

## Christopher Ruggiero: Higher Education in France and the United States: Historical Development and Structure

(IEPS M.A. thesis assessment by Miloš Calda)

### Characteristics

The author of the submitted thesis characterized its aim in the following manner: "This paper will explore the argument put forth by *The Economist* (ie that America's system of higher education is the best in the world... because there is no system") by presenting higher education in the United States and France. The reason for choosing France is because it represents... the archetypical model of centralized, state control." (p. 2)

In other words, Mr Ruggiero set as his goal a description rather than a verification of a well-formulated hypothesis. This makes his thesis comparable to the Institute of International Studies' B.A. theses.

The submitted thesis falls into two parts. Part One deals with the history of modern higher education in Germany (with a good characteristics of Humboldt's model), France, and the United States, Part Two takes a look at two U.S. universities (Harvard and Michigan) and two of their French counterparts (Paris IV and *École normale supérieure*).

The author has successfully characterized the main differences between the university education systems in the two countries.

The submitted thesis seldom goes beyond typology and classification. The author provides information on the structures of the above four institutions of higher learning.

### Remarks

The submitted thesis has no dedicated list of sources. From what I could find in footnotes, the author worked with a limited number of sources in the French language, although the French concept of higher learning represents one of the focuses of the thesis.<sup>1</sup>

Some materials seem to be of little use in an M.A. thesis as they should be generally well known. Eg the map of the westward expansion of the United States, Figure 2, page 24.

The author mentions "factionalism within French society" (p. 28) – this must be clarified during the thesis' defense.

The author mentions organizations of American academics like AAUP (p. 32). However, there is no explanation of their role, reasons for their foundation, etc.

The author uses internet resources inadequately. He ought to have give (a) full internet addresses (cf. eg Footnote 47) and (b) the day he accessed the page.

Sometimes the author uses data without giving his sources: Table 2, page 38, (unnumbered!) pie chart p. 50, Chart 6, p. 51, Chart 7, p. 52.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eg [http://www.ens.fr/concours/Organisation/arrete\\_2004\\_admission\\_3ENS.pdf](http://www.ens.fr/concours/Organisation/arrete_2004_admission_3ENS.pdf)  
However, my attempt at finding the page met with no success, just a blank web page...

The author uses the U.S. News and World Report rankings (eg p. 40). However, he never mentions the two leading international rankings of universities, the Times Higher Education Supplement and the ranking by the Jiao Tong University, Shanghai.

When dealing with universities' ranking, we must take into consideration their criteria. This was not done by the author.

I expect the author to clarify the following sentence (p. 59): "If the relationship is disturbed, then the Harvard Corporation becomes vulnerable to the criticism of being outsiders."

A very important point: whenever hard data are used, precise sources must be given. This was not the case eg on p. 76 (figures about Harvard admittance).

#### Conclusion

The thesis submitted cannot be accused of being overambitious. Mr Ruggiero did a good job in terms of classification and typology. However, his thesis suffers from a number of above-described problems. I evaluate his thesis as "good" at best, provided he performs at the defense in a satisfactory manner.

.....  
Doc. PhDr. Miloš Calda  
June 20th 2006