

Perspectives and Challenges of Developing Student Mobility in Siberian State Aerospace University

Abstract

The aim of this paper is a closer look at the actual trends of the Russian student mobility, the factors stimulating and discouraging student mobility, the outcomes of student mobility, and the controversial issues recently debated in this area.

Siberian State Aerospace University has had more than 10 years experience in organizing student mobility. Most of the problems in carrying out international activities are common for the whole Russia but still there are some peculiarities featuring technical universities situated in the centre of Russia.

Student mobility and accompanying academic recognition are assumed to be necessary prerequisites for an open and dynamic international educational area that will aid worldwide integration and labour market mobility (1).

Student mobility refers to the process when students change university and usually even the country for some certain period of time. The period of time can be various but usually it is restricted to a semester or a year. Student mobility is usually not spontaneous, it is very often organized and stimulated by the administration and international departments of the university. However the mobility can be organized by the other body or the students themselves (self-organized or “free-movers”).

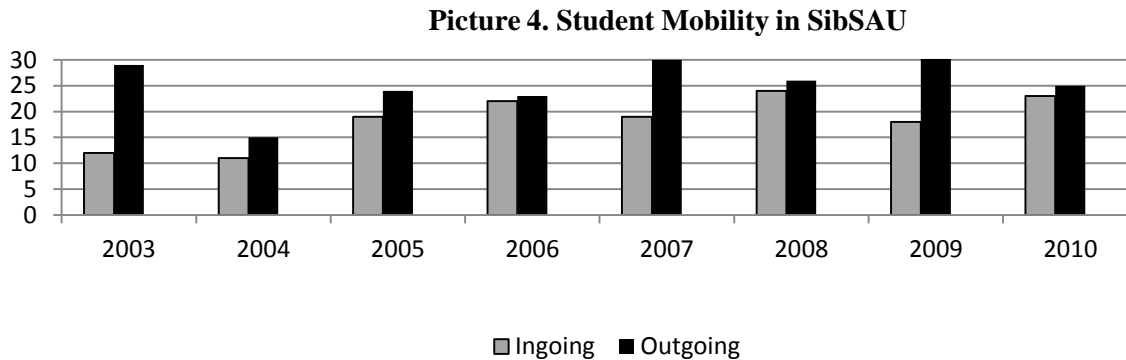
Siberian State Aerospace University (SibSAU) is a contemporary multi-disciplinary higher school where specialists in such high-technology and innovative spheres as rocket and space production as well as international business, finance, management and humanities are trained. The university has established and maintains international relationships with forty universities in twenty-five countries of the world. The main focus is on long-term projects aimed at making educational and scientific activity meet world standards.

The stress in international cooperation is made on realization of mutually beneficial programs of academic exchange and joint projects which allow students to get Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree training in foreign universities. The aim of SibSAU is to have an average of 10% of students both as foreign students studying in the university and students of SibSAU participating in different programs of student mobility.

International integration of Siberian universities has its own peculiarities one of which is their geographical position. SibSAU is situated in the centre of Russia. It is quite distant from both Europe and Asia-Pacific region which does not help the university to have transboundary agreements with foreign universities. For foreign students Siberia is considered very often as an exotic and sometimes even dangerous place to study. For Russian students there are also many

obstacles including for instance visa procedures. There are no Consulates or Embassies of foreign countries in Krasnoyarsk and students have to go to Novosibirsk or even Moscow to obtain a visa which is quite expensive, requires much additional time.

The number of ingoing and outgoing students in SibSAU is demonstrated at picture 4.

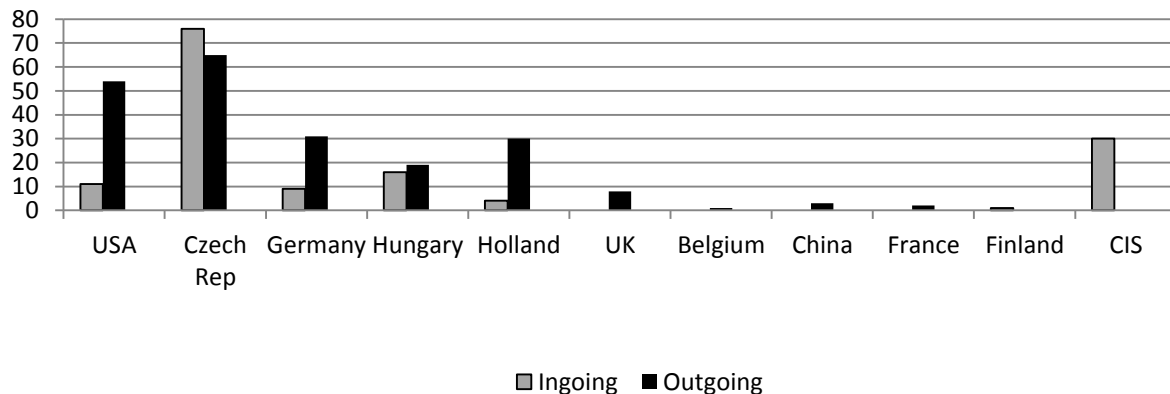


The picture clearly shows that the number of outgoing students exceeds the number of foreign students studying in SibSAU. On the average about 20 foreign students come to SibSAU each year mostly as exchange students or for summer courses and internship. Up to 25-30 students of SibSAU study each year abroad as exchange students or for double diplomas.

The overall number of students taking part both in ingoing and outgoing mobility for the last seven years and their distribution among the countries are presented at picture 5. Most student mobility programs are developing with the US universities, the universities of the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary and Holland. Quite a lot of students from the former USSR study in SibSAU which is peculiar for all Russian universities. Student exchange and study abroad programs are organized under SibSAU bilateral agreements with such European higher schools as Holland Fontys, Eindhoven, Budapest Business School in Hungary, Czech Technical University in Prague, etc.

One of reasons why the number of outgoing students is much higher than the ingoing ones is in language proficiency. Students from SibSAU study in foreign countries in the English language. All partner universities from European countries collaborating with SibSAU offer courses in English. At the same time SibSAU is only developing special disciplines in the English language. That is why students from the Czech Republic and Hungary willing to combine studying the Russian language and their areas of some special interest. Though there are already several courses in SibSAU which are delivered in the English language for both foreign and Russian students. They are mainly for Bachelor's Degree in International Business and some programs in Master's Degrees. Such practice from the one hand helps to attract foreign students to the university and from the other hand stimulates Russian students to learn foreign languages and communicate with students from abroad.

Picture 5. Countries of Ingoing and Outgoing Student Mobility



One of the most successful joint projects of SibSAU is with State University of New-York, College in Oneonta (SUNY, Oneonta). For more than ten years it has allowed students from SibSAU to get a dual degree (SibSAU Bachelor’s Degree in Management and SUNY Bachelor of Science degree in Business Economics). To earn the degree from SUNY Oneonta, SibSAU students are required to complete 122 credit hours of courses. In the case of SibSAU, the program was developed in consultation with SUNY Oneonta, so that its courses would be accepted for transfer to the maximum allowable amount, which is seventy-seven credit hours during 3 years in the home university. After transferring the maximum of seventy-seven credit hours from SibSAU to SUNY Oneonta, students must complete 45 credit hours in specified courses at SUNY Oneonta. But up to 15 credits of SUNY Oneonta coursework are usually taught at SibSAU by SUNY Oneonta faculty. Such summer courses delivered by American faculty in Krasnoyarsk give excellent experience both in the English language proficiency and special knowledge about American peculiarities of Business courses to SibSAU students. They also attract foreign students from partner universities from the Czech Republic, Hungary etc.

One more joint project was developed by SibSAU in collaboration with Dickinson State University (DSU), the USA. Two universities have agreed upon the Articulation and Implementation Agreement to outline the terms regarding the administration and implementation of the “Dual-Degree Joint” (DDJ) Program. The DDJ Program includes two plans: “2+1+1” Plan which allows SibSAU students who have completed their sophomore year to study at DSU during their junior year; and “3+1” Plan which allows SibSAU students who have completed their junior year to study at DSU during their senior year.

Under the Dual Degree Joint (DDJ program), students are to follow and meet the established educational requirements of both institutions. Based on the fundamental premise of recognizing and accepting academic course credit between DSU and SibSAU, the DDJ program will enable Russian students from SibSAU to obtain bachelor’s degrees from both DSU and SibSAU upon successful completion of the DDJ program described herein. Recognizing transfer credits earned at DSU, SibSAU issues DDJ Program students a Bachelor’s degree after they return to Russia and complete the remaining required coursework as determined by SibSAU. DSU confers the Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration after the student completes the DDJ program requirements including successful completion of all required DSU credits and the equivalent of 128 U.S. credits (including acceptable transfer credits from SibSAU), returning to Russia within

one month of the DDJ program's end date, and successfully completing all SibSAU's degree requirements. DSU does not award the degree until SibSAU sends written confirmation that the student has completed his/her studies and has been granted a Russian Bachelor's degree.

Dual Degree Programs facilitate and stimulate the growth of student mobility. They imply automatic recognition of credits earned by students during their study abroad period, help to avoid complications of translating grading schemes, explaining transcripts. That is why they can be considered new and radical ventures in academic mobility (11).

Now SibSAU is planning to increase the share of foreign students as well as the number of students of SibSAU going to study abroad. Further development becomes possible with the transition of Russian education system to two-level system of Bachelor's and Master's degrees. This system has already been legally adopted in Russia and starting from 2011 all universities have transitioned to it. Still some programs mostly in the sphere of technology will retain the specialist 5 year long degree. Obviously it was one of the reasons why mostly programs of business and economics were the basic ones for cooperation between SibSAU and foreign partners. It was very hard to articulate and agree on entirely different programs in the spheres of technology and natural sciences. Now bachelor and master programs will fit much better into the international system which we hope will allow SibSAU develop more joint programs with foreign partners. Introduction of the module system and credit makes it possible to provide individual educational trajectories and curricula adjustments as developing double diploma and exchange agreements with foreign partners. Still whereas educational standards are very autonomous in most foreign countries, in Russia very much is still determined by the state. It sometimes causes the issue of nontransferability of credits. Students are reluctant to attempt a semester or year away from their home institution if they are not certain they will receive full credit value for their studies.

Credits for studies completed at another higher institution are either fully or partially transferred to the degree of the student in SibSAU. The main aim of the university is not to prolong the duration of the student's study in SibSAU because of the studying abroad. Usually the curriculum is discussed with department staff members and a so-called study plan is drawn up. The decision to approve the transfer of credits is usually made by the faculty after the department has approved the study plan.

SibSAU is planning to introduce the Learning Agreement which is a document drawn up by the student with the help of his or her department and the host university before departure. Also all students participating in student exchange programs after finishing to study abroad have to bring to their home university transcript of records stating the student's grades before and after the study abroad period. Both the home and the host university must approve the learning agreement based on the ECTS system before the student's departure. The two universities exchange the student's academic transcript information before and after the study abroad period.

One of the key weaknesses is the problem of quality assurance. In order to attract international students and conclude agreements with foreign partners a university has to prove that its programs comply with international standards. External quality assurance is guaranteed by accreditation of the programs in foreign academic and professional organizations and boards. SibSAU was one of the first Russian universities who accredited 11 programs in the European

Council of Business Education (ECBE) and 4 programs in the American Council of Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). Now the aim of the university is to accredit programs in the sphere of techniques and technologies.

Insufficient information on study possibilities abroad sometimes prevents students from taking part in mobility programs. SibSAU takes an active part in international conferences and seminars as well as provides for organization of such events in the university.

SibSAU organizes Summer Schools in Krasnoyarsk for foreign students. The program of three schools (Unique Ecosystems of Central Siberia, Life Support for Space Systems and Tracks of Recent Days) includes not only courses held indoor but also outdoor activities aiming to show Siberian nature and magnificence of surroundings. All Schools are targeted at undergraduates and postgraduates from all over the world pursuing interests or developing their skills in natural sciences and techniques. The highly-qualified faculty of summer courses help students gain extra knowledge within the programme and have a rest to remember Siberia for a long time.

One more interesting event to attract foreign students to SibSAU as well as to promote international education among Russian students will be organized in summer 2011. It is a unique forum that will take place in four countries in collaboration with five universities: Siberian State Aerospace University, Institute of Finance & Economics, Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia), Dalian Polytechnic University & Dalian University (China) and Handong Global University, Pohang (Korea). The main objectives of the Forum are as follows: to provide insights into the business environment, opportunities and challenges of the participating countries, to learn about international business practices at the regional and global levels, and to develop business and personal network. In the framework of the seminar the participants most of which are students of master's degrees from the foreign countries will discuss the following issues: economic challenges and opportunities on the regional and global scale, impacts of environmental changes on the socio-economic development of the countries and arising challenges, technological advances, their impacts on business and arising challenges, structural changes in the traditional economic sectors of the countries, influences of national cultures on business development and new ways and opportunities to develop effective partnerships and international mobility. The forum will be held in all four participating countries.

Such events help SibSAU orient its activities towards international integration of its higher education to meet new standards and world tendencies. There are some objective obstacles to these activities but the mission of every university including SibSAU is to link efforts to overcome all challenges.

Development of student mobility ensures high quality of academic degrees that are valuable and prestigious both on the local Russian and international labour markets. Major advantages of studying abroad as a part of Russian degree include obtaining international diplomas and certificates, which facilitate the job search in Russia and abroad, improved career prospects, acquiring a wider outlook on life, prestige, foreign language practice and uniform education standards as well as education quality assurance. That is why international integration of higher education, as well as all activities connected with globalization, set new standards for Russian institutions.

Siberian State Aerospace University aims at developing the system of academic mobility cooperation based on the combination of the best Russian and international traditions. The first perspective is in expanding the number of bilateral and multilateral agreements with foreign universities concerning student exchange. In an international orientation, the central standing will be with universities of Europe and the USA in order to provide enrollment of SibSAU students to a variety of joint programs including high-technology and innovative spheres. Double degree program agreements need to be expanded beyond the USA universities. Strengthening the bonds of international exchange with Asian and CIS countries is on the agenda for the coming years as they can be concerned as major customers of SibSAU's export of educational services.

The attraction and integration of international students at SibSAU will require further development of such international programs as pre-university foundation program, summer schools, international joint academic programs, internships, upgrading courses and short-term academic programs on different technical and business subjects conducted in foreign languages.

Another emphasis is going to be done by the university on the foreign language capacity, in particular in English. SibSAU is working hard at establishing English taught programs. Much attention at the university is paid to teaching languages to the students and faculty of Business and Humanities. It is very important to apply this practice to the students and faculty of technical departments.

The next direction is the achievement of international standards of quality assurance of more academic programs including those in the branches of techniques and technologies through international accreditation. Other steps for further enhancement of SibSAU international student mobility include development of the network of central and departmental coordinators for international affairs, improvement of the SibSAU external promotional and advertising activities as well as internal channels of communication between the central Department of International Cooperation and academic staff, faculty and students.

We strongly believe that all these efforts will help SibSAU to meet international challenges with solutions to regional problems, to develop individuals, and to drive the attainment of economic imperatives.

Bibliography

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