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A comparative study of termination of student status in Central Europe

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If the student status ends before the absolutorium (pre-degree), we can speak about dropout. In our paper, we are going to present the cases of termination of the student status and we would also like to make a comparison in three countries: Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania. The aim of our research is to demonstrate the various ways in which student status can be terminated. The dropout is an important and significant topic in higher education policy, because it causes institutional and individual loss, too.

Keywords: dropout; student status; higher education policy

INTRODUCTION

The increase of student's number in higher education goes hand in hand with increase of dropout in higher education (Kozma, 2004; Trow, 1974). Student status is acquired by enrolling at an institution of higher education. If student status terminates before the absolutorium, we speak of dropout, unless the student continues education at another institution. From the student's point of view, this does not represent a break in study; however, statistically, it is considered to be a dropout from the previous institution (Pusztai, 2017). Since 1970s, several studies have dealt with the issue of student dropouts, trying to identify its features and explanatory factors, using various theoretical models to describe the phenomenon (e.g., Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Vossensteyn et al., 2015). Our research presents cases involving the termination of student status. Our focus is on institutions of higher education in Hungary, as well as Hungarian institutions of higher education in Romania and the Ukraine. The aim of our research is to investigate the various ways in which student status can be terminated and, by comparing and contrasting procedures of terminating student status to present flexible, permissive, and stricter, less "in-service" higher education systems by shedding light on, analyzing, comparing, and contrasting higher education legislation. The Center for Higher Educational Research and Development carries out fundamental and applied researches regarding higher education in the border region of Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine. Our aim is to carry out researches and negotiate actual developmental questions, which confer regional and institutional decisions.

LEGISLATION OUTLINE

Hungary

The scope of Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education covers all Hungarian institutions of higher

education, all persons involved in higher education activities and governance, as well as the higher education activities performed by Hungarian higher education institutions outside the territory of Hungary (Act CCIV/2011, 2018, 1§ 2). The provisions of this Act apply to all Hungarian higher education institutions irrespective of their maintainers.

If student status terminates before the absolutorium has been given, we speak of dropout. Student status is terminated automatically on the last day of the final examination period (If the absolutorium is obtained, students may complete a final examination during the examination period within 2 years following the award of the final certificate. After the expiry of the 2-year period, the final examination can be completed under certain conditions. A final examination cannot be completed after the fifth year following student status termination; Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 50§ 3, 1§ 2).

Student status terminates on the day the student announces the discontinuation of his/her studies (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). In this case, there is no need to submit a request, since the student himself/herself is asking for the termination of student status.

If the student is transferred to another higher education institution, there is no breaking point regarding his/her studies; however, from the institution's point of view, this is considered a dropout (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). Student status at the previous institution is terminated on the day of the transfer and on the same day a new student status is acquired at the host institution.

If the student fails to meet curriculum requirements [i.e., has failed to acquire at least 18 credits as an average of the last two semesters, and/or does not meet the grade

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average recommended by the institution (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 48§ 2)] or has come to the end of state-financed [The state finances two extra semesters beyond the duration of the course in BA, BSc, MA, and MSc programs. The maximum financing period is 14 semesters in the case of a single-cycle program (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 47§ 1)] semesters and/or has completed the program 1.5 times without obtaining the absolutorium, he/she is *relocated* into the full tuition category. Student status terminates if the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in the full tuition category (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2).

During the education program, the student has the right to suspend student status; however, the total combined duration of the suspension period may not exceed *two consecutive semesters*. If the suspension period exceeds this duration, student status is terminated (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). The institution may authorize the student's request for a combined period of suspension exceeding the duration set out above (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). If no request is submitted, student status is terminated. Student status is also terminated if the student *fails to register* for the next semester (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). Failure to register is not entirely dependent on the student's choice, since if he/she is behind with tuition-fee payments, it is not possible for him/her to register. The institution sends a notification regarding the payment delay. If payment obligations are not met, the institution will assess the social background of the student. If the student is found incapable of meeting payment obligations, the institution might provide an opportunity for payment by installments, or even cancel the debt. As a result, the student can register for the next semester. If no reason is found for non-payment of the tuition fee, the debt is still effective and may lead to the termination of student status.

A penalty may be imposed on any student who seriously violates the rules and regulations of the institution. One form of disciplinary penalty is barring the student from studying for a definite period (for a maximum of 2 years). During this period, student status is suspended. The most serious penalty is *expelling* the student from the institution (Act CCIV/2011, 2018; 1§ 2). This leads to the termination of student status. In the next part of our paper, we examined the legal background of the dropout in the foreign institutions.

INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

Romania

Partium Christian University

Partium Christian University was established following the regime change in 1989 and was the first Hungarian independent, accredited university in Romania. Act 196/2008 of October 21 states that Partium Christian University is a Hungarian higher education institution, an autonomous legal personality with a public benefit objective and legal status.

Student Status at Partium Christian University

Student status is acquired by enrolling at Partium Christian University and meeting the requirements below:

1. A successful entrance examination
2. Transfer from another university
3. Reenrollment (*Section 39*) (Partium Christian University, 2018)

Student status termination at Partium Christian University

As outlined above, student status can be acquired in various ways; however, our research focuses on presenting ways of terminating student status.

Student status at Partium Christian University has to be renewed each year by registering for the next academic year. The student signs an annex to the contract with the university related to meeting the obligations outlined in the syllabus (*Section 39.2*). If the student *fails to register for the next academic year*, student status is terminated.

Student status is also terminated *at the request of the student*. A request can be made under the following conditions:

1. The result of a successful entrance examination becomes void, if the student requests the termination of the student status before the start of the academic year and the request is approved by the Faculty Board (*Section 42.a*).
2. Following the start of the academic year, student status can be terminated as a result of a disciplinary penalty or at the request of the student, provided the annual tuition fee has been paid. Students whose status has been terminated at their request can subsequently apply for reenrollment in a written form. These requests are handled by the dean. In the case of reenrollment, students fall into the full tuition category (*Section 42.b*).

As with most institutions, the structure of the course is based on the academic credit system. Student status is also terminated if the student *fails to pass a minimum of 30 credits* by the end of the academic year (i.e., the reexamination period in September). In such cases, the student can reregister in the full tuition category. If the student does not wish to continue his/her studies in the full tuition category, student status is terminated (*Section 30*).

Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (RO)

For the successful completion of an academic year and to move on to the following one, students have to *pass a minimum of 30 credits* from a maximum of 60 credits. If the student *fails to pass the minimum number of credits* his/her enrollment is discontinued, that is, student status is terminated (*Article 25*) (Babeş-Bolyai University, 2017).

Furthermore, in cases where the student *fails to meet tuition and penalty requirements* by the deadline, that is, 10 days before the start of the following academic year, he/she is excluded from the university (*Article 25*).

Students whose enrollment has been discontinued in conformity with *Article 25* can reregister in the full tuition category at their request and with the approval of the Faculty Board within 5 years of the discontinuation. We speak of dropout if the student does not wish or *cannot afford to continue his/her studies in the full tuition category*.

Failure to pass the minimum number of credits, to meet the requirement to move on to the following academic year,

can also result in dropout. Students can reregister on condition that they fulfill the syllabus requirements for the academic year they parallelly move on to with the academic year in question. If, *for whatever reason, students fail to meet the requirements*, we can refer to this as dropout (*Article 27*).

If they fulfill certain requirements, students have the right to request the extension of their studies. Requests for extension are handed in at the faculty secretary at least 10 days before the start of the academic year. *Failing to hand in the request* results in exclusion from the university.

If the student fails to complete his/her studies during the extended period, we also speak of dropout (three or four extensions for BA studies and two extensions for MA studies) (*Article 30*).

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (RO)

The Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania uses the European Credit Transfer System. University regulations are in conformity with the national higher education laws (National Education Law No. 1/2011, Law 288/2004 on the *organization of university studies*) and ministerial decrees (3235/2005 and 3617/2005) (*A Sapientia Erdélyi Magyar Tudományegyetem kreditrendszerű Tanulmányi-és vizsgaszabályzata, 2013*).

Student status is terminated on the following cases:

1. If the student fails to meet the deadline for registering in the Neptun system and signing the study contract required for his/her studies and has not requested a suspension or extension of studies. In this case, a rector's decree is issued terminating student status from the start of the semester.
2. If the student is expelled due to academic reasons as presented under 26§/4. In this case, a rector's decree is issued terminating student status from the start of the following semester.
3. In cases of misconduct, if such penalty is imposed. Student status terminates on the date stated in the disciplinary penalty.
4. If the student fails to meet contractual payment obligations. In this case, student status terminates from the start of the semester following the unsettled debts.
5. At the student's request, starting from the date stated in the rector's approval.
6. At the expiry of the maximum extension period. In this case, student status terminates on the date the rector's decree is issued (*5. § 8. a-f*).

Ukraine

There are two higher education institutions in Ukraine, which offer education in Hungarian. The *Uzhhorod National University in Transcarpathia is the oldest higher education institution in the country*. It was established in 1946. In 1963, the Hungarian language specialization was introduced by the university and in 1965, the Hungarian Philology Department was founded. This focused on training teachers of Hungarian language and literature, who could study in Hungarian for the first time. The university is administered

by the State and thus the language of education is Ukrainian. In 2008, the Hungarian language Faculty of Humanities and Natural Sciences was founded. This offers courses taught partly in Hungarian (specific subjects are taught in Hungarian) within five different specializations. In 2016, the Hungarian language faculty became the Ukrainian-Hungarian Educational Institute ([Orosz, 2007](#); [Uzhhorod National University](#)).

At the Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education, the language of education is entirely Hungarian. The institution is a private establishment, funded by an association and provides its graduates with certificates accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The education system in Ukraine is centralized; there is no autonomy provided for minority education. Consequently, minority education institutions differ from other institutions solely in terms of the language in which the courses are taught. They are bound to comply with the central legislation applicable to all educational institutions ([Orosz, 2007](#)).

At present, the education law in force in Ukraine is the Law on Higher Education adopted on July 1, 2014. The law regulates public relations in the process of enforcing the constitutional right to education, and the rights and obligations of the actors in the education sector, and defines the competences of public bodies and local governments in the field of education ([Law of Ukraine of 2014, Concerning higher education](#)). The law applies to all higher education institutions on the territory of Ukraine.

Article 46 of the law on higher education treats the issue of school dropout. The Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, based on the aforementioned law, issued a decree on dropout. The regulation defines dropout as follows: termination of student status of a student enrolled in higher education for reasons specified in the law of higher education ([Decree No. 525 of 2015](#)).

Article 46 of the law on higher education covers the possible reasons for student status termination in higher education institutions in Ukraine. Student status is terminated:

1. at the completion of studies;
2. at the request of the student;
3. if the student transfers or enrolls to another higher education institution;
4. if the student fails to meet syllabus requirements;
5. if there is a breach of contract between the higher education institution and the student;
6. in other cases, where:
 - illness is certified by a medical commission (contagious or mental illness);
 - the higher education institute is closed down or restructured;
 - there is 1 month of unjustified absence;
 - the student fails the final exam or fails to defend his/her thesis;
 - the student does not present him/herself within 10 days following registration;
 - a disciplinary penalty is imposed (if the student is found guilty);
 - the student dies (student status ends on the day of death) ([Article 46/2014, Section 1](#)).

Table 1. Reasons for student status termination in the Hungarian higher education institutions of the countries examined

Reasons for student status termination	Hungary	Romania	Ukraine
1. Independent individual decisions (the student requests the termination of student status and/or transfers to another higher education institution)	X	X	X
2. Obtaining the absolutorium	X	X	X
3. Failure to meet curriculum requirements			X
4. Exceeding the number of permitted passive semesters	X		
5. Financial (the student has debts to the institution, or does not meet payment obligations)	X	X	X
6. Misdemeanor, disciplinary penalty (the most serious penalty is exclusion from the higher education institution; thus, student status is terminated)	X	X	X
7. Misconduct, unjustified absences			X
8. Poor physical/mental condition (in the case of contagious or mental diseases that pose a danger to others, student status is terminated)			X
9. Closing down of the higher education institution (student status is terminated at an institution that has closed down, and the student is transferred to another higher education institution)	X	X	X

Section 2 of Article 46 of the aforementioned law enumerates the reasons for a temporary suspension of student status:

1. illness;
2. voluntary service in the army;
3. family reasons;
4. scholarship abroad; and
5. maternity leave.

In accordance with the law concerning higher education, the rector of each higher education institution issues a decree on student status termination or transfer. The decrees issued by the rectors of the *Uzhhorod National University and Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education* include the reasons enumerated above for student status termination. The decrees issued by higher education institutions state that underage students can be excluded only following the decision of a commission. In Ukraine, secondary education lasts 11 years; thus, during the university entrance examination, many students are not yet 18 years old. If a first-year student fails to meet requirements, he/she cannot repeat the year and he/she has to retake the entrance examination. If the student's absence from the exam is unjustified, he/she fails the exam. In the higher education institutions mentioned above, if the student fails fewer than two exams, he/she can retake the exam by the start of the next semester. Students can take the exam in one subject twice: first with the course instructor and second in front of a committee ([Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education Decree of 2015](#); [Uzhhorod National University Decree No. 698/2015](#)).

In 2005, Ukraine joined the Bologna Process of higher education reform. Joining the Bologna system initiated, a number of education policy processes in the country. In order to fight corruption, and also to improve the quality of secondary education, in 2006, the Ukrainian education system developed a unified admission system to integrate with the European model and to create a unified admission process into higher education institutions. Independent testing centers were established and external independent testing was introduced (Зовнішнє незалежне оцінювання – ЗНО/ZNO). As a result, students who wish to pursue their studies in Ukrainian higher education

institutions have to take Ukrainian language and literature, History, or Mathematics A-level exams in independent testing centers ([Orosz 2015](#); [Ukrainian Center for Educational Quality Assessment website](#)). If the independent A-level exams are successful, students can first apply for two full-time specializations, and later for one full-time and one correspondence specialization. This influences the rate of dropout in higher education institutions in Ukraine. Many students cannot meet the requirements of two specializations and thus they drop out from one.

Comparing and contrasting

As a result of our research, it can be stated that the reasons for student status termination bear many similarities in the Hungarian language higher education institutions of the three countries. Table 1 shows these similarities.

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, it can be stated that there are a number of similarities and differences in the higher education laws regulating dropout in Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine. In all three countries, the student has the right to request student status termination. The process is similar in all three countries: from the institution's point of view, it is considered a case of dropout, although a new student status might become active at another institution. Parallels can also be drawn in the case of the completion of studies or failure to meet payment obligations, disciplinary penalties, and the closing down of the higher education institution.

Romania does the most to prevent dropout. Students do not drop out easily from higher education institutions and simultaneously lose student status. There are no reasons for student status termination, which are in effect exclusively in Romania.

With regard to the dropout, Ukraine has the most serious legal background of the countries under scrutiny. Only here can student status be terminated in the case of an unjustified absence for a period of 1 month, or if the student does not present him/herself within 10 days following registration. Student status is also terminated if a contagious or mental

illness occurs that poses a danger to others. According to the law, student status is terminated at the death of the student.

With regard to the legal background related to dropout, Hungary occupies an intermediate position between Romania and Ukraine. According to regulations in Hungary, failure to meet curriculum requirements does not result in student status termination in all cases. However, failure to meet payment requirements or serious disciplinary penalty leads to student status termination.

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