

# The characteristics of PhD programs at Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU): The transformation of generic competences of PhD students in Political Science

Maria Edinova\*

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to explore the characteristics of the new model of PhD programs (using the case of SPSU) and to test the following hypothesis: the new model of PhD programs in Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU) is relevant and useful for innovative development and knowledge economy formation. The hypothesis was tested according to the following tasks: 1) Analysis of the cooperation of main actors or dialog between actors in the case of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU); 2) Estimate of changes in completion rates in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU; and 3) Exploration of the motivations of PhD students in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU. The new model of PhD programs affects the structure of communication and coordination channels between all stakeholders. It also supports the necessity of such incorporation channels for the development of educational programs. Network analysis shows that SPSU is the main actor in the decision-making processes for the development of methodological and scientific programs. Other governmental bodies, NGOs, and institutes are also included in this process. Discourse analysis and a review of questionnaire data show the first perceptions of the new model of PhD program. The

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\* **Maria Edinova** (edinovams@gmail.com), PhD student in Political Science (Saint-Petersburg State University), is currently Deputy Head of the International Department in the Organizing Committee of Saint-Petersburg International Labor Forum. She previously worked at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) in the PhD Department.

*More information about the author is available at the end of this article.*

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new model is changing the completion rates by introducing a new measurement: the Diploma “Researcher. Teacher-Researcher”. An overview of general competences at SPSU proved that core competences of this program correlate with soft skills and encourage the development of systematic and critical thinking, project management and cooperation skills. In addition they provide the possibility to build inter-cultural channels of self-development and to work with information.

**Keywords:** PhD students; third circle of education; general competences; soft skills; networks.

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## I. Introduction

Modernity means a transition to a new knowledge economy. Given this, governmental bodies, enterprises and the academic society have an increasing interest in the production of skilled specialists with doctoral degrees.

The aim of this article is to explore the characteristics of the new model of PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) programs (using the case of SPSU) and to test the following hypothesis: the new model of PhD programs in Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU) is relevant and useful for innovative development and knowledge economy formation. A counter-hypothesis asserts that the PhD program is not relevant and useful enough. This hypothesis follows from the goals of state programs, especially “The Development of Education.”<sup>1</sup> This document outlines the need to develop youth potential for the innovative modernization and social orientation of the country and to achieve a high level of education quality in Russia. This will increase Russia’s competitiveness and consequently stimulate its knowledge economy. Moreover, the strategy of Saint-Petersburg State University highlights scientific and technological development through priority directions that are also directed at the modernization of the economy. According to the plan of Saint-Petersburg State University, by 2020 “Achieving a new level of educational, research, innovation, and expertise activities will allow SPSU, as the leader of the Russian system of higher education, to focus on solving the key tasks of social and economic development of the Russian Federation.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the relevance and usefulness of the new model of the PhD program will be achieved if this new model meets the main goals of the federal and

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<sup>1</sup> “The Development of Education,” The Portal of Federal Programs, accessed October 20, 2018, <http://programs.gov.ru/Portal/programs/passport/02>.

<sup>2</sup> “Saint-Petersburg State University Strategy until 2020,” Saint-Petersburg State University, accessed June 20, 2018, <https://spbu.ru/openuniversity/documents/programma-razvitiya-spbgu-do-2020-goda>.

university programs and contributes to the strengthening of the knowledge economy.

The aforementioned hypothesis will be tested according to the following *tasks* in the context of the objectives of the state and university programs: 1) analysis of the cooperation of main actors or dialog between actors in the case of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU); 2) estimate of changes in completion rates in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU; and 3) exploration of motivations of PhD students in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU. The program guarantees a high level of professional qualification by cooperation with employers and other “stakeholders” for future graduates (the initiative of SPSU “Open University”). An increase in the number of graduates of higher qualification is being achieved by improving completion rates and deepening the motivation of students.

Thus, the importance of the current case-study is to obtain data from stakeholders, faculty and PhD students in order to explore the characteristics of the new PhD model. This article contains the learners’ perspective, the academics’ perspective and the labor market’s perspective on the issues of PhD programs’ modernization in the case of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU).

## II. PhD programs in Russia: between past and future

According to the logic of the three tasks posed in the current article, it is possible to analyze only the first directions of changes in the higher education sphere in Russia. An analysis of discussions about the cooperation of the main actors involved in the decision-making process in the sphere of PhD programs’ transformation will give us the first response to these transformations from the main stakeholders. Thus, theoretical concepts represented in this section and a historical background of Russian reforms will provide a basis for the current analysis.

### II.1. *PhD programs between “product” and “process”*

Nowadays the rhetorical question “what is a PhD?” is rather popular among specialists in education. During the transformation process scientists supported various themes within the framework of the PhD program: they stressed the importance of the thesis, pointed out the need for a more dynamic

learning process, and emphasized the importance of cooperation and collaboration with the labor market with respect to doctoral studies.

In the literature review, two broad approaches to understanding the PhD programs could be noted. Some scholars defined PhD education as a *product* in terms of a traditional knowledge-based doctorate. This type of PhD program involved a specific contribution to knowledge, unique PhD students' investigation which they carry out independently. Other scholars define PhD programs as a *process* which contains more complex elements of research training.<sup>3</sup> This approach leads to the improvement in completion rates, acquisition of a broad range of research skills, increased employability, etc.

From this perspective, the main direction of change in Russia is related to a significant accent on skills, training and completion rates.<sup>4</sup> These theoretical concepts show that the transformations in Russian PhD programs are parallel, in conceptual terms, with the global scholarly community's discussions about the PhD.

## II.2. *The scope of PhD reform in Russia*

Over the past few years, PhD-level education in Russia has faced considerable transformations. The new Federal Law "On Education in the Russian Federation" was adopted in 2012 and proclaimed the structural reorganization of PhD-level education in Russia. It was proposed to "integrate" PhD studies into the third level of education, which means creating new competences for PhD programs. The most important transformations for the aim and tasks of the current article are 1) PhD programs' reorientation towards competence-based third level education and 2) new rules of defense.

### II.2.1. Competence-based PhD education

The reform of PhD programs in Russia discloses the potential for a new approach to competences that was used in the bachelor programs and master's programs. Such a transformation is considered to be in the same

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<sup>3</sup> John Hockey, "The Social Science PhD: A Literature Review," *Studies in Higher Education* 16, no.3 (January 1991): 319, doi: 10.1080/03075079112331382875.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Park, "New Variant PhD: The Changing Nature of the Doctorate in the UK," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27, no.2 (July 2005): 189–207, doi: 10.1080/13600800500120068.

conceptual framework as Ann Katherine Isaacs' metaphor about the "doctoral paradox" or the "doctoral mystique". Isaacs suggested that doctoral defense is the most important aspect of PhD education for the majority of professors and students. A few researchers have underlined the importance of the educational process, but for the majority "it is not necessary to look under the carpet, so to speak, to know that a PhD is a PhD."<sup>5</sup> In another article it is argued that the world is producing more PhDs than ever before.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the reorientation of PhD education towards advanced training presents a possible solution to the issue of "overproduction." Moreover, this transformation provides PhD holders with competences and knowledge for highly qualified work outside academia. Universities and special commissions contributed to a new direction of competences that go beyond the extremely narrow specialization towards soft skills.

There have been discussions about the crisis of high doctorate attrition rates, which are rooted in the fact that a doctoral degree does not guarantee a job for life.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, graduates have to develop more flexible and transferable skills that can satisfy the labor market's demands. The importance of such flexible and transferable skills is the allure of the knowledge economy for doctoral degrees, which represent advanced technical skills and ability to conduct research and promote effective participation in communities of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Skilled PhD graduates contribute to society through their productive actions.<sup>9</sup>

The previous Russian system considered PhD programs to be a step on the path to the defense of the degree. The new system considers PhD programs to be a tool for producing highly qualified specialists for the needs of a knowledge society. Such changes at PhD-level education are correlated with the international classification of higher education and the practice of European countries. It is vitally important to point to the

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<sup>5</sup> Ann Katherine Isaacs, "Tuning Tools and Insights for Modern Competence-Based Third-Cycle Program," in *The European Higher Education Area*, ed. Adrian Curaj (Springer, Cham, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> David Cyranoski et al., "Education: The PhD Factory," *Nature* 472, no.7343 (April 2011): 276, doi: 10.1038/472276a.

<sup>7</sup> Christine Halse, "Is the Doctorate in Crisis?" *Nagoya Journal of Studies in Higher Education* 7 (2007): 321–337.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Neumann, Kim Khim Tan, "From PhD to Initial Employment: the Doctorate in a Knowledge Economy," *Studies in Higher Education* 36, no. 5 (August 2011): 601–614, doi: 10.1080/03075079.2011.594596.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Mowbray, Christine Halse, "The Purpose of the PhD: Theorising the Skills Acquired by Students," *Higher Education Research & Development* 29, no. 6 (December 2010): 653–664, doi: 10.1080/07294360.2010.487199.

Qualifications Frameworks in the European Higher Education Area. This document underlines the necessity to focus on a PhD program's competences rather than the program's structure.<sup>10</sup> It stresses the idea that the person holding a PhD should be able to take on a societal role dealing appropriately with issues of economic and social development. As was pointed out at the Bologna seminar in Helsinki, "Degrees of the third cycle: Competence and career of researchers," doctoral programs should not be limited to the specific subject of the dissertation research.<sup>11</sup> The Russian Federation ascribes QF for EHEA and actually transforms the previous PhD system's framework.

Thus, PhD programs are supposed to provide the sustainable intellectual skills necessary for a successful career. Russian scholars emphasize that the most important component of the doctoral program is the development of transferable skills, which are understood as universal competences that ensure a successful professional career in various fields of intellectual activity.<sup>12</sup> The new model of general competences is connected with research, teaching activities and soft skills. For instance, the association of Classical Universities of Russia and Lomonosov State University of Moscow initiated the creation of a new model for the formation of research competences of graduates in order to achieve transparency.<sup>13</sup>

General competences that have strong links with improvement of soft skills make PhD students competitive in the job market. What Tuning Academy calls "generic competences" are the competences that are useful in all disciplinary areas. These are often called "transversal skills" or, in the case of Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU), "general competences."

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<sup>10</sup> "A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, Bologna Working Group Report on Qualifications Frameworks, accessed September 26, 2019, <http://ecahe.eu>.

<sup>11</sup> Valentin Ivanovich Baidenko, Nadezda Alekseevna Selezneva, "Izistorii Stanovleniya Evropejskoj Doktorskoj Stepeni" ["From the History of the Formation of a European Doctoral Degree"], *Higher education in Russia* 8/9 (2010): 99–116.

<sup>12</sup> Boris Ilich Bednyi, "Rol' I Struktura Obrazovatel'noj Podgotovki v Aspiranture Novogo Tipa," ["The Role and Structure of Educational Training in Graduate School of a New Type"] *Higher education in Russia* 12 (2013): 78–89, ISSN: 0869-3617.

<sup>13</sup> Evgeniya Vladimirovna Karavaeva, Olga Vladimirovna Vorobeva, and Viktoriya Petrovna Tyshkevich "O Razrabotke Modeli Formirovaniya Issledovatel'skih Kompetencij Vypusnikov Programm Vysshogo Obrazovaniya," ["On the Development of a Model for the Formation of Research Competencies of Graduates of Higher Education Programs"] *Higher education in Russia* 27, no. 4 (2018): 33–47.

According to the educational plan of the PhD program in the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU, students need to develop the following three main competences (general competences):

- GC-1: the ability to apply a scientific approach in their professional activity
- GC-2: the ability to work with professional texts and communicate with scientific communities as well as report on the results of scientific work in English, Russian and other languages
- GC-3: the ability to perform the duties of the researcher. This includes responsibilities for conducting scientific research, publishing scientific papers and articles, and providing individual lectures and seminars.

According to the “General Characteristics” of the educational program “Political Science (PhD program),” graduates have two types of skills: research and pedagogical. The research activities are: implementation of research and analytical projects in areas of political theory and political practice (GC-1); analysis and synthesis of research results using modern achievements of domestic and foreign political science (GC-2); preparation and holding of seminars and conferences; and lastly, preparation and editing scientific texts regarding political systems and political regimes, processes of social and political transformation, and principles and mechanisms of political governance (GC-3). The pedagogical activities are: preparation and conduction of lectures, seminars and workshops with using multimedia equipment; the development of educational programs for academic disciplines; and ultimately, the organization of independent work of students in preparation for classes (GC-3). Because of this, these competences are an influence on the development of such skills as: analytical thinking (GC-1), communication skills and writing skills (GC-2), and organizational skills (GC-3).

The new competence system should transform the PhD students’ motivation. Scholars have pointed out that PhD graduates try to find jobs both in academia and business and the level of job satisfaction is quite low. Thus, gaining general competences is intended to increase motivation levels.

## II.2.2. New PhD – new defenses

Along with the changes, a new system of granting degrees was introduced, and now SPSU provides degrees separately from the Higher Attestation

Commission (PhD of SPSU). This system is quite different from the previous one, which consisted of two levels of a candidate thesis' review at the level of the Dissertation Council on a specific specialization (meetings were held once a month and consisted of members from different universities who worked in one specialization) and at the level of Higher Attestation Commission (works under the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Russian Federation). In accordance with the additions to the law "On Amendments to Article 4 of the Federal Law" on Science and the State Scientific and Technical Policy" dissertation councils which were created earlier had to be closed before September 1, 2018 at Moscow State University (MSU) and Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU). Thus, these universities can grant degrees without a second level of validation from the Higher Attestation Commission.

The implementation of the new model of PhD programs and continuing reforms in the third level of education is connected with the decrease of completion rates since 2007. "According to Russian government statistics, in 2007–2013, only 25–30% of PhD students had defended dissertations during the period of study or 1 year after the completion of PhD program."<sup>14</sup> The new PhD model represents the new qualification that awarded to the graduate after their defense of "final qualifying work" (at the end of the third year of their study) the title "Researcher. Teacher-researcher." It should be mentioned that this qualification is unified for all areas of training in accordance with the Law of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia №1061 from 12/09/2013. In the following 6 months, PhD students have the opportunity to defend their thesis and obtain a PhD degree. According to the development program of SPSU for the period up to 2020, one of the goals of the university is to increase the completion rates of PhD programs.

### II.3. Cooperation between actors

The management process in the scope of PhD education and governmental initiatives aimed at improving development are becoming more effective. With the aim of improving completion and motivation rates, the suggestion of introducing new public management tools to enable

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<sup>14</sup> Natalia Maloshonok, and Evgeniy Terentev, "National Barriers to the Completion of Doctoral Programs at Russian Universities," *Higher Education* 77, no. 2 (April 21 2018): 195–211, doi: 10.1007/s10734-018-0267-9.



successful PhD education has been pointed out by different scholars.<sup>15</sup> Such mechanisms as transparency over academic achievements and the lack of regulations for departments by governmental institutions lead to the broadening of the networks of the main stakeholders interested in the PhD program development.

In recent years, the task of orienting higher education to the labor market in Russia has been solved by attracting representatives of organizations and enterprises to educational and methodological commissions, scientific commissions, as well as state examination and attestation commissions. Thus, they are given the opportunity to reflect the interests of the economy in the field of specialist training. For the analysis of programs, competences and the entire educational process implemented in Saint-Petersburg State University, a significant number of expert bodies were created. Among them were educational programs councils, quality control commissions of educational process and educational and methodological commissions at each faculty of SPSU.

Thus, this part shows the main discussions about PhD programs and main directions of reforms in Russia. These reforms should be related to the effective cooperation between the main stakeholders, high completion rates, and improvement of the motivation of PhD students. This is based on the competences related to soft skills.

### III. Methodology

Based on the above goals and tasks of the article, methods of secondary and primary data collection were applied. Statistics, the official documents of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) and speeches from the 2018 International Labor Forum were used as secondary data sources. The primary data come from online questionnaires for the PhD students at the Faculty of Political Science and graduates and in-depth interviews with members of the Faculty Board and the Administrative Staff, Academic Associations, governmental bodies and the HR-Association (Table 1).

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Schneider, and Dieter Sadowski, "The Impact of New Public Management Instruments on PhD Education," *Higher Education* 59, no. 5 (July 2009): 543–565, doi: 10.1007/s10734-009-9264-3.

**Table 1**

Data Collection					
Tasks	Secondary Data			Primary Data	
	Statistics	Speeches	Official Documents	Questionnaires	Interviews
1. to analyze the cooperation of main actors or dialog between actors in the case of the Faculty of Political Science	-	+	+	+	+
2. to estimate changes in completion rates in the case of the Faculty of Political Science	+	-	+	+	-
3. to explore motivation of PhD students in the case of the Faculty of Political Science.	-	-	-	+	+

**Table 2**

Sample				
Perspective	Type of data	Group	The quantity of data in group	The period of data collection
The Learners' perspective	Questionnaires	Graduates	12	June – October 2018
		PhD students	18	
The Academics' perspective	Interviews	SPSU (E1-E6)	6	September – October 2018
		Academic associations (A1-A3)	3	
The Labor market's perspective	Speeches	Governmental bodies (G1-G2)	2	March 2018
	Interviews	HR-association (J1)	1	September – October 2018

Thus, the learners' perspective, the academics' perspective, and the labor market's perspective were chosen for deeper analysis of the issue (Table 2). These three categories of respondents consist of PhD students and graduates (the learners' perspective) to whom online questionnaires were emailed; professors at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU), heads of different departments, members of scientific and educational-methodological commissions at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU), federal academic associations in Russia (the academic perspective) with whom interviews were conducted; members of the HR-association with whom the interview was conducted and members of governmental bodies (the labor market perspective) whose speeches from the International Labor Forum were coded and analyzed in the same categories as interviews. According to the suggestion that all interviews be explored as "voices" from the one concrete perspective, it was possible to transcribe and code speeches of governmental bodies in the same sets of questions and emerging categories as face-to-face interviews.

Firstly, statistical data were taken from the official portal of Russian Statistics. The lack of official statistics of completion rates in Political Science leads to the lack of information to make a full picture of how the new PhD model influences on completion rates.

Secondly, official documents were divided into three groups: protocols of educational-methodological commissions (October 2017 – September 2018), protocols of scientific commissions (October 2017 – September 2018), and protocols of defense commissions (2016, 2017 and 2018). To create a network of main actors in the decision-making process in the sphere of PhD program's modernization at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU), three types of measures were used to identify participants involved in this process. Members of educational-methodological commission at the faculty, scientific commission at the faculty, and the examination boards for PhD defenses from 2016 to 2018 were analyzed. The tool of UCINET software was used to draw a network of the decision-making process in the sphere of the implementation of competences. The definition of the network analysis is used in the terms of Roderick Arthur William Rhodes' definition of the policy network analysis. This is because the aim of the current article is to disclose the decision-making process.<sup>16</sup>

Thirdly, the link to the online survey was emailed to 56 PhD students of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) (admitted between 2013 and 2017)

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<sup>16</sup> Roderick Arthur William Rhodes, *Understanding Governance: Policy Networks, Governance, Reflexivity, and Accountability* (Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1997).

and 30 questionnaires were collected from June 2018 to October 2018. Out of them, 40% corresponded to those who have already graduated and 60% to those who were still studying. The online survey for PhD students and graduates consisted of 16 questions: hard data (the year of admission to PhD program), three closed questions and 12 questions with multiple answers. The questions were divided into five groups:

- 1) Questions about PhD students' motivation
- 2) Questions connected with potential completion rates
- 3) Questions about PhD students' cooperation with the members of the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU)
- 4) Questions about competences
- 5) Questions about PhD students' careers

The analysis of closed questions was based on a grounded approach. According to the founders of grounded theory,<sup>17</sup> this approach is appropriate for conceptualizing categories from collected data and demonstrating relations between them. Thus, opened responses were divided into core categories and then the characteristics of each category were analyzed.

Fourthly, 10 semi-structured face-to-face interviews<sup>18</sup> were conducted and audiotaped during the period from March 2018 to October 2018. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Consequently, six interviews were conducted with the representatives of the Faculty (E1-E6), three interviews with representatives of academic associations (governmental and non-governmental: A1-A3), and one interview with the representative of the labor market (business J-1). Thus, six interviews were conducted inside the Faculty of Political Science and four interviews were conducted outside the Faculty of Political Science.

Four clusters of questions for the "academic perspective" E1-E6 and A1-A-3 emerged during the interviews: 1) about the new PhD model in general;

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<sup>17</sup> Barney G. Glaser, Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Routledge, 2017), doi:10.4324/9780203793206.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews were conducted with the head of the Educational-Methodological Commission of the Faculty of Political Science, members of the Educational-Methodological Commission of the Faculty of Political Science, the heads of the Departments of the Faculty of Political Science, the head of Scientific Commission of the Faculty of Political Science, members of the Scientific Commission at the Faculty of Political Science, a member of the Higher Attestation Commission, a member of the Federal Educational-Methodological Association of Higher Education, the head of the Department of HR Association in Saint-Petersburg, and the vice-president of the Russian Association of Political Science.

2) about PhD competences; 3) about cooperation with the labor market; and 4) about skills of PhD students and graduates. Three sets of questions for the “labor market perspective” J-1 and G-1-G-2 emerged during the interviews: 1) about professional standards and educational standards; 2) about educational competences and graduates’ skills and labor market requirements; and 3) about cooperation channels between governmental bodies, educational organizations and the labor market.

The interviews were transcribed, coded and special emerging categories were identified. According to the four clusters of questions, respondents (E1-E6; A1-A3) tended to speak about the issue from the perspective of three categories: PhD students and graduates “knowledge,” PhD students and graduates “research,” and “effectiveness” of the new PhD model (Table 3). New subcategories were included in the system of analysis because of the function of the semi-structured interviews, which provide the broad data. This was useful for obtaining emerging analytical categories.

**Table 3**

Group of questions	Questions about new PhD model in general	Questions about competences in PhD education	Questions about cooperation with labor market	Questions about skills of PhD students and graduates
Questions	New model	Pedagogical practice	Cooperation with labor market	Soft skills
	Strengths and weaknesses of new model	Transformation of competences	Usefulness of competences for the requirements of the labor market	Who is a PhD graduate?
Characteristics of PhD competences				
Emphasis in answers	Knowledge			Description of features and skills
	Research			
	Effectiveness			

Speeches from the Labor Forum were coded according to the logic of the interview questions (J-1). The most interesting speeches were outlined among 16 speeches of participants of the panel according to the scope of the article. Thus, two speeches of the representatives of governmental bodies

were used (G-1-G-2). The interview (J-1) and speeches (G-1-G-2) were coded according to the categories “effectiveness” and “knowledge.”

Traditional discourse analysis was used to focus on the practices of the text or rhetoric. There are very many definitions of discourse analysis. In this article the definition connected with “individuals and group interpretation of the world” are used. Continuing the suggestion of Reisman, the most important thing for this analysis was to understand the internal attitudes of speakers.<sup>19</sup> In discourse, research coding is made more straightforward by “sifting relevant materials from a large body of recording and transcript.”<sup>20</sup>

## IV. Findings

This section consists of three subsections in accordance with tasks of this article that were outlined before. Consequently, all data were distributed according to the three tasks.

### IV.1. *Analysis of cooperation between main actors in the case of the Faculty of Political Science, SPSU*

There are many external actors included in the educational and educational-methodological processes at different stages at SPSU. According to the protocols of the scientific commission, educational-methodological commission, and defense commissions at the Faculty of Political Science, the level of collaboration and the strength of relationships between actors (governmental bodies, NGO, universities) was rated by the amount of contacts. According to Figure 1, the vertex is for actors (municipal authorities, city government authorities, NGOs, universities etc.); ties are for the number of cooperative meetings. Number one is Saint-Petersburg State University, while numbers 2 to 13 are other universities, governmental and non-governmental organizations.<sup>21</sup>

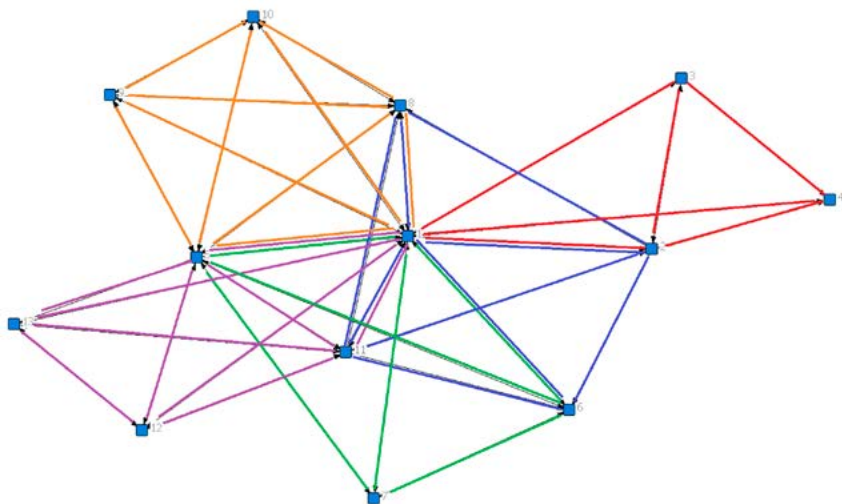
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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis: Qualitative Research Methods* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Melissa Hardy and Alan Bryman, *Handbook of Data Analysis* (London: Sage Publications Limited, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> 2.Legislative Assembly of Saint-Petersburg, 3.Committee on Media of the Government of Saint-Petersburg, 4.Students, 5.Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, 6.Saint-Petersburg Election Commission, 7.Civil Society Development Foundation, 8.Baltic State Technical University, 9.Saint-Petersburg State Institute of Culture,

Thus, 12 main actors are involved with the Faculty of Political Science (number 1) and take part in meetings, conversations, discussions on the main directions of the development of PhD programs and members of examination and defense commissions. The network (Figure 1) displays five dens clots, which show members of the educational-methodological commission (the red polyhedron), the scientific commission (the green polyhedron) and defense commissions from 2016 to 2018 at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) (orange, blue and purple polyhedrons). The most influential actors with the majority of ties with the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) are the Saint-Petersburg Legislative Assembly (2), the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and the Public Administration (5), the Saint-Petersburg Election Commission (6), the Baltic State Technical University (8), the Central Naval Museum of Saint-Petersburg (11).



**Figure 1**

Main actors involved in faculty activities

According to the analysis of the category “knowledge” in interviews, it is important to outline and explain subcategories in the third cluster of

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10.Sociology Institute of Russian Academy of Science, 11.Central Naval Museum of Saint-Petersburg, 12.Russian society of political scientists, and 13.Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation.

questions about cooperation with the labor market (*overeducation* and *ignorance*) for the first task of the article. On the one hand, overproduction of PhD graduates leads to an increase in the numbers of highly qualified specialists which positively influences human capital and creative capital development. This is vital for economic growth. Respondents outlined that all “budget places” (grants for PhD education from the government) are coordinated with the labor market. On the other hand, respondents argue that PhD graduates’ knowledge is not obvious to the labor market and this leads to their ignorance’. According to the analysis of the category “effectiveness” in interviews, it is vital to highlight two subcategories in the third set of questions (sustainable cooperation and lack of knowledge channels). The total number of respondents who speak about coordination between the labor market and educational organizations pointed out the necessity of sustainable cooperation on a continual basis with a huge range of potential actors. However, the lack of knowledge channels and the lack of information in the scope of PhD program’s transformations leads to the misunderstanding of the role of new graduates in the labor market.

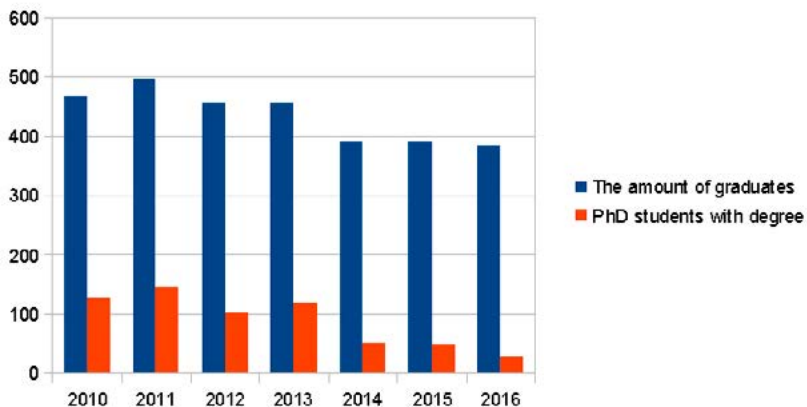
Thus, these data help to analyze the cooperation of main actors or dialog between actors in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU.

#### IV.2. *Assessment of the developments in completion rates of PhD programs in Russia*

According to Figure 2, the decreasing level of completion rates and the reduced number of graduates without a degree in educational organizations can be seen. This is for six years in the scope of the Political Science specialization. A decrease is observed both in absolute values and in percentage. Thus, from 2010 the percentage of PhD graduates with degrees from the total number of PhD graduates decreased more than two times (from 27% in 2010 to 7% in 2016). According to the new PhD model, 2016 was the first year of graduation.

According to the analysis of the category “research” in interviews, it is important to outline and explain subcategories in the first cluster of questions about the new PhD model in general (research *promotion* and research *decrease*) and review the subcategories in the second set of questions about competences in PhD programs (the competence-based approach *work on PhD student research* and the competence-based approach *decrease the level of individual research*). On the one hand, the new model introduced a new completion rates measure – diploma “Researcher. Teacher-researcher”

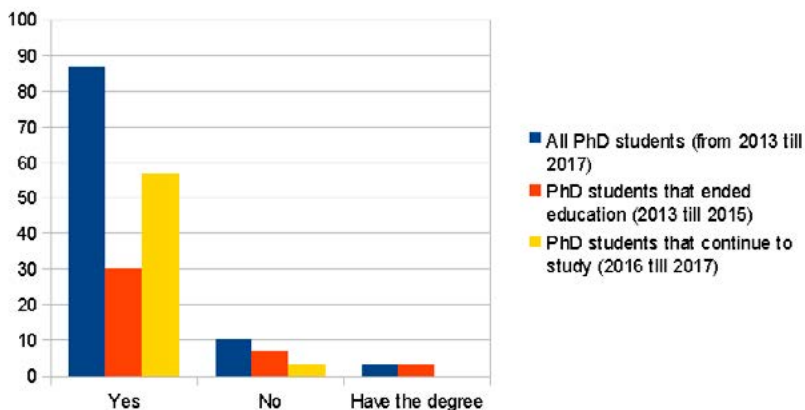




**Figure 2**

PhD graduates who ended the program (blue). PhD graduates with degree among total (specialization Political Science, all Russian universities).

(research promotion). A concentric approach of competences strengthens PhD students’ research skills (*work on PhD student research*). Moreover, it leads to future increases in completion rates. On the other hand, respondents argue that the new model has no effect or even a negative effect on completion



**Figure 3**

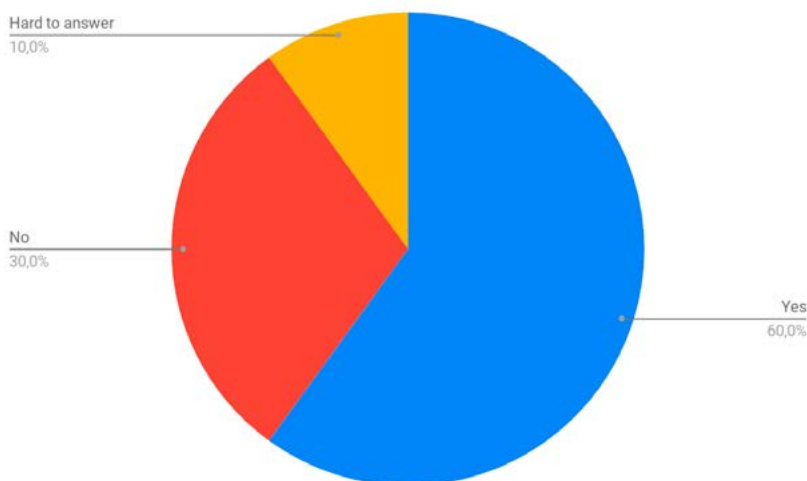
Distribution of survey results “do PhD students plan to defend their degree thesis?”

rates because of the research level decrease (rooted in the necessity to complete two theses [one for the diploma and one for the degree]). Furthermore, the competence-based approach erases the individuality of PhD student research.

According to the survey, 86.7% of respondents plan to defend their dissertations for a degree. 30% of PhD graduates (admitted from 2013 to 2015) and 56.6% of PhD students (admitted from 2016 to 2017) are planning to defend their thesis out of the total number of respondents. 6.6% and 3.3% of PhD graduates and PhD students (respectively) do not want to defend their dissertations. Only 3.3% of PhD graduates end up earning the degree. At the same time, 56.7% of graduate students claim that their skills acquired during the PhD program at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) are important for their future career.

### IV.3. Analysis of motivation of PhD students in the case of the Faculty of Political Science, (SPSU)

During the correlation analysis, it was outlined that 60% of graduate students believe that the presence of a degree has a positive effect on their



**Figure 4**

Distribution of survey results “Does the PhD degree and PhD experience make you more competitive in the labor market?”

competitiveness in the labor market (Figure 4). The category “effectiveness” in interviews has shown two subcategories in the first set of questions about the new PhD model in general (the new PhD model is effective for the University; the new model is not efficient for PhD students and graduates). The category knowledge was divided into two subcategories in the second set of questions about PhD competences (importance of competences for any career and importance only for academia). The category “research” shows two subcategories in the third set of questions about cooperation with the labor market (image and ignorance). These emergent subcategories reflected the issue of PhD students’ motivation in terms of the efficiency of the program for them, the importance of PhD competences for a broad variety of career choices, and the prestige of motivation. Thus, this data helps to disclose the issue of motivation of PhD students in the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU.

## V. Discussion

In this article an overview of the general competences in the new model of postgraduate programs at Saint-Petersburg State University was discussed. These competences have a greater impact on the development of general and universal skills that can be useful in any field. This differs from previous PhD programs, which could be characterized by a very strong emphasis on the preparation of independent (under the guidance of a Doctor of Science/Professor) qualification research work. In fact, the components of training, as well as the pedagogical components, were minimized in the previous PhD program.

In general, the attitudes towards new competences that provide new PhD programs have been divided. On the one hand, the interviewees (E4) optimistically evaluated the new competence model. Such a continuous educational model preserves the freshness of knowledge. Moreover, it was noted that a concentric approach to competences was implemented in SPSU. It was pointed out that in the interviews (E5) the modern model of PhD programs represents the continuation of student learning. On the other hand, postgraduate studies should be at a separate level that applies to a separate department and professors who do not participate in the work with bachelors and masters. “The student status of a graduate student is emphasized – this is a negative trait, this system is not effective in the psychological, structural, institutional and material sense. Competences based on an approach to the PhD program is not the key to success as they reflect the same disadvantages that associate a graduate student with a 1st year undergraduate student” (A-1).

Based on the discourse analysis of in-depth interviews, three main conclusions can be made.

First of all, according to the aim of the state program, it is necessary to build sustainable cooperation channels between all stakeholders on federal, regional and university levels: the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and Ministry of Science and Higher Education, other governmental bodies and NGOs, universities and business community, etc. These channels will help to avoid transaction costs and provide the right feedback from the labor market to the educational sphere. Thus, some interviews, both from the labor market and academia, outlined the problem of misalignment of competences in political science with professional standards. Another problem is that the representatives outside academia (J1) do not understand the new model of PhD programs and it is the first obstacle to their ability to participate actively.

Secondly, the transformation of PhD education into the third level of study leads to the increase in completion rates. The implementation of the new measure of completion – a qualification diploma for PhD students (“Researcher. Teacher-Researcher”) – technically increases the completion rates of PhD educational programs. But this diploma does not influence knowledge development and does not promote the knowledge economy because of the weak criteria for obtaining it, as stated in the majority of interviews. Therefore, this system needs future modernization as it does not positively influence degree completion rates. According to the survey data, some PhD students admitted in the years 2013, 2015 and 2016 do not want to defend their degree theses. Only PhD students (100% of them) admitted in 2017 plan to do so. This is connected with the transformation of the PhD education plan for students admitted in 2017: they receive new disciplines in pedagogy, psychology, and communication. The trend for increasing the hours of pedagogical practice has more advantages according to the discourse analysis of in-depth interviews. According to the PhD students surveyed at the Faculty of Political Science, 24.1% of respondents estimated the efficiency of pedagogical practice in the context of development of key competences at 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. 20.7% estimated it to be 10 and 17% evaluated this indicator to be 1. Such diversity in the estimation of pedagogical practice outlines the issue of different levels of incorporation for the pedagogical community of the faculty. This conclusion comes from the correlation between the level of PhD students’ participation in the meetings of the academic council, departments and other commissions and the level of their evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching practice for PhD students in terms of developing core competences. Consequently, the higher the level of incorporation is, the higher the interest and the higher the completion rates

will be. Unfortunately, a problematic issue that remains is that PhD students have to engage in compensated work (100%) because of a lack of funding for their PhD. As stated in the interview (E4) “the combination of graduate students in their studies with work, because of the low level of scholarships, leads to a decrease in the level of scientific knowledge.” Obviously, it leads to a reduction in completion rates.

Thirdly, according to the assumption that self-management is the core competence among the soft skills, it is important to make a correlation with the competences of PhD programs in SPSU. The sustainable promotion of high soft skills during the PhD programs increases the motivation rate of PhD students by opening broader career opportunities for students. During the discourse analysis in 4 out of the 9 in-depth interviews (interviews E1, E2, E3, E4) with the representatives of the university, the member of Higher Attestation Commission and Russian Association for Political Science, staff pointed out the importance of time management, organizational skills, self-observation, self-analysis and discipline as the competences that developed during the PhD study. Analysis of a survey of PhD students shows that 56.7% of students considered that these competences were important in their professional activities now and in the future. At the same time, only 36.7% of PhD students from the Faculty of Political Science wanted to work in universities and in the higher education system. Consequently, the competences gained from PhD programs are relevant for different professional directions.

## VI. Conclusion

This article has analyzed the new model of PhD programs in Russia, using the case of the Faculty of Political Science at SPSU. The new model has transformed PhD education in several ways: it has incorporated labor market representatives into the process of educational program implementation, it has created new competences, it has introduced additional disciplines and hours of pedagogical practice, it has added the new diploma qualification at the end of the PhD program (before degree), and it has changed the rules of degree defenses. All these transformations were directed at achieving goals of federal programs in educational and labor market development.

The new PhD model in SPSU declares its aims in the context of knowledge economy and sustainable development of education and labor market. The new model of PhD programs affects the structure of communication and coordination channels between all stakeholders and

supports the necessity of such incorporation channels for the development of educational programs. In the current article an overview of general competences in the new model of PhD programs at Saint-Petersburg State University has been conducted. Core competences of this program correlate with soft skills and encourage the development of systematic and critical thinking, project management and cooperation skills, and they provide the possibility to build inter-cultural channels of self-development and to work with information. This correlation stimulates broad career opportunities for graduates after they exit their PhD programs and promotes higher motivation rates because PhD students will better understand how they can present and translate their knowledge to the needs of society.

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## About the author

MARIA EDINOVA (edinovams@gmail.com), PhD student in Political Science at Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU), is currently Deputy Head of the International Department in the Organizing Committee of the Saint-Petersburg International Labor Forum. Previously she worked at the Faculty of Political Science (SPSU) as the specialist in the PhD Department. Her major research interests include educational policy, internationalization of higher education, and migration policy. Maria Edinova received a bachelor's degree in Political Science (2014), master's degree in Public Policy and Political Governance (2016), and the qualification "Researcher. Teacher-Researcher" (2019) at Saint-Petersburg State University.

# **The characteristics of PhD programs at Saint-Petersburg State University (SPSU): The transformation of generic competences of PhD students in Political Science**

Maria Edinova

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