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**The USA, Britain and the Russian Federation education systems in comparison.**

Mandatory schooling in the UK consists of primary school for 6 years and secondary school for another 5. After that, many students go on to do three to five “A-Levels” in their chosen subjects for another 2 years and apply to university. In total, about 40% of the population goes into higher education. It used to be highly subsidized by the government, but fees were raised to £3,000 per year in the mid-2000’s and was raised further to £6,000-9,000 from 2012 for good places (in practice, all self-respecting universities will charge the highest rates, since failing to do so would signal lack of confidence in their own quality). So the average British student studies at European universities, most of which are free or charge only symbolic rates. Typical UK programs offer a single program of study (e.g. Math; Fine Arts) for three years.

Cambridge is the top ranked UK university, closely followed by Oxford. Together they are called Oxbridge.

There are 12 grades of US mandatory schooling, divided into: elementary, secondary, and senior high. About 70% of the US populations ends up with some kind of college education and there are far more mature on returning students than in the UK. In private universities, fees are high, but subsidies for poor families and scholarships are very generous. Ironically, public universities are actually less affordable for lower middle class families. Any remaining lack of money can be made up with state subsidized loans. Finally, fees are very low in America’s excellent system of community colleges.

Apart from the occasional truant, secondary schooling is universal in all three countries. All British pupils wear school uniforms, but it is infrequent in Russia, and very rare in the US.

Corporal punishment is still practiced in schools in the conservative states in the US, which is shocking to many Europeans. Russia abolished corporal punishment in schools in 1917. The UK abolished the practice in 1987, and extended it to private schools by the early 2000’s (under EU pressure); before that, the headmaster’s cane was a common cultural element amongst the boarding school graduates that formed the British upper middle class.

Home schooling is legal in all three countries, but is by far the most widespread in the US.

The curriculum in US universities is far broader than in Britain. In contrast to the latter’s hyper-specialization, Americans place a particular stress on the value of a well-rounded “liberal arts” education; in addition to a chosen major, students are encouraged and frequently required to take classes in history, math, literature, etc. So despite the typical US undergraduate degree lasting four years as opposed to the British three, the average American student only spends perhaps 2-3 years on her major; on the upside, she emerges more knowledgeable on the world in general. The US doesn’t have exactly structured programs for particular subjects, as with Britain; as long as the requisite units have been taken by the end of the four years, the student gets his degree. To take U.C. Berkeley as an example, you need 120+ units to graduate; each class is worth three to five units; and you typically take about four classes per Fall and Spring semester (and perhaps one or two classes during Summer).

Mandatory schooling in Russia lasts for 11 years, and consists of 11 grades. Traditionally, universities admissions were based on school grades, and in the case of elite universities, written and oral exams in the proposed field of study. Recently, this system has been replaced by the Unified State Exam, which is to be taken by every pupil and used in most university admission applications (Some universities has right to manage one additional exam). About 70% of Russians go into a Higher Education Institute, which can be a university, academy, or specialized school. The typical undergrad program at a university lasts four years, follows by a two year Masters (newly changes in system, earlier it was 5 or 6 years of studying, depending on man discipline). Students take classes from different departments in the first period, and spend an increasing proportion of time on their chosen subject later on. University fees are much lower than in the US or the UK, but state stipends for students are miserly.

Many poorer American students take part-time jobs to fund their university study; many others work to begin building their career (e.g. it is common for both US and UK students to intern at investment banks, IT companies, etc. during summer). Fewer young people work in Russia; university study is more typically expected to be a full-time job.

Most universities in the US tend to be private, though there are some excellent public schools too. In Britain and Russia, almost all universities are public.

The marking systems differ. In British schools, everyday school grades are numerical, with a 1 being best and a 5 being worst; however, in national exams, an alphabetical scale is used. In Russia, the order is reversed, with a 5 being best and a 2 being worst. In the US, an A is the best grade, a C is a pass, and an F is a fail.

In US universities, having a GPA (Grade Point Average) of less than 2.0 is regarded as a fail, and grounds for expelling a student unless he improves. Having a GPA above 3.3 is very much recommended from a future employment perspective; to get into decent graduate schools, law schools and medical schools, a GPA of 3.7-4.0 is expected. In British universities, the undergraduate degree classification goes, from best to worst: 1st, 2:1, 2:2, 3rd, pass, fail. Those with a first-class or upper second degree enjoy the best job prospects. In Russia, graduation certificates were either Red (theoretically better) or Blue (theoretically worse).

Economics and related disciplines (Business, Management, Marketing, etc.) have become the most popular subjects in Britain, Russia, and the US. With the exception of Applied Math\* and Computer Science – useful for finance and IT, the two most dynamic, high-paid and prestigious sectors in all three countries – the hard sciences (e.g. Physics, Chemistry, Engineering) are sinking into the background, though the extent of the degradation varies (most advanced in Britain, least advanced in Russia). Though there is concern about this process in all three countries. There has also appeared a redundancy of degrees in Media Studies, Women’s Studies, etc., in all three countries.

The process of becoming a doctor or lawyer varies by country. In the US, universities rarely offer classes in medicine. Instead, “pre-meds” are required to take a number of classes in fundamental sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Biochemistry, Physics, Math) while doing any degree they wish (though in practice most pick something like biochemistry). The aspiring lawyer tends to take classes in subjects like Legal Studies, History, and Political Science. There is intensive competition for places at law and medical schools, so only those with the highest GPA’s, and the best MCAT’s (Medical College Admissions Test) and LSAT’s (Law School Admissions Test), get in. After several more years of study, and apprentice work at a hospital or law firm, a new doctor or lawyer appears in America.

In Britain, both Medicine and Law are studied as subjects at university for three years. As I understand it, the apprenticeship with a hospital or law firm follows immediately afterwards. On average, US doctors seem to be better trained than British ones; at least, whereas an American doctor would have no problem establishing himself in the UK, the reverse does not apply (not to even mention a Russian doctor).

Which country has the best education system? The results of international standardized tests show that there is little difference between the three countries. Russia does slightly worse on the PISA (Program for international student assessment) tests than the US, and the US does significantly worse than Britain; on the other hand, Russia tends to do slightly better on the [TIMMS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TIMSS) and PIRLS (Progress in international reading literacy study) tests. So it’s hard to say. If I had to make a generalization, I’d say math and hard sciences are taught better in Russian schools, whereas the British and Americans are better at developing argumentative and essay writing skills.

Moscow State University is usually the top ranked Russian university.

The situation is clearer in higher education. According to the most famous ARWU global universities rankings, Russia has just 2 institutions in the Top 500, compared with 154 for the United States and 38 for the United Kingdom. However, it’s important to stress that these rankings aren’t primarily reflections of universities’ quality of education, but of their funding and international prestige. The Times Higher Education ratings are even more illusory in favor of Anglo-Saxon institutions.

These rankings should all be more properly considered as global university reputation rankings. In many parts of the world, the simple ownership of a university degree from the US or the UK – no matter the subject, no matter even the performance – confers a great deal of respect and good job offers.

Probably the level of theoretical knowledge gained by students at Russian universities is no worse than at equivalent British or American universities; possibly, even better (note that the standard Russian undergraduate degree lasts six years, as opposed to four in the US and three in the UK). However, Russian universities fail big-time when it comes to applying their research capabilities to corporate applications. This is in contrast to the US, where capitalists looks up universities for the next big start-up, big corporations sponsor and head-hunt for talented students and professors and departments strike up partnerships to develop innovative new products and services. The same process goes on at British universities.

Russian universities are the successors to the Soviet system of higher education, whose biggest strengths were in math and theoretical physics, while the main applications were in military. This made research hard to monetize in civilian markets in the context of the new market economy. Scientific equipment has not been modernized, with the result that only a few top universities are still capable of conducting world-class research in spheres such as applied physics or microelectronics.

Now while it is true that some universities have begun to prosper and strike up corporate partnerships, e.g. Moscow State University with Yandex, this remains the exception rather than the rule.

Cheating is most prevalent at Russian universities, followed by American ones, and then British ones. Cheating presents in any form – payment to teachers, presents for them or useful relations.

More frequently, students simply plagiarize from the Internet. This is why, special programs have been developed to compare student essays and exams with comparable content on the Internet. Punishments are severe for students caught plagiarizing in British and American universities.

Overall, university admissions are probably the most meritocratic in the UK. In Russia, though it is very important to successfully pass interview for job. However, direct bribes have become more difficult in recent years, due to the national standardization of the exam system, but in Russia there is a lot of problems with plagiarizing.

This would be considered pretty repellent by Europeans (and most Americans too), but is only counted as corruption by the former. There are two other major examples of discrimination in university admissions to US colleges. First, good athletes – primarily American football players, rowers, and lacrosse players – are much more likely to get in with poor grades, as they bring their university money and recognition (this is also common in Oxbridge, UK, for rowers). Second, there is positive discrimination based on race: due to their poorer academic performance in schools, African-Americans and Hispanics have an easier time getting in on poor grades than whites or Asians.

American intelligence believe, that discrimination based on race is not necessarily a bad idea. Firstly, a higher education is absolutely necessary for all but the lowest-skilled careers in the US, and to enter the ranks of the elites. It’s in the interests of the American state – if not of ethnic Asians, who are disadvantaged by the system – that all races are adequately represented in higher education. Secondly, positive discrimination – in theory – is supposed to make up for the supposed discrimination that African-Americans and Hispanics suffer in schools. Abandoning it may be viewed as a politically incorrect admission that the reason their scores are lower isn’t because of systemic racial discrimination, but because of something else. Personally, I disagree with this point of view, but this is like it is.

The most prestigious US universities belong to the league: Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth College, Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, and Yale. In particular, Yale University is known as a fostering ground for future Presidents. Other excellent universities, with lower social profiles, include Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, Chicago, and Carnegie Mellon. Academically, the foremost US universities include Harvard, Princeton, MIT, Caltech, Stanford, U.C. Berkeley, and Yale. The British elites go to Oxford (if they’re bright) or St.-Andrews. Cambridge is probably the most academically rigorous – certainly for the sciences, anyway – followed by Oxford, Imperial College, University College London (UCL), the London School of Economics (LSE). The most prestigious Russian institutes are Moscow State University; Moscow Physics and Technics Institute; St.-Petersburg State University; and the Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow.

Fake colleges and degrees are common in both Russia and the US.