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The Higher Education System in Vietnam

by Kristy Kelly, Director, Institute of International Education/Vietnam

Acknowledgements: *This report was compiled from information provided by the World Bank and the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam. World Education Services and the US Information Agency also provided information. The Higher education system in Vietnam is in great flux, therefore, the most current data was not available to include in this document. A new Minister of Education and Training has recently been appointed, and several new presidents of the leading universities have or are about to be selected. It is expected that many important changes affecting curriculum, the structure of higher education and nature of degrees will be made in the next year.*

Everyday one quarter of the total population of Vietnam is directly involved in formal education and training activities, either as students or teachers. Education is an important part of the society. It is a major preoccupation of government and is a highly valued and respected activity in Vietnamese society. The Vietnam education and training sector is large, present in almost every village and touches virtually every family. There are almost 18 million students in the education system and over 0.5 million teachers and instructors. The structure of the education system is 5-4-3 i.e., five years of primary education (grades 1-5) followed by four years of lower secondary (grades 6-9), and three years of upper secondary (grades 10-12). Higher education programs last between two and six years.

Government spending on education and training grew rapidly during the 1990's and in 1995 education and training's share of the overall discretionary State budget was about 12 percent or about 3.5% of GDP. Household expenditure on education and formal cost-recovery adds a further 2.5% of GDP. Thus, aggregate expenditures of education in 1994/95 were approximately 6% of GDP with households meeting 43% of overall educational expenditures.

The above thumbnail sketch shows the level of commitment to education and training in Vietnam. Indeed, recognizing the fact that as Vietnam's growth increasingly depends on knowledge and technology as it enters the global economy, the Government recently pledged to increase spending on education to 15% of the State budget by the year 2000. It also recently completed a review of the past "Doi Moi" reforms ("Renovation" policy that began in 1989 with the opening of Vietnam to private sector involvement in all areas of Vietnam's development) in education and training and is in the process of updating the nation's sector strategy, five-year plan and legal framework for education.

"DOI MOI" AND EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Prior to Vietnam's partition under the Geneva Agreement in 1954, formal education was constrained during the 20th century. Under French colonial rule, only a relatively small and elite group of Vietnamese attended public educational institutions, most of which were located in the larger urban areas. In response to this exclusionary policy, non-government schools were started in many parts of the country, including many of Vietnam's rural villages. This satisfied some part of the strong household demand for education, but few poor families could, in fact, afford the private school fees. Hence, illiteracy was widespread in Vietnam, at least until 1945 when Ho Chi Minh, the nationalist leader, launched a grassroots literacy campaign in those areas under the control of his revolutionary forces. At the end of French colonial rule, private schools in the North were incorporated into a free public education system. Expansion of this system was a priority goal of the Government over the next thirty years.

Despite high overall literacy and high enrollments in Vietnam today, and despite relatively small differences in access to education among males and females, wide regional differences do exist. The mountainous northern province of Lai Chau, for example, has a reported literacy rate of only 49 percent, and in this province there are twice as many literate men as women. School participation rates remain lower in the mountainous areas of Vietnam's North and Central Zones, and in the Mekong Delta Region, particularly for girls. Whereas ethnic minorities account for over 13 percent of Vietnam's population, ethnic minority individuals account for only 4 percent of the student population.

Several important changes have occurred since the introduction of "Doi Moi" and these have impacted the education sector in important ways. First, government spending on education and training has increased both in absolute terms and as a percentage of overall government spending during the 1990s. Particularly large increases occurred in 1993 and 1994 — 46% and 33% real spending on growth in these two years, respectively (figures after 1994 were not available at the time of this writing).

A second major change during the 1990s has been the elimination of many regulations restricting or proscribing the private sector's role in education and training. New decrees and resolutions have been passed that encourage the private sector's expansion. "Semi-public" and "people-founded" institutions account for only a tiny proportion of total enrollments, but are increasing rapidly in number. Non-public education is especially common in pre-school education, in vocational and technical education and training, and increasingly also at the tertiary level of general education. Non-public institutions cover nearly all of their operating costs from student fees.

A third and related policy change has been to allow public institutions to levy tuition fees, though only within rather strict limits, and to charge for other goods and services sold to the public. Household outlays on education and training at all levels accounted for 43% of total government and household spending on education and training in 1994. This proportion varied from as little as 12 percent and 19 percent in vocation/technical and tertiary education to as much as 48 percent, 59 percent and 62 percent in primary lower secondary, and upper secondary education. As in many other countries, government spending on education in Vietnam reflects an implicit bias in favor of the rich — because this spending covers a relatively small share of the costs at the lower levels of education,

which are attended by more children from low-income families, and covers a larger share as one moves up the education ladder, where one finds fewer low-income students.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING: ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE OF EDUCATION

Before 1987, three agencies shared responsibility for the provision of educational services in Vietnam: the Ministry of Education, the General Department for Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Technical Education. In 1987, the two latter bodies merged to form the Ministry of Higher, Technical and Vocational Education, and in 1990, a single ministry — the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) — assumed the responsibility for all education and training at the national level. The MOET is divided into many separate departments, of which the most important are those responsible for primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education, higher education, teacher education and adult education. In another move to consolidate resources, in April 1998, the Prime Minister decreed that vocational and technical education would no longer be MOET's responsibility, but rather under the control of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA). At the time of this writing, no information was available regarding how or when this move would occur.

MOET has major responsibility for planning and directing Vietnam's system of education and training as well as for many aspects of curriculum development and materials production. MOET has partial responsibility — shared with the Office of the Government, which is attached to the Prime Minister's Office with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Investment — for broader decisions of policy formulation, target setting, and sectoral financing. The management and financing of education and training are becoming more decentralized in Vietnam. This can be seen from two different perspectives: vertical decentralization and horizontal decentralization.

Vertical decentralization refers to the functional departments responsible for education and training in the central government. Although MOET plays a pre-eminent role, many institutions in Vietnam fall under other line ministries and government agencies (for example art schools and conservatories are under the Ministry of Culture and Information). The multiplicity of actors can result in duplication, confusion and waste. Well over two dozen line-ministries and specialized agencies retain some role in administering public education institutions in Vietnam.

Horizontal decentralization refers to the different levels of government responsible. With respect to the administration of public financing for education, expenditures of the central government account for only a relatively small share of the total percent of capital (28 percent of total). A much larger share (72 percent of budgeted expenditure) is administered by the provinces, which in turn delegate many responsibilities to districts and communes.

In higher education and vocational/technical education, with the exception of universities, the role of provincial governments in running educational institutions is at least as large as the role of the central government. However, the lack of a formal legal management system leads to extreme dependency on MOET which in turn reduces the ability of each institution to respond to community needs in the market economy.

One final note is that MOET does not yet have a system of evaluating each institution for accrediting purposes. At this time, all degrees granted by Vietnamese institutions are officially approved and signed by MOET. However, as more private institutions develop and more joint-programs are offered by non-Vietnamese institutions, MOET recognizes the need for and creation of an accreditation system.

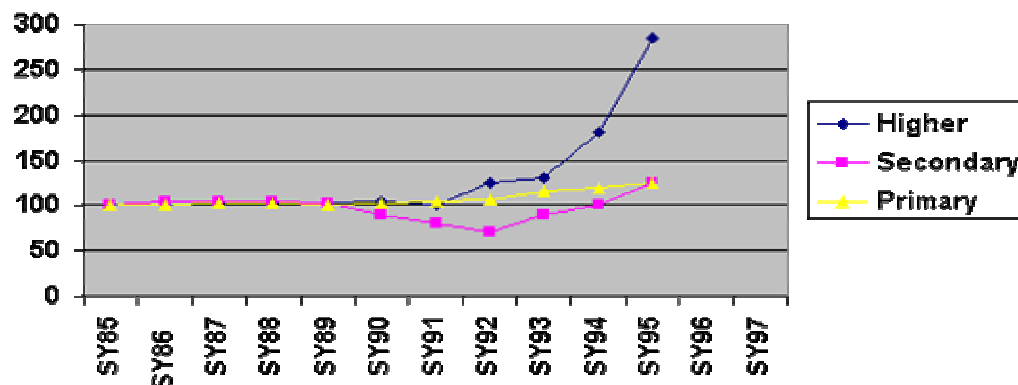
TERTIARY EDUCATION IN VIETNAM TODAY

Higher education in Vietnam is similar to that of the former Soviet Union with a multiplicity of small mono-disciplinary institutions with limited linkage between teaching and research. The present structures and procedures have been inherited from the era of central planning when higher education was segmented by economic sectors with many specialized institutions, each with little autonomy of its own, reporting to a particular line ministry. Between 1993 and 1995, total higher education enrollments grew by 117% (from 162,000 to 354,000), while expenditures grew by 63%. The number of institutions have grown from 120 in the early 1990s to 157 in 1998 despite the consolidation of several public institutions into larger multi-disciplinary institutions (called national or regional universities).

Higher education programs consist of short-cycle programs of three to three-and-a-half years' duration, offered mainly by what are referred to as colleges or junior colleges ("cao dang"). About two-thirds of Vietnam's degree granting junior colleges specialize in training teachers for lower levels of the education system. In addition to short-cycle programs, there are long-cycle bachelor degree programs offered at universities ("dai hoc") and postgraduate programs at master and doctoral levels.

The chart below shows the rapid increase in tertiary education enrollments, which has more than doubled each year, far outstripping the modest increase in primary education and even the quite rapid increase in secondary school enrollments.

Enrollment trend in Higher Education Relative to Primary and Secondary Education



There are three broad types of universities in Vietnam¹; two of which are more traditional forms meaning that they rely on classroom lectures as their principal medium of instruction. The first of this type are the "specialized universities," each of which focuses on a single area of study, such as economics, engineering, fine arts, or law. The second

of this type are the "multi-disciplinary universities," including five newly established national and regional universities in some of Vietnam's largest cities. The third and newest category of university education in Vietnam is the "open university" system in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Already by 1995, only one year after they opened, these accounted for 52,583 students, or approximately one out of every seven higher education students in Vietnam. (For more information, see Categories of Higher Education Students).

According to the Ministry of Education and Training, in 1998 there are 157 higher education institutions, 78 of which offer bachelor degrees and 10 of which are private. This figure includes some 69 junior colleges, but excludes institutions under the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The junior college sector now consists of 45 teachers colleges and 24 technical and vocational and training colleges offering courses in areas such as agriculture, allied health, fine arts, banking, and policy studies.

Each university is administered by a rector ("hieu truong") who is chosen by faculty members and serves a 4-year term with a possible extension depending on faculty vote, with no limit to the number of terms possible. The universities are divided into departments ("khoa"), each of which is under a department head who is responsible for all administrative and academic matters within the department. Since 1989, universities have been able to choose their own rector, the academic staff and students both voting, but the result must be ratified by MOET.

POLICIES FOR FUTURE CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

The system in which specialized and professional education was offered in a comparatively large number of small institutions is changing. Now that Vietnam is no longer operating a completely centrally planned economy, and graduates are no longer assigned jobs and guaranteed employment upon graduation, the narrowly focused training provided is no longer considered appropriate. In order to increase the ability of the system to respond to the demands of the market economy and to increase the efficiency and quality of the education, the Government has embarked on reform. Tertiary education policy changes include the following seven strategies:

- Introduction of semi-public and non-public tertiary education (see following section)
- Tuition fees and charges for students, coupled with an extensive range of student scholarships
- Encouragement of entrepreneurial activity by institutions to raise additional non-government revenues
- Reducing the system's segmentation with the consolidation of the responsibility for pedagogical functions of all institutions under a single authority
- Experimentation with a new unified structure of education to promote coherence in course structures, qualifications and standards (see general education on page 12)
- Preliminary testing of a credit system of pedagogical organization

● Limited consolidation of a few existing mono-disciplinary institutions into multi-disciplinary universities (see Multi-Disciplinary Universities)

PRIVATE (NON-PUBLIC) EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Government's objectives for education and training include increasing educational coverage and changing educational content so as to prepare workers to perform effectively in the labor market. A major reform designed to further these objectives is the development of a "non-public" system of education to parallel the public system.

Vietnam's history of free education and centralized planning made this a politically sensitive direction in which to move. This may explain the reliance on euphemisms, such as "non-public," in most contexts instead of clear reference to "privatization" of education. Nevertheless, these policy changes introduced over a relatively short period of time will have a profound impact on the future of Vietnam's education system.

There are three different types of non-public educational institutions as of this writing:

Semi-public ("ban cong"): The facility is owned by the state and managed by a public authority at the central, provincial, district, or commune level, but all operating costs are covered by student fees.

People-founded ("dan lap"): People-founded institutions are owned and managed by non-government organizations or private associations such as trade unions, cooperatives, youth organizations and women's associations. As with semi-public institutions, there is close to full cost recovery.

Private ("tu lap"): These are private institutions in the usual sense of the world, owned and managed by private individuals. Fully private institutions are not allowed in primary and secondary education, but only in pre-school, vocational/technical schools, and tertiary education.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITIES

In the interests of strengthening the university system and improving and streamlining research at this level, a fundamental reorganization of the institutional basis of higher education is taking place. This has involved the consolidation of the relatively large numbers of small, specialized institutions into several pivotal universities, with the aim of enhancing the links between basic research and university teaching.

The new universities are of two types — national and regional — and are multi-disciplinary in character. Two national universities and three regional universities have already been established. At present, the national universities offer bachelor, master and doctoral programs, while the regional universities offer bachelor, masters and other college-level programs.

Vietnam National University Hanoi, initially known as the Hanoi National University, was established in 1993 as an amalgamation of Hanoi University, Hanoi Pedagogic University and Hanoi University for Teachers of Foreign Languages. These institutions have been reorganized into five colleges: general education, natural sciences, social

sciences and humanities, pedagogy and foreign languages. The university is in the process of adding seven more colleges specializing in law, business, engineering and economics.

Vietnam National University at Ho Chi Minh City, initially known as the Ho Chi Minh City National University, was founded in 1995 from nine institutions — University of HCMC, University of Technology, University of Economics, University of Education, Teachers' Technical Training College, University of Architecture, University of Finance and Accounting, University of Agriculture and Forestry and the School of Law. The new university is divided into 10 colleges, four research centers and 47 scientific centers.

Da Nang University was established in 1994 from two university-level institutions (Da Nang University of Technology and the Da Nang University for Teachers of Foreign Languages), one college (Da Nang Teachers Training College) and the Nguyen Van Troi Secondary Technical School for Technical Workers. The new university maintains its emphasis in preparing in technical fields, while Hue University to the north, prepares students in social sciences and humanities.

Hue University, was also founded in 1994 from the following institutions: the University of Hue Teachers College, Hue University of Agriculture No. 2, Hue University of Medicine, and Hue College of Fine Arts. The new university has six colleges including the college of general education.

Thai Nguyen University was established in 1994 from four university-level institutions (Vietnam Bac Teachers College, Bac Thai College of Agriculture No. 3, Thai Nguyen College of Industry, and Bac Thai/Thai Nguyen/Vietnam Bac College of Medicine), and the Bac Thai Secondary Technical School for Mechanical and Electrical Workers. The new university has five separate colleges and numerous research centers. The university is responsible for providing education for students from all provinces in Vietnam north of Hanoi.

ADMISSION TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Admission to universities is a two-part process coordinated through MOET. Students must first pass the Secondary School Leaving Examination (SSLE) with a score of at least 20 in order to be permitted to take a university entrance exam. The SSLE consists of comprehensive achievement tests in four subjects each with a maximum value of ten points, for a total of 40 points possible. In order to graduate, students need to have at least a cumulative average of 20 points. (For more information on scoring, see Grading). In addition, students must be in good health within clearly stipulated regulations and under 32 years of age or 35 years for women, those who served in the military or those from ethnic minority groups.

Until 1996, all university entrance exams were centrally administered by MOET. Four different exams were offered, and students sat for the examination in the subject combination appropriate to the university faculty, college or institute they wished to enter. The student was only permitted to sit for one exam for admission to one department of only one university each year.

Since 1987, the universities and other institutions of higher education have carried out the selection process. University entrance via examination has always been highly competitive. Under the former system, only about one in 15 student gained admission. Overall figures are not readily available for the new system, but enrollment statistics and individual universities suggest that the situation may have eased as regards actual admission, but some students will pay fees. Each institution is now permitted to set a minimum score in the Secondary School Leaving Examination as an eligibility requirement to sit for its entrance examination and eligible students may sit for more than one entrance exam at more than one university.

Today, the entrance exams are divided into four categories according to the fields of study the student plans to pursue and the university offering that subject. The categories of exams and the subjects tested follow:

● **Group A:** tests knowledge of math, physics and chemistry (for students of engineering, computer science, physics, etc.)

● **Group B:** tests knowledge of math, chemistry and biology (for students of natural sciences and business)

● **Group C:** tests knowledge of literature, history and biology (for students of social sciences and humanities)

● **Group D:** tests knowledge of literature, math and foreign language (for students of foreign languages, either in education or translation/interpretation tracks)

The results of the entrance exam determine the category of student that they enroll under.

CATEGORIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

Vietnamese higher education programs have been distinguished historically by their flexibility, particularly as regards professional and technical education. In-service courses, shortened programs, accelerated courses and upgrading programs have been a feature of the system and will continue to be as the higher education system is continually forced to provide new programs to meet the emerging market demands.

Regular full-time students ("sinh vien chinh quy dai han"): Regular students gain university admission through the examination process outlined above following clearly defined and selective criteria. They may receive full scholarship, but most pay some fees which usually only represent a fraction of the actual cost of undergraduate study. Students who complete a regular program of study receive a graduation diploma or degree endorsed with the words "chinh quy." Older awards may include the words "dai han" indicating a long-cycle program, normally undertaken in full-time mode. At this time, only students graduating from regular programs are eligible for continued post-graduate study in Vietnam, and only in the same field as their bachelor degree. This group is still the largest of the five higher education groups but has declined in recent years as a percentage of the total number of individuals attending colleges and universities.

In-service ("tai chuc"): In-service is another well-established program in Vietnam. In the current system, in-service students, sometimes referred to as "part-time," undertake an abbreviated course while employed. For the most part, these students are civil servants sponsored by their government offices. They are studying to upgrade their skills and to prepare for more difficult or more responsible positions upon completion of their training programs. Until recently this was strictly an employer-nomination scheme, but arrangements are now more flexible as regards courses studied. Courses undertaken in this mode are usually focused on more practical experience rather than the theoretical or academic. Students who complete a degree or diploma in this mode also receive a graduate degree, but it is endorsed with the term "tai chuc."

Open: After 1988-89 a combination of factors, including the abandonment of guaranteed employment for graduates and the acknowledged need for universities to fund themselves to a significant extent, led to the establishment of "open" programs at many universities. Students access to these courses was based on their ability to pay fees, in some cases almost irrespective of the academic credentials. In general, the curriculum and the teachers were the same for regular and open students, although the classes themselves were not mixed. Students who completed the open mode degree received a graduation diploma endorsed with the words "mo rong." These degrees did not usually have a high status and were not normally accepted for entry to postgraduate programs.

It was argued that the perceived low quality of the open degrees devalued regular degrees from the same institution, and that the money received did not compensate for the strain on resources. Accordingly, MOET decided in 1992 to modify the open system. Open admission is not restricted to the designated open universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and to the junior and community colleges.

Open Universities offer a range of specialties designed for intellectual enrichment, rather than professional development. The schools have only been in operation for three to four years, so it is still too early to be able to assess the quality of education offered.

Part-time: Regular universities will no longer offer open admission programs, but they are granted the authority to offer part-time programs comparable in requirements and standards to the regular programs. MOET is encouraging the expansion of enrollment in the part-time programs and to open even newer college-preparation programs to assist students without the academic preparation for regular or part-time programs. How diplomas for part-time degree programs will be marked has not yet been determined.

Short-term Training ("ngan han chuyen tu"): Students who have completed two or three years of secondary technical education or vocational education training and have a diploma or certificate can undertake upgrading courses and obtain a degree after three years rather than the four or five years required by regular students entering directly from upper-secondary school.

Specialized or Retraining Courses ("boi duong va dao tao lai"): Another group of students receiving "upgrading" are those who graduated from higher education institutions in the past and are pursuing training or re-training, often in subjects that were not available previously, in order to deal more effectively with their current jobs or to prepare themselves for new jobs. For example, computer programming is a common

subject now being studied by people who graduated from the various engineering and science fields.

UNDERGRADUATE COURSES AND AWARDS

There are two types of undergraduate programs: short-cycle and long-cycle.

Short-cycle programs refer to programs offered at junior or community colleges. The programs normally require three years of study and lead to the Certificate of Higher Education, Junior College Diploma or Associate (Bachelor) degree.

Long-cycle programs are offered by universities and require between four and six years to complete. Upon graduation from a long-cycle program, the Diploma of Higher Education or University Graduate Diploma and/or Bachelor Degree is conferred. Programs in arts, sciences, education, economics, and foreign languages usually require four years of study, although courses involving a major foreign language component in addition to the other major may require five years. Engineering, agriculture and pharmacy degrees normally take five years, although some universities are planning to reduce this to five and expand the graduate programs. Medical and dental programs take six years to complete.

Credit System: A credit system is slowly being introduced around the country to replace the previous tightly structured subject-based model. In the old system, a class of students entered a program together and stayed together throughout the entire degree program, following the same curriculum. In the new credit system, courses will be assigned a credit value and students must complete a prescribed number of credits before being eligible to graduate. In this system, each credit represents one hour of theoretical lectures (or two thirds of an hour of practical work) plus one hour of preparation per week, over a 15-week semester. Four year programs will normally require a total of 210 credits, five-year programs require 270 credits and six-year programs require 320 credits. The purpose of implementing a credit system, more in line with education systems around the world is two-fold: to provide students the flexibility in their studies to learn more than one main subject and to allow students a way of transferring to other schools or taking classes at other universities.

Two-phase Education System

● **General Education:** A two-tier degree program has been introduced, whereby the first three to four semesters of study constitute the general stage, preparing students for more specialized studies during the second phase. In the first phase, often referred to as general education, students take general subjects such as a foreign language, physical fitness and military training, and political theory, as well as core subjects related to their intended field of study. There are seven core groupings: social sciences, humanities, foreign languages, business and management, economics, mathematics and physics, biology, and chemistry.

● Completion of the first phase (or the first 90 credits) leads to the award of a Certificate of University Studies which determines eligibility to take the selection examinations for admission to phase two, or the specialized education component. At the end of the general education program, a student's status and scholarship are reviewed. It is also

possible for students to change universities at this stage, but in practice this is restricted due to the nature of the core studies program.

● **Specialized Education:** During the second phase, students take more specialized studies in one or two areas. Programs are based on the list of specialties issued by MOET and comprise about 34 groups and 127 disciplines. This phase concludes with a graduation thesis or project or with comprehensive exams. Formerly, the thesis option was restricted to the best students, but now may be considered as a major equivalent of credits. Not all institutions have adopted the two-phase system, but the universities under complete MOET control have done so.²

● Degree certificates offered upon completion of the full bachelor program include the title "cu nhan," followed by the area of specialization. Although this regulation is said to apply across all disciplines, the traditional titles of "engineer," "doctor," "architect," and "pharmacist" are still in use at the same schools rather than "cu nhan."

GRADUATE COURSES AND AWARDS

Until very recently, postgraduate education remained undeveloped in Vietnam, only available at major universities, with higher doctorates only awarded by the University of Hanoi. Students tended to go overseas to further their studies (see Overseas Study for more information). In addition, research institutes at centers of which there were more than 300 in 1993 normally conducted research.

Early postgraduate education programs were based on French models, but from the 1960s in the north and 1976 in the south, Vietnamese postgraduate education followed the Soviet pattern. With the reduction of study opportunities in the former Eastern bloc countries and the increased interest in Western economic methods, the development of a more flexible and streamlined postgraduate system is now in place. This section will only focus on current postgraduate programs available in Vietnam since 1990.

Master's Degrees are awarded following a two-year program of course work and thesis defended before external examiners. Entry to the program is by competitive examination. A student needs to have achieved very good marks at the undergraduate level in order to be considered for entry into the master's degree program.

Doctoral Degrees are conferred following a minimum of two years course work after the master's degree and completion of a thesis or project. A student may, however, be invited to enter into an excellerated master's/doctorate degree program of four year's duration upon graduation from university. The thesis for the doctoral degree is defended before a national committee selected by MOET. Candidature is usually restricted to students who hold a master's degree and who are invited to join the program. However, holders of the undergraduate degree with outstanding achievement may also be admitted to candidature after passing the examinations of the so-called "minimum" program in political subjects, a foreign language, and the relevant academic or professional specialization. The doctoral degree is the highest degree currently available in Vietnam.

This postgraduate structure applies to all disciplines. However, in some professional areas, such as medicine, there are two postgraduate streams, one leading to the two higher academic degrees and the other to higher professional specializations.

GRADING

Since 1971 (1977 in southern Vietnam) a 10-point grading system has been in use at all levels. The normal passing level is 5. The following is published by MOET as the official "definition" of grades, but especially at the tertiary level, this can vary with some institutions assigning 8-9 to the top 5% of students for example.

Official Definition of Grades			
9-10	uu/xuat sac	Excellent/Outstanding	About 5% of Students
7-8	kha	Good	About 35% of Students
5-6	trung binh	Average	About 50% of Students
Less Than 5	khong	Fail	About 8% of Students
	dat	Pass	For Pass/Fail Courses

The grade average usually determines promotion from classes to class and semester to semester. Sources differ on whether an average grade of 5 is always required. It appears that in some cases, a score of between 4 and 5 with no 0s may result in a pass.

As well as these subject or course grades at the primary and secondary school levels, general classifications may also be used to describe achievement in major school examinations such as the Secondary School Leaving Examination in which four subjects are examined. The classifications are:

General Classifications		
36-40	gioi	Very Good/Excellent
28-27	kha	Good
20-27	trung binh	Average

Recent sources also say that another grade is coming into use, "trung binh kha" (fairly good), presumably for grades between 25 and 30.

A final note is that once accepted to university, most students tend not to concentrate on their grades as much as they had in secondary school. Their focus is more on passing. The top students, however, remain competitive as their scholarships are based on maintaining certain marks.

TUITION FEES, SCHOLARSHIPS AND LOANS FOR STUDENTS

Higher education institutions are permitted to charge fees, subject to government regulations on fee levels, the categories of students permitted to pay reduced fees or exempted from paying fees altogether, and the institutions' use of the fees they collect.

Under these measures, institutions have a measure of discretion regarding the level of tuition fees charged, but they are required to report their revenue to the line ministry or provincial governments that oversee their operations. Now, fees may also be charged for special services, such as matriculation, examinations, boarding and graduation. In addition, institutions may enter into "training contracts" with employers or provincial authorities to provide in-service training. The fees charged for these services are not regulated and may be set at full cost-recovery.

The current policies on fees and fee exemptions do not take family income into account in determining how much different families or students pay. In higher education, fee levels for different programs are supposed to reflect priority subject areas, while specific categories of students, including war invalids, orphans and ethnic minorities, may be granted fee exemptions. In the interest of equity objectives the government does provide scholarships and has recently established a student loan scheme, on a pilot basis, to assist students whose families cannot afford the fees or other private costs of public education.

OVERSEAS STUDY OPPORTUNITIES

Although most of Vietnam's universities, and in fact its modern education system, is new, one way the government made post-graduate education available was through overseas study opportunities. Most political, economic and social leaders today are products of international education, and this will continue to hold true as the government continues to place high priority on sending its brightest students abroad.

In 1951, Vietnam sent its first group of students abroad to the Soviet Union and then after that to other former socialist countries. The former socialist countries helped train over 30,000 undergraduates, 13,500 postgraduates, 25,000 technicians and thousands of other scientists. In 1989, with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union, Vietnamese students were sent home from all of these countries. Until recently there have been very few opportunities for Vietnamese students to study abroad, leaving about a 10-year gap between those who returned with advance degrees from the former communist countries and those with the opportunity to study abroad today.

Today, there are very few full scholarships available to study overseas. Each year, there are about 10 Canadian government scholarships, 70 scholarships to study in the UK, 200 for France, 150 for Australia, Thailand offers 70 short-term scholarships and 10 long-term scholarships, the Japanese government offers about 60 scholarships and the US has about 30 Fulbright Fellowships available for master degree students only. In addition, about twice this number of full-scholarships are made available to Vietnamese students directly from universities, foundations or corporations.

Another estimated 5000 students are studying abroad each year on institutional scholarships or through their own finances. About one half are studying in the US and

the general feeling among those that are studying in other countries is that they would have preferred to invest in a US education, but for the cost

VIETNAMESE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

The information in this summary was obtained from the 1995/96 Country Locator Report provided by the Institute of International Education through a grant from USIA, E/ASA. These reports are based on data collected from an annual survey of universities for the publication Open Doors. Not all universities responded to the survey, nor do all universities which do respond, provide a breakdown by nationality or by level of study. Particular universities are missing from the report even though there are Vietnamese students currently studying there. The following information was extracted from Vietnam's 1995/96 Country Locator Report:

- The 790 (the extrapolated number is 922) Vietnamese students studying in the US are enrolled in over 216 different universities. The University of Central Florida with 92 (12%) has the largest number of Vietnamese students of any college or university in the US.

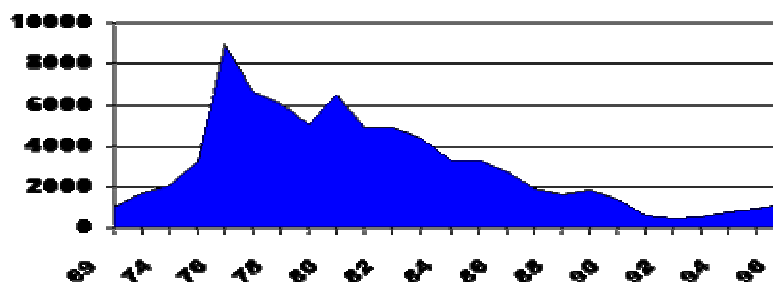
- Vietnam ranks 66th of all countries with international students in the US.

- Forty-five percent of Vietnamese study in the top twenty most popular universities. The average number of students per university is four.

- Florida is the most popular state with Vietnamese students, attracting 96 (12%). States following in order to popularity with Vietnamese are California (87); Maryland 78 or 10%; Texas (73 or 9%); and New York (33 or 4%). Forty-seven percent of the Vietnamese students enrolled in US institutions are concentrated in these five states.

- Fifty-five percent of all Vietnamese are studying at the undergraduate level. Eighteen percent are enrolled in graduate programs while 11% are listed as non-degree or ESL students.

Number of Vietnamese Students Studying in the US by Year



One final note is that as more information about the US education system becomes available to interested students in Vietnam, and as more students return from their studies at American institutions, the numbers of people in Vietnam applying to American colleges and universities will greatly increase. The interest throughout Vietnam is already very great, and two of the largest hurdles from the Vietnamese side have

recently been removed. The process of obtaining a passport to go abroad has eased and obtaining an exit visa from Vietnam is no longer required. The difficulties that remain are from the US side: 1) access to free, up-to-date, and unbiased information; and 2) meeting the consular requirements to obtain a student visa. The Institute of International Education in Vietnam is dedicated to providing free student advising throughout the country and will continue to offer and expand its full-cycle services for students planning to study in the US. It is our hope that as students have more access to information, they will be better able to select appropriate programs, and meet the admission and visa requirements. The Vietnam office will also continue to provide a full range of services to American institutions interested in learning more about Vietnam, the education system and its students.

Footnotes

¹ Universities and colleges in Vietnam are known by a number of English terms, including university, colleges, institute and polytechnic; even "school" is sometimes used. However, in Vietnamese, the institutional title includes the words "dai hoc" meaning that the institution offers a four-year degree program or higher. Non-university-level tertiary institutions use the words "cao dang" meaning they offer associate-type degrees only. Today, most educators in Vietnam use the English term junior college or community college to indicate the "cao dang" institutions

² MOET is currently considering whether to phase out the separate general education college at each university in favor of allowing universities to assign part of a teacher's time to teaching general education courses along with their other specialized course assignments.

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