

In contrast, organizations that are central to quality review of higher education in an international setting, such as the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) and the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), believe that international standards are needed for quality in higher education. These organizations focus on the growing globalization of higher education and the call for shared understanding about quality judgments in various countries.

Some supranational organizations are giving increasing attention to quality assurance as well. These include UNESCO, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. In general, these organizations favor the development of regional or international quality standards as they focus on the role of higher education in the economic development of individual countries.

U.S. accrediting organizations prefer to expand communication and cooperation with nation-based quality assurance bodies to address quality internationally.

In this context, the GATS negotiations on liberalization of trade in services are also producing considerable debate—and, in some quarters, consternation—about whether and how quality review of higher education should be addressed in an arena dedicated to trade issues. This concern focuses on whether trade negotiations about “liberalization” will ultimately produce additional regulation of higher education and quality review treated as commodities for consumers. The higher education sector sees itself as offering an experience of considerable depth and complexity (as opposed to a commodity) and sees its students as vital contributors to a community of learning (rather than as disconnected consumers of some commodity).

Many issues and questions confront U.S. accreditors and those engaged in accreditation and quality assurance in many other countries. The continuing expansion of higher education and quality review in an international setting will be accompanied by an ongoing and robust international conversation intended to address these issues and answer the questions.

This article is based on *Letter from the President*, August 2002 available at the CHEA website www.chea.org.

Evaluating and Rewarding Professors: Mexican Style

Philip G. Altbach

Philip G. Altbach is Monan professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College.

Evaluating professors is a hot topic worldwide. Assessment, accountability, and differential rewards are on the agendas of universities and governments. In most countries, however, little real evaluation of academic work occurs and only modest levels of accountability exist. Academic staff are rewarded based on rank and length of service rather than on their individual performance. Indeed, such an evaluation process flies in the face of tradition and sometimes of established labor-management practices.

For at least a segment of the Mexican academic profession, a complex set of evaluative mechanisms exists, tied directly to salary and remuneration. It is worth taking a look at Mexican practices, which might have relevance elsewhere. We will focus on two important public universities—the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), perhaps the world’s largest university with 245,000 students, and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), a large prestigious public university with 46,200 students. Both are located in Mexico City. The practices discussed here resemble those at many other public universities, but not in Mexico’s growing private higher education sector.

This discussion relates mainly to professors with full-time appointments; they comprise just one-third of the teaching staff at UNAM. The rest are part-time staff who receive a modest payment for each course they teach and participate only to a minor extent in the governance of the university. UNAM is similar to most other Mexican universities in this respect. UAM is exceptional in that a majority of its teaching staff have full-time appointments. It should be noted that “full-time” staff may also teach courses at other, usually private, universities or do consulting or other kinds of work to supplement their incomes.

Prior to 1990, Mexican universities, in common with most academic institutions worldwide, did little or no evaluation of faculty performance in determining salary levels. Professors were paid by rank and length of service, with few variations by discipline to take account of market factors. This system precluded any way of rewarding highly productive faculty—or giving a negative message to underachieving faculty. Further, the base salary of Mexican academics is quite low—too low to sustain a middle-class lifestyle or to retain the best

people in the universities. The academic system needed to introduce both accountability and differentiation, and to reward the most productive professors. The goal of the new evaluation schemes was to improve the quality and performance of Mexican academics, and it was for this reason that the government provided funds to create the new programs. There was also recognition by academic leaders that remuneration had to be increased. There is a certain contradiction in these two goals—increasing salaries and introducing evaluation—and this has had implications for implementation.

Prior to 1990, Mexican universities, in common with most academic institutions worldwide, did little or no evaluation of faculty performance in determining salaries levels.

The Internal Reward System

Currently UNAM and UAM offer a complicated set of income supplements on top of salary, based on performance and other criteria. This set of arrangements has produced a differentiated income structure. The system that has developed over the last decade has gotten quite complex and, many argue, nonfunctional in parts. Some academics refuse to participate in the numerous evaluation committees and boards, claiming that the reviews use up time and money that, they say, could be better spent in support of research. The criteria for rewarding professors are criticized as being too narrow. Another charge is that politics and favoritism toward members of particular factions has become part of the evaluation process in some fields and institutions. Some have argued that this evaluation system promotes the “survival of the fittest,” stimulating unhealthy competition and discouraging collaborative research, and is, these critics say, the crassest form of privatization of academic work. UAM is currently engaged in a major review of the structure of academic appointments and remuneration.

As noted, everyone receives a base salary that is not related to performance—and is quite low. Many universities have established their own set of monetary rewards and “top up” payments to faculty members. Criteria for assigning salary increments were originally designed to reward productivity, mainly in research, but these rewards have to some extent become entitlements given out to all but the weakest. Other persons denied these monetary rewards include faculty members who have fallen out of favor with senior administrators, with the political or academic factions in charge of the department

or institution, or with the evaluation committee. Productivity was usually measured by the number of articles or books published, with a premium placed on publishing in international journals: a locally published article was worth much less than one published abroad in English. Innovative teaching methods were not taken into account, nor was “outreach” such as publications aimed at a mass audience or public service. The omission of teaching from performance reviews is due in part to the difficulty of measuring effective teaching. Satisfactory tools for evaluating teaching do not exist anywhere, and developing useful criteria might be especially difficult in Mexico’s bureaucratic environment.

The university’s internal reward system, instituted with the intention of providing a more adequate income to the professoriate, in part achieved its goals. However, the system has been subverted by non-merit-based criteria and an overly narrow scope of measurement. Once on the “merit” list, a person was seldom removed. If productivity was judged deficient in an evaluation period, an increment might be omitted, but participation in the system continued. What started as merit-based reward arrangement became just part of the remuneration package.

Once on the “merit” list, a person was seldom removed.

CONACYT and SNI

Another and more important source of salary for a small group of Mexican academics is the system to promote national scientific productivity organized by the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT), a government-funded organization. CONACYT has its own national system of researchers (SNI), a network of the most highly productive scholars and researchers in all of the disciplines who are given significant remuneration supplements in recognition of their work. Only a small proportion of Mexican academics, 3 percent of the total number and about 10 percent of the full-time faculty (for example, 2,352 at UNAM and 410 at UAM) are part of the SNI system. Selection occurs through a peer review system, and maintaining membership is based on continuing productivity. Membership in the SNI system confers prestige in addition to providing more income. One of the reasons for the establishment of the SNI system was to encourage the best Mexican academics to remain in Mexico. CONACYT recognizes research productivity—focusing mainly on publications but also on external grants. As with internal evaluations, teaching at the undergraduate

level and service are not considered to be relevant criteria to measure productivity. The SNI system seems to work reasonably well. The awards are recognized as based on merit (however narrowly defined), and the members of the national network are viewed as among the best scholars and researchers working in Mexican higher education.

Conclusion

These reward arrangements have created a partially merit-based system for academic remuneration in a segment of Mexico's universities. The arrangements show that it is possible, in a highly bureaucratic academic system resistant to basic structural change, to implement a reform that had two goals—to raise salaries for the most productive professors and to provide a way to measure productivity. Unfortunately, the system itself has become rather rigid and, at least at the university level, no longer provides evaluation based on merit. It is just a standard way to supplement the inadequate basic salaries. The criteria for evaluation, both internally in the universities and in CONACYT, are overly narrow in scope and fail to recognize all aspects of meritorious and relevant academic work. Academic salaries, woefully inadequate, have been raised in many instances. For a few of the most productive faculty, salaries have been significantly improved. The idea of remuneration based on merit has been widely recognized—a significant achievement in a bureaucratized academic system.

Academic salaries, woefully inadequate, have been raised in many instances.

UAM is currently rethinking its reward structures. Perhaps these discussions will lead to the creation of a system that works better and provides a more effective merit-based reward system. Mexico is an example of a country that has taken evaluation seriously, creating a very complex set of arrangements that provide at least some of the necessary elements of evaluation in the context of a highly politicized and bureaucratic academic system. In context, it is not a small achievement. Other countries can look at Mexico's interesting experiment with merit-based salaries through the back door. There are lessons, both positive and negative, to be learned.

Note: Manuel Gil-Antón has also written about this theme in his "Big City Love The Academic Workplace in Mexico," in P. G. Altbach, ed., *The Decline of the Guru: The Academic Profession in Developing Countries* (New York: Palgrave, 2003). ■

Catholic Universities Ponder Globalization

In early December 2002, more than 300 leaders of Catholic universities worldwide met at the Vatican in Rome to discuss the implications of globalization for Catholic higher education. The conference was co-sponsored by the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) and the Vatican's congregation for Catholic Education. Globalization has special implications for church-related institutions, as they have a special mission that is both global and spiritual in nature but at the same time at odds with many of the forces of the "market" that are often integrally linked with globalization.

One of the unique features of the church-related institutions attending the conference is the concern for keeping values at the center of the academic equation and a desire to avoid being drawn completely into the commercialization that characterizes much of contemporary higher education. Navigating the complex realities of both kinds of globalization—that motivated by a focus on social justice and spiritualism and at the same time being subject to the globalization of the market—is not easy. The papers and discussions featured a combination of concerns with understanding the nature of a Catholic university in a changing societal environment, in linking theological issues to contemporary higher education challenges, and maintaining a focus on social justice issues in an era of "marketization."

The realities faced by these 300 institutions from all continents is, of course, quite varied. The realities faced by Catholic universities in non-Catholic environments are different from those in Catholic countries. The problems of Catholic institutions in developing countries are also unique. All were united by a commitment to understand globalization and to navigate constructively in this new context. The conference's final statement stressed harnessing the forces of globalization so that, for example, the revolution in information technology can be used to strengthen solidarity rather than the commercialization of knowledge.

Additional information is available from IFCU, 21 rue d'Assas, 75270 Paris, France. The papers given at the conference will be available, as will be the final statement. E-mail: loic.roche@bureau.fiuc.org

Internet Resources

Visit our website for downloadable back issues of *International Higher Education* and other publications and resources at <http://www.bc.edu/cihe/>.