

Website as an information distribution channel and promoter of the idea of social responsibility in Kazakhstani universities

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Abstract. This paper examines the social responsibility of universities in Kazakhstan. By analyzing the changes occurring in the society, civil society development, emergence of new forms of communication, the authors emphasize the need to develop social responsibility in modern Kazakh universities and inform the community through new and effective channels, such as official web sites of educational institutions.

Keywords: social responsibility, the University website, reputation, stakeholders, social image of the university, social dimension

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are one of the most important social institutions of the modern society and the strategy of their conduct in accordance with their mission has to be of a socially responsible nature. The London Communiqué 2007 states that the purpose of higher education includes preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation [1]. Society imposes high obligations on educational institutions, expecting that they should show examples of a high degree of social responsibility.

Today, we need to realize that the social assessment of any organization in the civil society, including universities, becomes an essential factor in building the public attitude towards them. However, social responsibility up to this day has been spoken of in the business sphere, in particular, in the oil industry. Socially responsible behavior of higher education institutions is useful for long term success of the university and society in general. However, in spite of emerging new demands set by the society towards educational institutions, no conference or roundtable on the topic of social responsibility in Kazakhstani universities has been held so far.

Social responsibility has to become an integral part of the university and its long-term policy. At the same time the general public and stakeholders should be informed about this policy, which allows to create favorable information filed about the higher education institution. The social image of any institution is shaped through informing about the important social university activities – its role in economic, social and cultural life of the country, region, city, in educating and training young people, assisting in solving social problems. There is a direct relationship between the social image of the institution and its financial performance. Higher education institutions not aware of their social responsibility to the society are deprived of potential consumers of their services, reputation among other important community stakeholders. The introduction of social responsibility practices and spreading the information about them can affect the positive reputation of Kazakhstani universities globally. Internet access, increase of the interactive audience,

where every member of the civil society can express his/her opinion in the global communication space are among the reasons why schools should not only adhere to the principles of social responsibility, but also inform the public. One of the most effective channels for this purpose is the official university website, which allows direct communication with all the university stakeholders. In addition, social projects are rarely reflected in other media.

2. Kazakhstani attempts to embark on social responsibility in higher education institutions

An analysis of websites of the top 4 Kazakhstani universities has shown the need for more complete coverage of higher education institutions social assessment. The official websites of the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research, Nazarbayev University, the L.Gumilyov Eurasian National University, and al-Farabi Kazakh National University have been chosen for the study. The research revealed that there are no documents reflecting clearly stated social responsibility policy on the websites of the 4 universities. However, all these universities implement both internal and external social programs. Social support of students, assistance to alumni in job hunting, staff social support are among the internal projects. Contribution to the development of the civil society through social and charity events can be named as external social programs. Much attention in Kazakhstani universities is paid to the alumni career, cooperation with employers, work of the Boards of Trustees. Yet, **Kazakhstani higher education institutions do not have a clearly stated social responsibility policy; neither do they have a specially designed program of corporate social responsibility. Introducing a special section devoted to the topic on the websites of universities will serve as a tool to further promote the ideas of social responsibility in universities.**

Today social responsibility as one of the commitments of the university should be on a par with teaching and research. As noted above, the purpose of higher education is to prepare students for an active role in a democratic society, for the professional and personal development. Education offered by universities should help people not only become a specialist prepared for professional careers in a rapidly changing world, but also help realize the personal potential. In addition, universities should teach social responsibility. Higher education institutions contribute to the social and economic development, educating leaders, equipping them with knowledge and values that will help them become responsible adults, who in turn will help build a better future. Universities form a socially responsible individual, cultivate a culture of socially responsible society. For example, we know that in all the aforementioned universities work on "green projects" which teach young people to act responsible for the environment. However, this information is not available on the websites.

2.1. The Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research

The Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP) can serve as an example of a smart approach to inform stakeholders about the contribution to the development of the civil society. It provides information about student organizations, where there are about 30 of them, which organize social events, information about these events. KIMEP volunteer student with the support of the faculty held concerts to raise money for eye surgery of three children from the orphanage and purchase of medical equipment. Children were preparing the concert, and the faculty and students were engaged in organizing the concert. The messages on the website make it clear that this event was held by the student organization called **Young Assembly of Nations**. The students were engaged in all the information and publicity issues, from creating the design to spreading flyers and tickets. There is a **Group of Future Businessmen (FBG)** among the student organizations. Their mission is to encourage and motivate KIMEP students to actively participate not only in the academic, but also in public life. Participation in charitable, information and cultural activities help students develop their best qualities. For example, arranging charity events for children from orphanages, students help children get a bright and interesting experience. **Future Leaders of Kazakhstan** is one of the student organizations. According to the mission the organization is responsible for holding international seminars in cooperation with international universities and organizations. There are also organizations that promote entrepreneurship, such as Business Incubator Group. Its task is to create a business environment in KIMEP by organizing and conducting business projects on a

professional level. Along with the mentioned organizations there are sports organizations as well. They aim to promote healthy lifestyle among students, encourage respect for animals. For instance, the KIMEP Society for Animal Protection is devoted to the solution of the problem of stray animals and promotion of respect for animals among the students.

In the section *About* on the KIMEP official website of the university Chan Young Bang, its President, with his speech to the stakeholders, declares that since its establishment KIMEP has always aspired to become 'world-class' in every aspect of its operations. "This term is often used but rarely defined. As we strive to enter the ranks of the world's elite universities in the near future, KIMEP will base all its efforts on the following definition: *A world-class university should produce eminently qualified graduates with the values, expertise, skills and knowledge which are consistent with and relevant to, the society in which they intend to serve*" [2].

2.2. Nazarbayev University

The place of the university in the society, its role and social responsibility are reflected in the mission and vision of the university. The policy of social responsibility at Nazarbayev University – a new university in Kazakhstan, can serve as a positive example for all universities in the country. Namely, Nazarbayev University's mission has a social responsibility focus: to advance the development of education and research in the Republic of Kazakhstan to the international level, as well as to contribute to Astana's aspiration to become the research and educational center of Eurasia. The vision also has a social feature: to form a competitive human capital, capable of developing and contributing to the science, education and national economy." The website provides the guiding principles of Nazarbayev University with a social content:

Leadership: aspiring for leadership in education, research and medicine, as well as in all activities;

Love of Country: students, faculty and scholars serving for the benefit of Kazakhstani society in order to build a modern prosperous state;

Autonomy and Academic Freedom: ensuring independence and collegiality in management and decision making based on democratic principles and personal responsibility of each individual involved; guarantee of academic freedom for faculty and researchers within their research, educational and clinical affairs;

Integrity: students, faculty and scientists following high moral and ethical principles, as well professionalism in all their activities;

Transparency and openness: ensuring full transparency and public accessibility of university operations;

Innovation Focus: constantly striving to employ cutting edge methods and technologies, readiness to utilize new knowledge and information.

Tolerance: creating equal conditions and accessibility for all, regardless of ethnic or religious status, gender, nationality, social status or physical condition.

Therefore, Nazarbayev University proclaimed principles fully comply with the thesis of social responsibility, stipulated in the documents of the Bologna Process [3].

The website of the University conveys to the students the need to develop their health through sport and regular physical exercises for they not only provide a fantastic opportunity to develop teamwork and leadership skills, but also help to socialize across different social and ethnic networks and to inspire and motivate.

2.3. Gumilyov Eurasian National University

Gumilyov Eurasian National University undertakes measures to develop the concept of social responsibility. Department of Social Educational Work operates at the University. It consists of several divisions which are charged with social activities to benefit the society. The divisions strive to create conditions for self-actualization of the students. The Centre for Patriotic Education's goal is to increase the proactive attitude and diligence in young people allowing them to fulfill their civic and military duty, to realize their social and spiritual needs, ethics, sense of honor and dignity, and the further expansion of democratic principles in the student community. The work of the Center aims at contributing to the development of the Kazakhstani individual of the 21st century, capable to continue democratic reforms and

bring the country to the level of the leading states in the world. The Council of Kazakh Repatriates is known for its activities to help student repatriates adapt to the Motherland and be engaged in cultural and scientific life. The leaders of the Council arrange various meetings, conferences, events, as well as promote Kazakh culture.

2.4. al-Farabi Kazakh National University

“The success of the university is maintained due to socially active, creative and highly intellectual students” as it is officially stated on the website of al-Farabi Kazakh National University [5]. According to the mission statement the University targets to educate competitive specialists with modern prestigious higher educations, who will be capable to solve problems of the intensive development of the most important sectors of economy, science and public life of Kazakhstan.

The Concept of the Educational Work adopted at the University is geared toward forming civic consciousness and active social position of the students. The students are encouraged to participate in the university, city and national events, campaigns, movements that are humanistic, patriotic, social, moral and psychologically oriented; implement measures to preserve inter-ethnic harmony among students and faculty; observe discipline and respect for rules of the community.

It is one of the University strategic purposes to develop the al-Farabi Kazakh National University not only as republican, but also international centre of education in the Central-Asian region with worthy positioning in the world educational space.

3. Conclusion

Thus, today there is a high level of awareness among universities to follow the principle of social responsibility as they train future decision-makers. It is necessary to embed social responsibility in all the functions of higher education institution. As a matter of fact, activities in the area are being implemented; however, the policy is not clearly defined. It is essential to further spread the idea of social responsibility of universities, to promote the concept. The official website of the university can become the most effective channel for this purpose. The web accessibility will help universities make their activities transparent to the public, as, nowadays, people rely on the information accessed online.

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