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*Today's News*

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**Foreign Universities in Vietnam Are Ordered to Teach Communist Ideology**By MARTHA ANN OVERLAND

Hanoi, Vietnam

The government of Vietnam has ordered all Vietnamese students attending foreign-owned universities in the country to take courses in communist ideology and Ho Chi Minh political theory.

According to the order, which was issued in April and made public last week, students must pass the following courses: "Marxist-Leninist Philosophy," "Marxist-Leninist Economics," "Scientific Socialism," "History of the Vietnamese Communist Party," and "Ho Chi Minh Thought."

All Vietnamese citizens enrolled in public and private higher-education institutions are required to take such courses. But this is the first time that foreign-owned universities have been instructed to teach the same subjects.

"Students are the main force for our future, and our future is socialism," explained Van Dinh Ung, a senior deputy in the Ministry of Education and Training. "Since the backbone of our development is socialism, Marxism-Leninism theory and philosophy needs to be taught. Even though we are now applying some theories of capitalism ... we still have to rely on socialism theory because our system is based on that rule."

Dozens of foreign universities, such as the University of Hawaii-Manoa, offer joint degrees in conjunction with Vietnamese institutions. But because of the number of regulations only a few universities have actually established their own campuses here. Fifteen years after approaching the Vietnamese government, the first U.S. educational institution in Vietnam, American Pacific University, opened in January.

Binh Thy Nguyen Tran, a Vietnamese-American who returned to Ho Chi Minh City, the former Saigon, to set up the university, is not happy with the new course requirements. But she said she does not think they will pose a problem. Instead of trying to incorporate the courses into the curriculum, she intends to ask the education ministry to send local professors to teach the courses. They will fulfill the legal requirements, even though the university will count the ideology courses only as electives.

"We will follow the laws of the country we are in," stressed Ms. Binh. "We care how the teachers teach the students, and we want the courses taught well, but we'll let the government worry about those courses. We don't want to touch" them.

Vietnam has moved toward a market economy since adopting *doi moi*, a perestroika-like process of reform, in 1986. Under new rules, foreign investment has surged and the country has recorded a steady 7-percent growth rate, making its economy one of the fastest-growing in the world. But there has never been an attempt to reduce the influence of the Communist Party or its ideology. In Vietnam,

cialism and Western-style capitalism exist side by side, albeit sometimes uneasily.

There are moments, however, when the two schools of thought clash openly. And often it is in the classroom.

"They are still teaching that socialism is advancing and capitalism is in the death throes," Hoa Pham, a fourth-year student at Hanoi Open University, said with a smile. "Nobody in class really pays attention to what they are teaching."

Ms. Hoa, clutching an expensive Nokia cellphone, explained that she has no objection to studying Ho Chi Minh or Karl Marx. But rather than exploring their contributions to history, she said, the courses are used to indoctrinate students. "We are taught only their positive points and can't ask any questions," said Ms. Hoa. "Nowadays, we really want to know more about other theories."

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