnist or a journalist who is also an adjunct faculty member. Interviewees were asked to sign an informed consent form in English or Russian, approved by the institutional review board of the author's university. Most agreed to allow their names to be used; a few chose anonymity.

Interviews took place during a two-week period in July 2006 in the national capital, Bishkek, and three oblast capitals—Karakol, Issyk-Kul oblast; Osh, Osh oblast; and Jalal-Abad, Jalal-Abad oblast. Some interviews were in English and others in Russian with an interpreter. The cities were chosen to provide a diversity of

perspectives. Osh and Jalal-Abad are in the south, near the Uzbekistan border, where the Tulip Revolution began. Karakol is in the northeast near the Kazakh border. Bishkek is overwhelmingly urban; the three oblasts are 69.3 percent to 74.7 percent rural.

Interviews were supplemented with an informal discussion with young journalists and university journalism students at Dom Journalista (House of Journalists) in Karakol; a meeting at the Institute of the Media Commissioner of journalists working to create the framework for a new organization, the Public Committee of Media Issues, to promote media development; a press conference by the governor of Issyk-Kul oblast; and informal conversations with several journalists or representatives of Western NGOs involved in civil society development.

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## Findings

The vast majority of journalism students still graduate with few practical skills or experience in professional settings, a situation little changed from the Soviet era, let alone the Akayev years. Interviewees identified three major failings of journalism education that existed before the Tulip Revolution and continued a year and a half later: inadequate training of students in professional skills; unqualified faculty; and lack of financial resources.

### Lack of Professional Skills

One regional newspaper editor acknowledged, “Our current students don’t have any skills in terms of theory or practical skills, how to write an article or make a report. Sometimes I ask, ‘Are you taught to write an article?’ and they say no” (anonymous editor, 2006). A European media trainer, who consults for local press organizations, said journalism students not only lack practical skills but “even the very theoretical would not fit what they need. It’s out of date. Some faculties are still teaching the history of Soviet journalism” (Loersch, 2006).

### Faculty Qualifications

The training program coordinator for the Institute for Public Policy, a Bishkek-based NGO, said, “The problem is our teachers are not journalists in general and are not practicing journalists. That’s why many young people who want to be journalists apply to organizations such as the Institute for Public Policy and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, for an opportunity to practice” (Toralieva, 2006). A press rights activist sounded pessimistic:

Who must change it, teachers? or who? or life? If it is life, we cannot control it. If it is up to teachers, now we have the same teachers as before. In journalism departments they are taught by philologists and historians. These people do not know how to do journalism. They have never written even a single article. Our universities don’t invite the leading journalists to teach—universities don’t have experts to teach. (anonymous activist, 2006).

Lack of support for reform among high-level university officials reinforces the staying power of old-guard faculty members, said an independent newspaper journalist in Osh:

The biggest problem is that university deans consider journalism as a movement in philology, how to write stylistics, grammar, that's all. Those people were educated in the Soviet Union, and keep in mind it is was in Brezhnev and Khrushchev's time. You can imagine how conservative they are. They don't even read current newspapers. If they read them, they could move to modern standards, but they're not open to new information. If they were open, they could add new information (Ismanov, 2006).

## Resource Limitations

Asked whether students who come to his Karakol television station for professional affiliations—internships—have requisite skills, the station founder replied, “Frankly speaking, no. The method of teaching in our universities leaves much to be desired.... They don't teach them how to use new technology, how to apply new technology in their work. They have very old methods of teaching and they don't have any equipment for students to use” (Saburbekov, 2006). A television journalist in Jalal-Abad discussed his experience as an adjunct faculty member for five years at a state university:

The university was not provided with textbooks even. It was difficult to teach there. There was no basics and no textbook. It was almost impossible to conduct practical seminars—lectures only. The university was not equipped.... I know one person who is an assistant of the dean and works in the journalism department. She does her best to develop potential skills among her students but she's limited in resources because there is no will from above (Batikan, 2006).

Interviewees identified more problems, including lack of motivation among students, corruption and an absence of academic integrity, and the economics of traditional journalism careers. A former adjunct faculty member said, “There is a tradition in our universities that only two or three students visit the courses. Other students just pay money for the credits” (Stambekov, 2006). Low salaries are disincentives for prospective journalists, one created by fiscal realities—including small advertising and circulation revenue bases and high production and delivery costs. Salaries are so inadequate that many talented, high-potential, ambitious students want to leave Kyrgyzstan to work or study, or they want to work for foreign news organizations that aren't read or watched by ordinary Kyrgyz citizens, take jobs in public relations or with non-media NGOs, or abandon communication careers entirely. A Bishkek professor observed, “Most local media can't offer good job terms. The dilemma is whether they stick to their profession and poor conditions” (Satybaldieva, 2006).

Certainly there is overlap among these factors. As a regional reporter for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty explained, “Journalists are educated according to the Soviet system, and the theory differs greatly from the practice.” Then recalling his student experience at Osh State University, he said:

The professors called themselves teachers and then journalists, but I didn't see any practical circumstances from them. I thought they knew a lot, but soon I learned it was not so. Thinking of international journalism standards, I learned about them only in trainings organized by international NGOs. In the university, you are educated in the history of journalism, the theory of journalism. That is not helpful (Kubanych, 2006).

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## Journalism Education at American University of Central Asia

Founded in 1997 as American University in Kyrgyzstan with financial support from the NGO Open Society Institute, the U.S. State Department, and the Kyrgyz government, AUCA describes itself as “unlike any other institution in Central Asia or, for that matter, in all of the CIS” as the region’s sole higher education institution that followed the American model with an American-style curriculum, credit hour system, and “a commitment to democratic values,” to freedom of expression and inquiry, and to academic integrity and honest.” (American University in Kyrgyzstan, 2002-2003). The University’s undergraduate handbook says:

In 2000-02 the Journalism Department undertook a major curriculum reform shifting the content focus from Russian philology to modern journalism oriented to objectivity, neutrality and factuality of news reporting. This reform has turned the program into a well-balanced combination of the American and Kyrgyz educational requirements and standards applied to the structure and content of a journalism program (American University of Central Asia).

While this study found that journalism education at other institutions has changed little if at all since the Tulip Revolution, what had been the country’s premier journalism program has moved from its traditional focus on print and broadcast journalism and toward public relations and advertising.

The university’s 2002-2003 catalogue listed 16 required courses, among them work on the student newspaper, a month-long internship, and an independent project or thesis. Requirements were divided among practical courses on reporting, computer design and layout, photojournalism, and production, and theoretical courses such as media law and ethics, historical and contemporary issues, and mass communication theory. Electives included magazine production, international communications, documentary production, scriptwriting, online journalism, and television criticism, as well as two advertising and two public relations courses:

Then in 2003, AUCA added public relations as a third specialization. The head of the journalism program until mid-2006<sup>1</sup> explained the rationale:

The main reason was print was not popular among students. We were not recruiting enough students who were interested in print, and in the end only one or two [graduates per year] would work in print, especially in Kyrgyzstan. When we started electives in public relations and advertising, students showed great interest and the market showed great interest (Satybaldieva, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> The program director left AUCA to pursue a doctorate in the United Kingdom. Her predecessor as director had left AUCA to pursue a doctorate in the United States.

Currently, public relations is the most popular track, reflecting growing commercialization and urbanization in the country, as well as a belief among students that they are more likely to find better-paying and more prestigious jobs with businesses, governmental agencies, and international organizations than with print and broadcast outlets. The second-most popular track is broadcast, trailed by print. Those who choose print often have friends or relatives in the business, and many continue their education in the United States or Western Europe. The curriculum was also revised to include more analytical and theoretical courses such as mass media and society.

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## Conclusions

As Kyrgyzstan's experience in the first year and a half after its Tulip Revolution shows, improving journalism education practices will be far from an overnight endeavor. Among the challenges are the lingering legacies and practices of the Soviet higher educational system, legacies and practices that impede reforms. In addition, the placement of programs at state-run universities further impairs prospects for change due to the centralized nature of governmental controls over curricula and resources and a lack of commitment to academic independence. Universities must address systemic problems of academic dishonesty, corruption, and politicization if journalism programs are to earn public and professional respect.

On a practical level, interviewees said the failure to adequately educate students makes it difficult to find qualified young journalists. "We have a real staff problem. For example, they cannot even fill in a proper application form with a question about advantages and disadvantages of your character," said an independent television station director, pulling an application from his desk and reading a question about the advantages and disadvantages of the applicant's character. One student's answer: "I have no disadvantages. Please trust me" — with mistakes in some words. We had the case of a girl who didn't know the alphabet when we arranged a competition. In a recent competition with about 200 participants, only two stayed. All were supposed to be well educated but only two were suitable to be our employees" (Khudaiberdiev, 2006).

Although this study is not intended to propose solutions for reforming journalism education in Kyrgyzstan, some approaches may improve some systemic and institutional weaknesses, if not improve programs themselves in light of institutional, economic, political, and cultural barriers. One approach is for NGOs to help fill the gap. When the executive director of the Osh Media Resource Center was asked about her NGO's effort to work with universities, she replied:

We didn't manage to do it but have this issue on our agenda. It's a really painful issue. During student internships, we launched a campaign when students could participate like real journalists but didn't get the expected results because of what those students don't know, and people in those editorial offices were not so open to students. Now we're thinking over a new project that can involve the mass media and students. We want to suggest a mechanism of integration between them. We realized the idea is really interesting but the process is very difficult because editors and students are interested in the process, but we found there is a gap (Aitieva, 2006).

A second approach is to facilitate professional placements or internships to provide hands-on experience. The press secretary to the governor of Osh oblast told how, starting in Soviet days, one independent newspaper hired fourth-year students who got experience before graduation. Now only two papers do so - one has seen weekly circulation grown from 1,500 to 4,000-4,500. "This is thanks to students of the journalism department because they make the newspaper interesting. They simultaneously work on professional skills and receive some experience" (Toksonbaev, 2006).

For press outlets that find too few qualified applicants emerging from universities, post-graduate training is a partial, much-limited alternative. Some training is provided by foreign NGOs, agencies, and media support organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), the U.S.-based International Center for Journalists, and the Denmark-based NGO International Media Support. Other training comes from domestic NGOs such as the Institute for Public Policy in Bishkek, the Osh Media Resource Center, and the Jalal-Abad Media Resource Center, and from local affiliates of international NGOs such as Internews and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. Even for working professionals, short-term training cannot replace comprehensive preparation at the university level.

Self-help is another limited alternative. In Karakol, students and young journalists gather on Friday afternoons at Dom Journalista (House of Journalists) to learn from each other and from guests.

Given the lack of internal resources, it is important for democratic governments, multi-governmental organizations such as OSCE, and NGOs to actively support improved journalism education, including support for domestic and expatriate professionals and for visiting faculty from foreign academic institutions—as through the Fulbright Program—and from the profession—as from the Knight International Journalism Fellowship Program. At the same time, donors, trainers, democracy advocates, press rights activists, and other outsiders must acknowledge and work within historical, cultural, economic and political realities of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, as well as understanding the potency of institutional inertia.

One troubling implication of the failure to professionalize journalism education during the post-Tulip Revolution window of opportunity is its long-term impact on the survival of an independent press. The editor of the Bishkek newspaper *Res Publica* said bluntly,

I'm not optimistic (about young journalists). They cannot write articles. They cannot be a journalist in the right profession. They cannot write, they cannot compose sentences. This is the main reason I cannot speak optimistically about the future of local media. I'm afraid that in ten years there will be no newspapers. The old professionals will be gone and there is no new generation to replace them (Popova, 2006).

There are monumental institutional and political impediments to reorienting journalism education away from its Soviet-era focus on theory. Most visiting Western faculty and professionals stay only a short time—a few weeks or months, one semester, perhaps a year or two—with little lasting impact on curriculum. Other faculty members who are from Kyrgyzstan but educated in the United States or

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Europe have left the country. Meanwhile, programs lack essential equipment such as cameras, tape recorders, computers, editing booths, software, and even textbooks. Given the unlikelihood of imminent reforms at the university level, attention must be paid to training and retraining professionals, especially those outside the capital. Organizations like the Osh Media Resource Center and Jalalbad Media Resource Center must be key allies, given their access to local journalists and their credibility. Foreign trainers are helpful, but domestic professionals better understand and connect better with local journalists.

Nor is it realistic to expect significant pedagogical reforms moving journalism education toward Western models of independence, ethics, and a commitment to fairness, balance, and accuracy while the national environment remains hostile to press rights. Pervasive corruption, authoritarianism at the national, regional, and local levels, lack of transparency, and other impediments to democracy similarly impede development of a free press system that would entice and retain—and adequately compensate—the most talented and best-trained aspiring journalists.

Scholars might examine the type of research question this article explores—did a significant change in journalism education occur during the first year and a half after the Tulip Revolution?—in the two other post-Soviet, post-“revolution” countries and put the answers in a broader context of whether journalists in all three countries operate in a manner more consistent with professional international standards and work in a climate of stronger press rights.

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