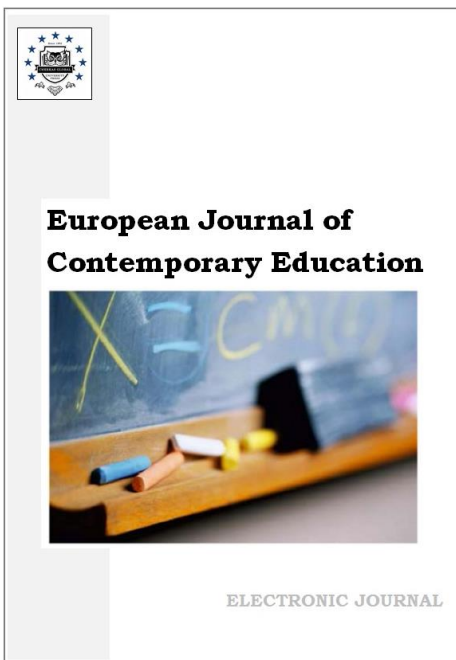




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The Social Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Second Half of the 19th century

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Abstract

This paper examines an official document originally entitled ‘The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University’ to provide an insight into the size, social composition, and religious affiliation of students and auditors at Kharkov Imperial University in the period 1840–1899.

A glimpse is provided of the evolution of the title of this historical source through the period of its publication. An insight is also provided into the substantive and formal characteristics of this historical document, including its structure, format, and the nature of the data contained therein.

A quantitative analysis of the data in the Lists helped determine the total number and composition of students enrolled in Kharkov Imperial University in the period under review.

It was established that, depending on the date of publication, different versions of the List varied in the kind of data available on students and auditors at the University.

The paper provides trend data on the composition of students within different departments and across the University as a whole. It was established that by the late 19th century the estate composition of the student body at Kharkov Imperial University had changed, with similar processes taking place in universities across the Russian Empire. This trend was associated with certain common processes that were taking place across the Russian Empire.

The paper also describes the way education in the Russian Empire transformed from an estate-based vocational education system to an estateless general education system.

Keywords: education, enrollment, learning opportunity, education policy, higher education, Kharkov Imperial University.

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1. Introduction

Gaining a proper insight into the characteristics of the development of the higher education system in the Russian Empire in the 19th century requires access to a source base that will enable a comprehensive analysis of relevant historical events and an integrated assessment thereof. In this context, it is worth conducting an integrated analysis of the following historical source on the history of higher education in the Russian Empire – ‘The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University’. Originally so entitled, this document provides an insight into the student body of Kharkov Imperial University in the period 1840–1917. An analysis of this historical source will make it possible to explore the various aspects of university development in the Russian Empire through the example of this particular university, as it contains information about the number, social composition, and religious affiliation of students and auditors at it.

It is worth noting that in the education system of the Russian Empire the university had developed not only and not so much as a research center but as a social institution shaping and nurturing the future of the nation’s political and ecclesiastical elites.

It is also worth noting that the social background of the nation’s emergent elite was not exclusively noble. In a sense, the university in the Russian Empire could be regarded as a “social elevator” for poor members of the nobility and the taxed estates, something that could help them improve their social status and integrate into the nation’s system of public service.

As noted by T.N. Zhukovskaya, “in the opening decades of the 19th century, the nation’s student body tended to be replenished not by members of the nobility but by graduates of ecclesiastical seminaries. The latter did not have much choice: wait for years to get a place in a modest rural parish or try their luck elsewhere other than ecclesiastical service. The government gave tacit approval to admitting to universities even members of the taxed estates (petit bourgeois and state and private peasants)”. According to the scholar, “all universities had many of them” (Zhukovskaya, 2011: 99).

The system of internal hierarchy entrenched in Russian imperial universities, grounded in a combination of civil rank, academic degree, and academic post, had an effective impact in terms of urging youth to choose science and education as a career path. For most of them, the university served to destroy estate barriers, offering new opportunities and mechanisms for socialization.

The period’s student body was made up of members of the petit bourgeois, state peasants, Cossacks, serfs, and other strata of society. For instance, a state peasant named Zakhary Serikov attended the Department of Medicine at Kharkov Imperial University (Spiski studentov, 1850–1851: 21), and an emancipated serf named Ivan Borovik attended the Department of Law (Spiski studentov, 1869–1870: 11).

The purpose of the research reported in this paper was to analyze the above document in order to gain an insight into the substantial transformations in the sociopolitical and socioeconomic areas of life in the Russian Empire in the 19th century.

2. Materials and methods

In putting this work together, use was made of ‘The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University’, a source on the history of higher education in the Russian Empire in the 19th century. The chronological focus was from 1840 to 1899. The document contains official information on students at Kharkov Imperial University, including data on their social background, religious affiliation, the date they were admitted to the University, the institution(s) they previously attended, and the source of funding for their tuition fees (Spiski studentov, 1840–1899).

No analysis was deliberately carried out of the List for the period 1900–1917, as it would be logical to examine them in the context of a new era in the history of the Russian state as a whole and Kharkov Imperial University in particular with a view to conducting a comparative analysis of the subject.

Use was made of methods of data analysis to obtain statistics about the outcomes across the key areas and objectives essential to the educational process in Kharkov Imperial University, as well as the dynamics of change in the size and social estate composition of the student body in this educational institution.

Use was also made of comparative analysis to explore the social estate composition of the University’s student body in each of its four departments. This helped summarize the social composition and size of the student body at Kharkov Imperial University in the 19th century.

The chronological focus was from 1850, i.e. the year the University became a four-department institution (following the splitting of the Department of Philosophy), to 1899.

3. Discussion

The history of Kharkov Imperial University is a bright page in the history of higher education in the Russian Empire. It is one of the oldest higher educational institutions not only in Ukraine but in Eastern Europe as a whole. The history of Kharkov Imperial University is an integral part of the intellectual, cultural, and ecclesiastical history of both Ukraine and the Russian Empire as a whole.

In this regard, the history of Kharkov Imperial University must be considered in the context of the development of higher education and science across the Russian Empire as a whole. Scholarly publications on this subject can help determine some of the key trends in the development of higher education in the Russian Empire and the making of its university space, which was deeply incorporated into the overall urban context. With that said, an important component of this process was the shaping of the values of the university community as a corporation of students and teachers. Hence, the history of Kharkov Imperial University is of considerable scholarly interest. It has been researched in multiple studies.

Of particular note is 'The History of Kharkov University (1804–2006): A Systematic Bibliographical Reference Book' (Istoriia, 2007). The value of this collection lies in that it covers over 8,000 scholarly works on the history of Kharkov University, grouped together based on chronology and subject matter. In the context of the present study, worthy of particular mention are Sections 10 and 11, which contain materials on issues of enrollment in the University (10.4) and rules for students and auditors (10.9), as well as lists of students and auditors at it (11.2).

There are a number of general scholarly works on the history of higher education in the Russian Empire that consider it through the lens of the European and Russian imperial traditions of education and science (Andreev, 2009; Avrus, 2001; Astakhov, 1955; Polyanskaya, 1958).

For instance, S.I. Posokhov examines, through the example of Moscow, Kazan, and Kharkov Imperial Universities, issues of the adaptation of an imperial university into the European sociocultural space. The historian provides an insight into the practices of the above universities in relation to self-representation, examines the mechanisms underlying the development and transformation of university traditions, and discusses the effect of the activity of a university in terms of urban modernization (Posokhov, 2014).

Issues surrounding student life in universities across the Russian Empire have been explored by a number of scholars, including A.G. Voronov, (Voronov, 1913), T.N. Zhukovskaya (Zhukovskaya, Kazakova, 2007; Zhukovskaya, 2011), V.S. Gnilosyrov (Gnilosyrov, 1862), and I.V. Lyubarsky (Lyubarskij, 1891). V.P. Buzeskul provides an insight into the operation of Kharkov Imperial University in the period from the adoption of the University Statute of 1884 to the beginning of the Russian Revolution of 1905 (Buzeskul, 1905). Some of the key characteristics of the organization of the educational process in Kharkov Imperial University have been analyzed by A.E. Lebid and N.A. Shevchenko (Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021).

Of particular interest is research by A.V. Kamosko (Kamosko, 1970) and S.V. Rozhdestvensky (Rozhdestvenskij, 1907) on the estate composition of students in Russian imperial universities and other educational institutions.

In particular, A.V. Kamosko provides some data on changes in the social composition of students in gymnasiums, progymnasiums, and real schools in the period 1836–1888. According to the scholar, "although children of nobles and functionaries led the way in numbers in gymnasiums in post-reform Russia, there was a significant drop in their relative share of the student body. At the same time, there was a significant increase in the number of children of members of the urban and rural estates, above all members of the groups that formed the Russian bourgeoisie, which was closing in on the privileged nobility. The researcher asserts that "the composition of students in secondary and higher schools in Russia in the 1930–80s was changing fully in keeping with the socioeconomic shifts taking place in the country at the time" (Kamosko, 1970: 207).

Furthermore, S.V. Rozhdestvensky provides an insight into the estate composition of students in Russian universities through the lens of a clash of an estate-based vocational education system and an estateless general education system (Rozhdestvenskij, 1907: 83).

The present work is based on a scholarly analysis of data contained in an official document originally entitled 'The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University' ([Spiski studentov, 1840–1899](#)).

4. Results

As already mentioned earlier, the List contained information on students' religious affiliation, estate background, previous education, etc.

The document had been printed at the University's own publishing house since 1840. That is, it had not been released for three and a half decades since its foundation in 1804. The document was released under different names at different times:

1840–1858: 'The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University';

1864–1866: 'The List of Students and Individuals Enrolled to Attend Lectures at Kharkov Imperial University';

1868–1885 and 1906–1907: 'The List of Students and Auditors Enrolled to Attend Lectures at Kharkov Imperial University';

1886–1887, 1896–1898, and 1908–1916: 'The List of Students at Kharkov Imperial University';

1898–1902: 'The Alphabetical List of Students and Auditors at Kharkov Imperial University'.

Pursuant to the University Statute of 1835, Kharkov Imperial University had the following three departments organized in it: 1) Department of Philosophy; 2) Department of Law; 3) Department of Medicine. The Department of Philosophy was split into the following two divisions: 1) History and Philology; 2) Physics and Mathematics. In 1850, these two divisions became independent departments. Thus, Kharkov Imperial University had three departments from 1835 to 1850, with one more department established in 1850.

In Kharkov Imperial University, as in other universities in the Russian Empire, each year the Administration drew up a list of students and auditors at the University, which included information for each of its departments ([Spiski studentov, 1840–1899](#)).

Being the official mouthpiece of Kharkov Imperial University, the document was published each year under the authority of the University's Board. It contained information on the University's students and auditors (i.e., individuals allowed to attend lectures and other learning activities without receiving credit) ([Brokgauz, Efron, 1892: 142](#)). According to Article 116 of the University Statute of 1884, "alongside students, permission to attend lectures and other learning activities will be granted to outsiders of a certain social standing or in a certain occupation" ([Ustav, 1911: 41-42](#)).

For instance, among the outsiders admitted to attend lectures in the Department of Medicine in the 1850–1851 school year were "a vet assistant named Osip Jordan, a person in pursuit of a degree in veterinary medicine, and a drugstore owner's assistant named August Bart, a person in pursuit of a degree as a druggist" ([Spiski studentov, 1850–1851: 25](#)). The number of auditors at Kharkov Imperial University increasingly grew with time. Whereas there were 5 auditors at Kharkov Imperial University between 1850 and 1851, the figure was now 65 between 1859 and 1860 ([Spiski studentov, 1859-1860: 28-34](#)), 57 between 1869 and 1870 ([Spiski studentov, 1869–1870: 37-38](#)), and 78 between 1880 and 1881 ([Spiski studentov, 1880–1881: 85-88](#)).

Admission to Kharkov Imperial University was regulated by the following rule: within the period from July 15 to August 15, "young people of at least 17 years of age" were to lodge with the Rector a formal request seeking permission to enroll in the department of their choice. The following documents were to be submitted:

1) All Christian entrants needed to provide their birth and baptism certificates. All entrants of other faiths needed to provide only their birth certificate.

2) All entrants needed to provide their gymnasium diploma or gymnasium transcripts.

3) All entrants of noble descent needed to provide their nobility certificate or a copy of the record in a noble genealogical book.

4) All entrant children of persons with a class rank needed to provide their father's service record.

5) All entrant members of the taxed estates needed to provide a discharge certificate. Those who had reached the age of 20 needed to provide a military service registration certificate as well.

- 6) All home-educated entrants needed to provide a certificate of conduct issued by the police.
- 7) All entrant foreigners needed to provide a passport (Pravila, 1878: 3-4).

As already mentioned earlier, the List contained data on the number of students in different years and departments, as well as information on their social background and religious affiliation (Table 1; Table 2; Table 3; Table 4).

Table 1. Number and Social Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1850–1851 (Spiski studentov, 1850–1851)

Department	1850–1851									
	Year of study					Social background				
	I	II	III	IV	V	nobility	petit bourgeois	merchants	clergy	officers
History and Philology	8	7	13	4	-	13	1	2	7	7
Physics and Mathematics	19	11	26	19	-	42	7	6	-	9
Law	26	15	31	50	-	79	5	6	6	18
Medicine	45	33	40	30	12	71	16	12	7	22
Total	98	66	110	103	12	205	29	26	20	56

Table 2. Number and Social Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1859–1860 (Spiski studentov, 1859–1860)

Department	1859–1860									
	Year of study					Social background				
	I	II	III	IV	V	nobility	petit bourgeois	merchants	clergy	officers
History and Philology	9	3	3	4	-	12	2	1	3	3
Physics and Mathematics	56	24	11	8	-	66	1	9	6	11
Law	67	42	27	12	-	78	11	17	6	17
Medicine	62	39	43	37	34	65	30	20	14	36
Total	194	108	84	61	34	221	44	47	29	67

Table 3. Number and Social Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1869–1870 (Spiski studentov, 1869–1870)

Department	1869–1870									
	Year of study					Social background				
	I	II	III	IV	V	nobility	petit bourgeois	merchants	clergy	officers
History and Philology	13	6	9	6	-	10	3	1	7	9
Physics and Mathematics	33	21	21	15	-	47	4	7	3	21
Law	82	93	87	23	-	133	18	16	16	68
Medicine	44	29	29	9	12	46	16	10	2	31
Total	172	149	146	53	12	236	41	34	28	129

Table 4. Number and Social Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1880–1881 ([Spiski studentov, 1880–1881](#))

Department	1880–1881									
	Year of study					Social background				
	I	II	III	IV	V	nobility	petit bourgeois	merchants	clergy	officers
History and Philology	20	15	20	21	-	10	2	-	39	18
Physics and Mathematics	63	49	18	8	-	43	6	12	35	29
Law	40	28	25	21	-	53	6	8	27	15
Medicine	120	126	68	66	55	71	62	36	129	58
Total	243	218	131	116	55	177	76	56	230	120

There are a few insights to be gained from the data analysis conducted. First of all, it is possible to name Kharkov Imperial University's most and least successful departments in terms of student enrollment ([Table 5](#)).

Table 5. Total Size of the Student Body at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1850–1881

Department	1850–1851		1859–1860		1869–1870		1880–1881	
	people	%	people	%	people	%	people	%
History and Philology	32	9	19	4	34	6	76	10
Physics and Mathematics	75	19	99	20	90	17	138	18
Law	122	31	148	31	285	54	114	15
Medicine	160	41	215	45	123	24	435	57
Total	389 (+5)	-	481 (+65)	-	532 (+57)	-	763 (+78)	-

[Table 5](#) displays the data on the numbers of students and auditors (provided in brackets) in each of the departments at Kharkov Imperial University.

As evidenced in the table above, the Department of History and Philology was the University's least popular department. The most popular were the Department of Medicine and the Department of Law.

It is particularly worth noting the uneven dynamics of admission to the University in the entire period under review. Admission was most stable in the Department of Physics and Mathematics. The process was somewhat nonlinear with the rest of the departments, especially the Department of Law (a sharp increase in the 1869–1870 school year) and the Department of Medicine (a sharp drop in the same school year).

Second of all, the data analysis helped determine the dynamics of change in the estate composition of students within different departments and across the University as a whole ([Table 6](#)).

Table 6. Social Estate Composition of Students at Kharkov Imperial University in the Period 1850–1881

Social background	Department	1850–1851		1859–1860		1869–1870		1880–1881	
		people	%	people	%	people	%	people	%
Nobility	History and Philology	13	6	12	5	10	4	10	6
	Physics and Mathematics	42	20	66	30	47	21	43	24

	Law	79	39	78	35	133	56	53	30
	Medicine	71	35	65	30	46	19	71	40
	Total	205	52	221	46	236	44	177	23
Petit bourgeois	History and Philology	1	4	2	5	3	7	2	3
	Physics and Mathematics	7	24	1	2	4	10	6	8
	Law	5	17	11	25	18	44	6	8
	Medicine	16	55	30	68	16	39	62	81
	Total	29	7	44	8	41	9	76	10
Merchants	History and Philology	2	8	1	2	1	3	-	-
	Physics and Mathematics	6	23	9	19	7	21	12	22
	Law	6	23	17	36	16	47	8	14
	Medicine	12	46	20	43	10	29	36	64
	Total	26	7	47	10	34	6	56	7
Clergy	History and Philology	7	35	3	10	7	25	39	17
	Physics and Mathematics	-	-	6	20	3	11	35	15
	Law	6	30	6	20	16	57	27	12
	Medicine	7	35	14	50	2	7	129	56
	Total	20	5	29	6	28	5	230	30
Officers	History and Philology	7	13	3	4	9	7	18	15
	Physics and Mathematics	9	16	11	16	21	16	29	24
	Law	18	32	17	26	68	53	15	13
	Medicine	22	39	36	54	31	24	58	48
	Total	56	14	67	14	129	24	120	16

Based on the above, the following inferences were made:

1) the period under review witnessed an overall decline in the number of students of noble descent at Kharkov Imperial University (from 52% of the total student body in the period 1850–1851 to 23 % in the period 1880–1881);

2) relatively low number of students from the petit bourgeois estate (less than 10 % of the total student body), the largest number of members of this group (relative to total students in the department) being concentrated in the Department of Medicine (over 80 % in the late 19th century);

3) relatively low number of students from the clergy (approximately 6 % of the total student body), the exception being the 1880–1881 school year, when their share was 30 % (relative to the rest of the school years in the period under review) – owing yet again to the Department of Medicine, which at that time had more student members of the clergy than the other three departments combined – 129 versus 101;

4) relatively low number of students from the merchant estate;

5) members of the rest of the social groups accounting for about 7.5 % of the total student body at Kharkov Imperial University.

With regard to the average share of students from each estate within each department at Kharkov Imperial University in the period under review, the figures are as follows:

1) nobility: History and Philology – 5 %; Physics and Mathematics – 24 %; Law – 40 %; Medicine – 31 %;

2) petit bourgeois: History and Philology – 5 %; Physics and Mathematics – 11 %; Law – 23 %; Medicine – 61 %;

3) merchants: History and Philology – 4 %; Physics and Mathematics – 21 %; Law – 30 %; Medicine – 45 %;

4) clergy: History and Philology – 22 %; Physics and Mathematics – 11 %; Law – 30 %; Medicine – 37 %;

5) officers: History and Philology – 10 %; Physics and Mathematics – 18 %; Law – 31 %; Medicine – 41 %.

Thus, the largest enrollment of members of the nobility was in the Department of Law, members of the petit bourgeois – the Department of Medicine, members of the merchant estate – the Department of Medicine, members of the clergy – the Department of Medicine, and members of the military estate – yet again the Department of Medicine. In part, this was due to the Department of Medicine being most popular with entrants. More specifically, in the period 1850–1881 the Department of Medicine had an enrollment of 933 students, the Department of Law – 669, the Department of Physics and Mathematics – 402, and the Department of History and Philology – 161 students.

5. Conclusion

As demonstrated by the case of Kharkov Imperial University, increasingly by the late 19th century the higher education system in the Russian Empire was witnessing liberalization processes, which was reflected in changes in the social estate composition of students within different departments and across the university as a whole. An analysis revealed that the drop in the number of members of the nobility among students at Kharkov Imperial University was associated with an increase in the number of individuals of non-noble descent among them.

A structural analysis of the Lists revealed that in the period under review the student body at Kharkov Imperial University mainly comprised members of the following five estates: nobility, petit bourgeois, merchants, clergy, and children of company officers. In addition, the University's student body included the offspring of state peasants, *odnodvortsy*, clerks, emancipated serfs, settlers, and Cossacks, as well as foreigners and Jews, with the share of members of these social groups in the total number of students at Kharkov Imperial University being very small.

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