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Abstract

**Russian Distance Learning Projects within
Far Eastern National University and Beyond**

Dr Lana V. Kurilova-Rich
Dr Alexei G. Falaleev
Far Eastern National University

For the last three years, the Russian economy has been growing after the decade of post-communist depression, and the Russian education system is about to astonish the world with its new achievements. The international distance learning projects pioneered by the Far Eastern National University (FENU) are the excellent examples of the evolution of the Russian university system. One of the five top-ranked national universities and the largest university in the Russian Far East, FENU became the Pacific gateway of the Russian Federation to the IT world. FENU builds bridges between the Russian education and the communities worldwide via its online projects. Today, FENU offers several joint degree programs, the main components of which are courses in Law, Russian and Japanese Languages, Business, and Management.

The following FENU online programs are unique to Russia:

- **Dual degree program with University of Maryland University College (UMUC), USA:** started in 1991, when Soviet Union was still afloat, and such programs were unthinkable. By October 2003, 265 FENU students graduated from UMUC with bachelor degrees in Business and Management, along with their Russian university degrees. Since 1999, UMUC accepts 90 FENU credits of 120 credits total, required for the undergraduate degree, and offers ten online courses for the remaining 30 credits. This is the most well known academic program in the Russian Far East, and its alumni belong to the business elite of Russia.
- **Dual degree program with University of Southern Queensland (USQ), Australia:** started in 2001 jointly with USQ, leader in providing flexible learning opportunities to the world, as determined by the International Council for Open and Distance Learning. FENU was the first Russian university to start a dual degree program with USQ. Sixteen of the 24 subjects required for the USQ bachelor degree in Business are transferred from FENU, and FENU faculty members teach the remaining eight USQ subjects jointly with USQ instructors. Next year, for the first time, FENU students will graduate from USQ.

The administrative support and academic exchange between FENU and USQ take place via the Internet.

- **Internet videoconference partnership with Waseda University (WU), Tokyo, Japan:** started in 2000 with the top-ranked private Japanese university. The partnership was later extended to a large-scale 2002-2005 project. Each semester, ten Russian tutors teach Russian language to the WU students, and ten Japanese tutors teach Japanese language to the FENU students for a total of 40 academic hours per week. The quality and scale of the videoconferences are unique in the history of the Russian-Japanese relations. This project is experimental and preceding an even greater educational program.
- **Internet videoconference partnership with Seattle University (SU), USA:** started in 2001. Beginning in 2002, the project is supported by the grant funds received from the Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation (FRAEC), a Seattle-based non-profit organization, and considerable matching funds of both universities. The highest officials of the Primorsky Regional Supreme Court, Primorsky Bar Association, Federal Ministry of Justice Administration, Federal Supreme Court Administration, and some other Russian legal institutions, participate in the videoconferences with the judges of the Washington State Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, members of the Washington State Bar Association, and other representatives of the American legal system. They participate in FENU-SU distance learning programs, aimed at implementing the American legal experience in the ongoing reform of the Russian judicial system. In terms of the positions of the people and the quality of technology and connection, this videoconference project seemed far fetched to many experts. FENU was the second in Russia only to Saint Petersburg State University to install a Polycom videoconference system supporting the H323 protocol. This technology dramatically improved the quality of connection and opened a new arena for the international projects. Today, FENU made this technology available to its students: since Fall 2003, FENU offered the first videoconference-based web course on the "International Law of Human Rights," taught by Prof. Christopher Roeder of SU law school. Since Spring 2004, at least three more videoconference-based SU law school courses will be available to the FENU law students. Credit transfer agreement between SU and FENU and an agreement to accept qualified FENU Law Institute graduates to the SU law school LL.M. program are the achievements unprecedented in the history of the Russian legal education.
- **Internet videoconference partnership with University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW), USA:** a partnership started in 1996 as a traditional faculty exchange program. It eventually developed to an IT-based partnership in which FENU is recognized as a national leader in the field of distance education. A course entitled "Current Problems of International Law and Business," taught by Prof. Rod Matthews (WU) and Prof. Natalia Prisekina (FENU) for nine Russian and eight

American students joined in one class, is the first Russian-American videoconference credit law course in history. It started in the Fall of 2003, one week before the first videoconference course with Seattle University.

- **FENU online degree programs and credit courses for individual students:** FENU was among the first Russian universities to create e-courses and e-tests (since 1993). The University opened its first e-degree programs in 1999. The FENU Open University, a subdivision responsible for online distance learning, was established in 2001. Starting the same year, any prospective student from any part of the world can enroll to various FENU online programs leading to accredited university degrees in business, management, marketing, accounting, finances, computer sciences, history, philosophy, sociology, and several other areas. Over 100 FENU credit courses are available online. More than 1800 students are enrolled to FENU DL degree programs. In addition, over 9,000 on-campus students register for more than 60,000 e-courses each semester. They take about 250,000 proctored e-tests annually. The scale and level of IT-support of these programs ensure FENU leadership in the field of Russian education.

As the only Russian university admitted to the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, we are proud to represent the Russian education before the top universities of the Pacific Rim. Our presentation will include a brief introduction to the Russian DL initiatives undertaken by the federal government, the regional authorities, and the individual universities. We will also discuss the trends, perspectives, and the infrastructure of Russian distance learning system.

International distance learning partnerships help FENU create a high quality DL system that has a material impact on the Russian society, the legal system, and the economy. We look forward to establishing many new partnerships and expanding and strengthening the existing ones.