

Academic Salaries, Academic Corruption, and the Academic Career

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If the academic profession does not maintain adequate income levels, academic performance throughout the system inevitably suffers. Academics must receive sufficient remuneration to live an appropriate middle-class lifestyle—that they must be paid according to the highest international standards, local levels are generally adequate. In many, perhaps most, countries salary levels have not kept up with inflation and the academic profession has lost ground to other professional occupations. In many countries, especially in the developing world and the middle-income nations of the former Soviet Union, academic salaries are entirely inadequate to live on. In such circumstances, academic performance deteriorates, the normal life of universities becomes difficult or impossible, and the temptation of corruption lures many academics. The harsh reality is that academics must find other sources of income.

Worldwide, the design of the academic career, built up over centuries, is under threat—indeed, it is being systematically dismantled in many countries. The traditional view of academic work sees it as more than a job—instead as something of a calling. The idea that professors are devoted to “the life of the mind” is part of professional identity. These goals may seem quaint and romantic in the market-oriented 21st century, but the concept of the university as an intellectual institution and something more than a degree-granting machine underlies them. If academics are allowed to pursue their traditional job of teaching and, for some but by no means all cases, research, universities can perform their traditional duties of educating the next generation of professionals, providing general learning, and creating new knowledge. For this to be sustained, however, the conditions for a “normal” academic career must survive—adequate remuneration, a realistic career path offering the likelihood of promotion and stability of employment, academic freedom to pursue teaching and research, at least a modicum of autonomy and participation in institutional governance, and the respect of society.

This does not mean that professors equal mandarins, who are free of accountability and create their own ivory tower utopias. The realities of mass higher education make this impossible. The professoriate must be differentiated by function and role, with most academics performing mainly teaching and only a minority involved in research. Accountability for academic work is necessary and appropriate. Some who work

in universities are part time, and others have limited-term appointments. The argument here is that the core academic profession in every country must receive payment from the university adequate to sustain middle-class life. A substantial full-time cadre of university teachers and researchers can maintain the essential teaching, research, and governance functions of any university.

AN EGYPTIAN EXAMPLE

A recent example from Egypt exemplifies the inevitable consequences of inadequate academic salaries. According to an article in the *Egyptian Gazette*, “university professors in Egypt have been accused of violating their code of ethics by greedily demanding large sums of money from their students.” The article provides examples. Professors profit from selling, at high prices, their textbooks and lecture notes. These purchases are mandatory for students, since examinations are based on the books, and classes are often too crowded for students to attend. The texts are changed each year to prevent re-sale of the books. Students are also forced to pay extra to attend off-campus classes offered by professors—where the real information is provided. Sometimes theaters or even conference rooms in five-star hotels are rented to hold these off-campus tutoring sessions. One dean describes private tutoring as an “infectious disease that is gnawing away at the flesh of society.” Academic staff interviewed for the article pointed out that they could not live on their academic salaries even though salaries were recently increased—an assistant professor in a public university earns around US\$260 per month—hardly enough to support a family.

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OTHER ACTIVITIES

While little in-depth research has been produced on academic corruption, throughout the world newspapers and other news media are replete with examples of it. Our concern here is with professorial practices that stray from standard academic ethics. Professors in some countries routinely demand bribes to help with admissions, to raise exam grades, or to permit student cheating. Money is paid to obtain academic appointments or promotions. Decisions concerning the purchase of equipment or supplies are sometimes influenced by payoffs, and selling scientific equipment occurs. Corrupt practices of many kinds take place so that academics can supplement inadequate salaries.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

It is, of course, difficult to pinpoint the causes of academic corruption. In some societies, ingrained corrupt practices at all levels influence the universities, and inadequate salaries may be just part of a larger problem. Universities cannot be insulated from societal corruption. But the root cause in many developing and middle-income countries is related to academic salaries. If that problem were solved, it would be possible to deal with professorial corruption.

In most instances, universities are not corrupt institutions. They have strong traditions of meritocracy and shared academic values. But they cannot survive systematic starvation without ethics being damaged. Providing a living wage for the academic profession, as well as maintaining the core idea of the academic career, is a necessary prerequisite for an ethical academic culture.

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Adequate salaries are, however, not enough. Well-paid professors are not always productive. A culture of productive academic work necessarily includes accountability, an internal ethic of hard work, a system of evaluation that includes an objective assessment of all kinds of academic work, and a merit-based system of promotion and salary allocation. Promoting academic staff on the basis of seniority alone, the practice in many countries, works against productivity.

The case of India is illustrative. Academic salaries for full-time staff were increased several years ago to levels able to minimally support middle-class life, although at the same time, salaries for highly skilled professionals outside of the universities increased much faster. However, little was done to ensure productivity or accountability on campus. As a result, the campus culture in many universities and colleges of modest productivity, favoritism in appointments and promotions, and a lack of high academic standards remains despite salary improvements.

CONCLUSION

The current practice in many countries of asking academics to become entrepreneurs—by teaching in profit-making parallel programs, consulting, creating private companies, or focusing on contract research—in order to enhance their salaries may solve immediately funding shortfalls but it damages the long-term health of the university. Overreliance on part-time staffing means that there will be no one on campus who takes responsibility for the institution—there is no stability and no institutional commitment. These, and other, practices lead directly to academic corruption, not only forcing professors to

enhance their incomes “by any means necessary” but also by jettisoning the traditional values and orientations of the university. The simple reality is that a healthy academic institution is an organic whole that requires adequate financial support, rigorous enforcement of traditional academic values, and at its core an academic profession committed to these values. Without this, corruption is likely to flourish and academic quality will inevitably suffer. ■

International Student Experiences of Neo-Racism and Discrimination

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While there is considerable investment and effort devoted to attracting international students, far less attention is paid to the experiences of international students once they arrive at the host institution. Thus, there remains little accountability and responsibility in place on institutions once they successfully attract the students they work so hard to recruit. There is limited literature on the international student experiences, and the problems associated with adjusting to a new environment. Some articles even offer a pathological diagnosis of international students as lacking coping skills. Far less research critically examines the inadequacies within host countries or institutions that perpetuate the difficulties for many international students. Understanding the experiences, especially the negative ones, of international students has been largely neglected but is central not only to ensuring their satisfaction but also fostering positive relationships between sending and receiving countries.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' CHALLENGES

A few studies have documented the tremendous hardships experienced by international students, not only in the United States but across the world—ranging from language and cultural barriers, feelings of isolation and loneliness, different ways of teaching and learning, and so on. However, most of these studies have framed these problems as stemming from an inability of these students to successfully “adapt” or “cope,” which presumes that international students bear the sole responsibility to persist, overcome such challenges, and then blend into the host society. The underlying assumption is that