



## **Academe in transition: Transformations in the Polish academic profession**

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**Abstract.** The period since 1989 has been an extremely dynamic one in Polish higher education. New opportunities have opened up for the academic community, along with new challenges. Suddenly, the academic profession has arrived at a stage that combines far-reaching autonomy with rather uncertain individual career prospects. In recent years, a number of new laws have been proposed that were intended to change the whole structure of recruitment, promotions, remuneration, working conditions, and appointments of academic faculty. All this has occurred amidst the strains and tensions resulting from changes in the broader society. The sudden passage from the more or less elite higher education system to mass higher education with a strong and dynamic private sector has transformed the situation of the academic community beyond all recognition. The transition has resulted in a new set of values and changes in position, tasks, and roles for academe in society. Today, the future of the Polish academic profession remains undetermined. The positive changes were accompanied by the chronic underfunding of public higher education. Polish academics have learned to accommodate themselves to the permanent state of uncertainty in which they are forced to operate. The present paper analyzes the current situation from the perspective of global changes affecting the academic profession.

**Keywords:** academic profession, higher education reforms in Central and Eastern Europe, Polish higher education, the state and the market

The period since 1989 has been an extremely dynamic one in Polish higher education. New opportunities have opened up for the academic community, along with new challenges. Suddenly, after decades of working under relatively stable conditions (albeit in the absence of academic and political freedoms), the academic profession has arrived at a stage that combines far-reaching autonomy with rather uncertain individual career prospects. In recent years, a number of new laws have been proposed that were intended to change the whole structure of academic recruitment, promotions, remuneration, working conditions, and appointments. All this has occurred amid the strains and tensions resulting from changes in the broader society.

The faculty have also participated in the enormous growth in enrollments during the 1990s and the explosion in the number of new private institutions with their equally new market orientation. The sudden passage from the more

or less elite higher education system of pre-1989 communist times to mass higher education with a strong and dynamic private sector has transformed the situation of the academic community beyond all recognition. The transition has resulted in a new set of values and changes in position, tasks, and roles for academe in society.

Along with the steadily decreasing public funds for higher education, the past decade or so has seen a dozen new official proposals on higher education reform – ranging from vouchers, to privatization, to major public funding, and countless schemes to support and regulate faculty remuneration.

Today, the future of the Polish academic profession remains undetermined. Since the early 1990s, the academic community has witnessed the passage from central to self-governance, institutional autonomy, and intellectual freedom. But these positive changes were accompanied by the chronic underfunding of public higher education and by predictions of necessary cuts of faculty positions. Polish academics have learned to accommodate themselves to the permanent state of uncertainty in which they are forced to function. However, the Polish higher education system may be leaving the crisis-plagued decade of the 1990s, only to encounter virtual collapse in the near future if far-reaching reforms are not introduced.

### **Overview of the higher education system**

Following the collapse of communism in 1989, there was a deep social conviction in Poland that the communist higher education system – centralized, ideological, and fully subordinate to the state – should and would be changed as soon as possible, with an emphasis on academic freedom and institutional autonomy. As early as 1990, a new higher education law was passed. The 1990 law gave higher education institutions a chance to begin to respond to the new social, political, and economic conditions and to make use of their newly gained autonomy. The law reintroduced the spirit and practice of autonomy, freedom of teaching and research, and in general de-ideologized the whole system. In addition, a new 1991 law on scientific research opened up new ways of financing research through a system of open competitions for what are termed grants.

These first steps toward reforming higher education were taken, and they were supposed to be followed soon after by further steps, in conjunction with comprehensive transformations of society and the economy. Unfortunately, after 10 years and a dozen subsequent reform projects, it has proven extremely difficult to pass a new higher education law (for a Central and Eastern European overview, see Tomusk 2000). It is much more probable that instead of revolutionary change of the system, Polish higher education

will witness gradual, evolutionary changes. This means even less stability for academic faculty than they had during the transitional period of the 1990s. A decade is a long time, and the general feeling of the public is that something must be done with higher education. Although at the start of the 1990s the Polish political class still viewed higher education as a very important social sector, this no longer seems to be the case. Reforms are overdue but progress is blocked for a wide range of political, economic, and social reasons. Thus, the future of the academic workplace has yet to be defined in terms of the public support available, number of faculty needed in any new system, salaries, benefits, teaching workloads, and the whole legal context in which academics are supposed to work.

The social and economic surroundings in which higher education operates in Poland today has changed enormously in the last decade: the number of students rose more than threefold, from about 400,000 in 1990 to over 1,400,000 in 1999. In the 1999–2000 academic year, one-third of the student body attended private higher education institutions, which did not even exist immediately following the collapse of communism. There are now over 180 private higher education institutions, and that number is constantly growing. The state has sharply reduced funding levels for public higher education in the last decade; reforms have been introduced in the public sector generally – in the Polish health care system, social security system, pension schemes, as well as primary and secondary education.

The period of transition in Poland took place at a time when many countries were reexamining higher education in particular, and the public sector in general. Especially in anglophone countries the result has led to an emphasis on privatization, managerialism, accountability, and on consumers (rather than providers) of higher education. Higher education is viewed more as a private commodity than a public or social good. The worldwide trends include globalization in teaching and research, as well as the appearance of new for-profit providers of higher and postsecondary education in knowledge-based societies alongside traditional higher education institutions, and new social demands on higher education (Kwiek 2003). These developments in a rapidly globalizing world are felt everywhere, especially in regions, such as Poland, undergoing vast social and economic transformations. While it may have been possible 10 years ago to disregard the global context when thinking about higher education, it is impossible to do so today (Kwiek 2001b). Yet the main drawback of proposed higher education legislation in Poland over the last decade is that they generally have lacked any strategic overview of the role and place of higher education and knowledge production in Polish society within the new global context. Also lacking is any clear vision of the academic profession of the future.

### The legal context

Polish higher education currently functions on the basis of four laws: the 1990 higher education law, the 1997 law governing professional higher education institutions, the 1991 law establishing the State Committee on Scientific Research, and the 1990 law on the scientific title and scientific degrees. All of them operate separately and have given rise to various controversies in recent years.

Discussions about future higher education legislation were mainly confined to the upper ranks of the academic community; virtually no other stakeholders seemed to be involved, either in collaboration with the Ministry of Education on the preparation of the draft law or in subsequent public discussions. There was no wider public debate about the proposed legislation, not to mention a more general examination of the role of higher education in society. Also unheard were the voices of those who fund higher education (the state in general and, increasingly, students and their parents) and of those who are its beneficiaries (students, parents, and industry). The vital social issue of reforming higher education was left to the ministry and to the academic community itself. Broader strategic questions about the role of higher education in an emerging democracy about to enter the European Union were never aired publicly. The current focus seems to be on coming up with a set of directives to keep the higher education system running in the short term. But an appropriate question might be whether such short-term solutions can be crafted without a comprehensive understanding of the current state of affairs and future goals (Kwiek and Finikov 2001).

### General academic profile

The Polish academic profession consists (in American terms) of assistant professors, associate professors, university professors, and full professors (*asystent*, *adiunkt*, *profesor nadzwyczajny*, and *profesor zwyczajny*), with different formal requirements for each position. Junior faculty include assistant and associate professors; senior faculty include university and full professors (plus habilitated faculty without the academic rank of university professor). In Poland, only the positions of university professor and full professor correspond to the traditional category of professor in European terminology. There are two scientific *degrees* (the Ph.D. and *doctor habilitatus*) and one scientific *title* (professor). (These degrees and this title are discussed later in the chapter.) Thus, with regard to an academic career there are four levels of positions available; and with regard to a scientific career, there are two scientific degrees and one scientific title. More generally,

academic faculty can be separated into two categories: research-and-teaching faculty and teaching faculty. Only the first category of faculty has the four levels of positions described earlier. With respect to the second category of faculty, four levels of positions are being introduced: senior lecturers, lecturers, foreign-language instructors, and instructors.

In the 1999–2000 academic year, public institutions controlled by the Ministry of Education had a total of 101,487 faculty and staff; and public institutions controlled by other ministries had 23,758 faculty and staff. In private institutions faculty and staff numbered 10,534 and in nonstate church institutions, 590. Public institutions had a total of 66,722 academic faculty, compared with 6,549 at private institutions – in other words, there is a 10 to 1 ratio of faculty in the two sectors. These numbers include full-time staff and faculty only.

Part-time appointments are still rare in Polish public higher education for a number of reasons. While salaries in public higher education are very low in any case, part-time positions do not count as regular employment that entitles people to pension schemes, social security, and medical benefits. Full-time employment rights and benefits, which are described in greater detail in the section on employment and working conditions, are to a certain extent the equivalent to tenure in the U.S. system.

In the private sector, on the other hand, part-time employment is more common than full-time employment. In fact, the ideal employment situation for senior faculty is full-time employment at a public higher education institution plus part-time employment in the private sector. In the long term, this situation will most likely change, with public institutions being forced, due to financial constraints, to use part-time faculty and the private sector being forced, by new laws, to hire more full-time faculty. It should be noted that over 95 percent of all faculty are employed in the public sector. Employment in the private sector alone is very rare and involves either junior faculty or senior academics.

An imbalance exists between the distribution of faculty and students at public and private institutions. As of December 1999, the number of students enrolled at higher education institutions was 1,421,277 – 1,002,210 (70.5 percent) at public institutions and 377,712 (26.6 percent) at private institutions. This means that the 27 percent of students enrolled at private institutions are taught by 8.9 percent of academic faculty.

Private institutions, which focus almost exclusively on teaching, make use of the intellectual resources of the chronically underfunded public institutions (for international trends and patterns, see Altbach 1999; Levy 1986). The dominant pattern is that almost all faculty at private institutions hold their main appointments at public institutions. The law requires a minimum of

Table 1. The number of faculty in public higher education, by rank and title, 1999

Ranks	Number	(%)
Professors	12,546	19
Ordinary	3,605	
Extraordinary	8,630	
Docents (with <i>doctor habilitatus</i> )	311 (233)	
Associate and assistant professors	40,885	61
Associate professors (with <i>doctor habilitatus</i> )	24,701 (2,584)	
Assistant professors	16,174	
Senior lecturers and lecturers	12,061	18
Instructors	1,230	2
Total	66,722	100

Note: Data from *Higher Education: Basic Data 2000*, pp. 42, 48, 54.

eight senior faculty members (academics with the title of *doctor habilitatus*, which gives them the status of “independent academics,” and full professors) before a private higher education institution may be licensed to operate. As a result, most private institutions employ just about eight professors with full benefits and a large number of faculty working on renewable, short-term contracts, paid by the hour – thereby permitting the institutions to avoid paying for social security, vacation time, and other benefits.

In a sense, public and private institutions exist in a state of competition regarding students and in a state of symbiosis regarding academic faculty. The poorly paid faculty at public institutions rush off after-hours to teach at private institutions so as to be able to earn enough to support a middle-class standard of living. Private institutions generally lack their own stable faculty. These practices have created an unhealthy situation for the whole higher education system – from the overworking of faculty, the worsening quality of teaching at both types of institutions, to the declining interest in research due to time constraints. The problems are most serious in the more market-oriented specializations such as law, management, economics, and marketing.

### Student-faculty ratios

In recent years enrollments have risen while the number of academic faculty remained about the same. Faculty from public institutions have been instrumental in the creation of the booming private sector. The reasons were

Table 2. Distribution of faculty in public higher education institutions, by rank, 1999

Institutions	Number	%	Junior–senior ratio*
Universities	21,654	32	2.6
Technical universities	17,849	27	3.8
Medical schools	8,706	13	6.6
Academies of agriculture	5,626	8.5	3.3
Pedagogical institutions	4,625	7	2.8
Academies of economics	2,971	4.5	3.0
Other	5,291	8	

Notes: Data from *Higher Education: Basic Data 2000*, pp. 42–47, 66.

\*In public higher education institutions, the overall ratio between associate and assistant professors (junior faculty) to each full professor (senior faculty) is 3.3 – with a slight difference between institutions controlled by the Ministry of Education (3.1) and those controlled by other ministries (4.2).

political, social, and economic: almost certainly the only way to build a strong private sector within one decade was to use the existing human resources of the public sector. Moreover, the private sector helped the faculty to survive very difficult times. For its part, the state cooperated by allowing faculty to hold several positions at once.

The overall number of students rose dramatically in the 1990s – in the case of public institutions, increasing from 390,400 in 1990 to 1,002,110 in 1999. The numbers include both regular as well as extramural and evening students. In the case of private institutions, enrollments increased from zero in 1989 to 377,712 in 1999. In 1999, public institutions had 403,578 extramural students and 51,431 students attending evening classes out of a total of 1,002,110 – together these two groups constituting over 45 percent of the whole student body. In the case of private institutions, only 20 percent of enrollments were regular students; extramurals made up 76 percent of the student body, and the rest attended evening classes, out of a total of 377,712 students. So while in public institutions over 50 percent of the student body are still regular students, in private institutions they compose merely 20 percent.

The ratio between the number of regular students per faculty member has been steadily increasing, both for regular and for extramural students, at institutions controlled by the Ministry of Education (see Table 3 for the changes in the ratio, by rank and type of institution.) Student-faculty ratios vary, depending on the type of institution and the discipline. In 1999, the highest student-faculty ratio for full professors was found at technical

Table 3. Student–faculty ratios<sup>a</sup> in public higher education, by rank and institution, 1999

Institution	All ranks	Senior faculty <sup>b</sup>	Junior faculty <sup>c</sup>
Regular students			
All institutions	9.3	43.2	15.5
Universities	9.1	42.3	16.1
Pedagogical institutions	8.4	41.2	14.6
Professional institutions	15.4	57.6	52.6
Technical universities	9.8	58.0	15.1
Theological academies	6.4	27.9	10.2
Extramural students <sup>d</sup>			
All institutions	14.2	75.6	21.2
Universities	17.8	82.8	31.5
Academies of economics	22.3	124.0	41.3
Academies of the arts	4.0	12.9	10.0
Medical schools	3.4	29.1	4.4
Professional institutions	24.2	92	84.0

Notes: Data from *Higher Education: Basic Data 2000*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>a</sup>the number of students per faculty member;

<sup>b</sup>senior faculty: full professors;

<sup>c</sup>junior faculty: associate and assistant professors;

<sup>d</sup>includes students in evening classes.

universities and the lowest at pedagogical higher education institutions and theological academies. The highest student-faculty ratio for associate and assistant professors was found at professional higher education institutions, with the lowest ratio at universities and technical universities.

The student-teacher ratio increases dramatically for extramural students and those attending evening classes, in both the private and public sector. As shown in Table 3, the student-faculty ratio in the case of full professors is highest at academies of economics and professional institutions of higher education and lowest at artistic higher education institutions and medical schools.

In those sectors of higher education with the highest student-faculty ratios, it is very difficult for faculty to give students individual attention. The common practice at almost all higher education institutions is that lectures are given by full professors and university professors and classes are handled by junior faculty. Given that professors in Poland have a relatively low teaching load of six to seven one-semester courses per year, of 30 hours each, for a total of 180 to 210 hours per year, current full-time junior faculty will have



to be supplemented by a growing number of part-timers to keep the average class size at 25 to 30 students.

### **Academic workloads**

The workload for faculty in Poland is relatively low by international standards. Workloads vary for different categories of academic faculty in the public sector. Faculty involved in research and teaching have workloads ranging from 120 hours to 210 hours per year. Senior lecturers are required to work between 240 and 360 hours; foreign-language instructors and other instructors have a workload of between 300 and 540 hours per year. In practice, the above regulations mean that junior faculty have between 6 and 8 hours of classes per week, while senior faculty have approximately 6 hours per week of seminars and lectures. For senior faculty, the weekly teaching load is augmented by several hours of service and attendance at meetings of their institutional council or department. That relatively liberal formulation of research, teaching, and administrative obligations of faculty has been altered with every new formulation of the higher education law proposed in recent years. The most recent draft calls for faculty to spend up to 30 hours per week on the premises of the institution, with 10 hours devoted to teaching. Some of the particulars of the new regulations – such as the rules on holding multiple positions by the professoriate – are bound to dismantle current working habits and employment structures of the Polish academic profession.

### **Gender distribution**

The gender distribution of academic faculty varies by discipline and seniority. Generally speaking, the higher the academic rank, the greater the concentration of men. In public higher education, women make up 40 percent (26,874 out of 66,722) of the academic profession, with the percentage of women increasing at the lower ranks. Women comprise 22 percent of senior faculty but 50 percent of junior faculty at universities. They comprise 19.5 percent of full professors and 41 percent of associate and assistant professors, at all institutions. Except for women's increasing percentage in the lower ranks, the last 10 years have seen no major change in the gender distribution of academic faculty. Table 4 shows the percentage of women across institutions and ranks.

The percentage of female Ph.D. students is on the rise, especially in the arts and humanities, as is the percentage of women students entering higher

Table 4. Women in public higher education, 1999 (percentages)

Institutions	Students	Senior faculty <sup>a</sup>	Junior faculty <sup>b</sup>
Total	55	19.5	41
Universities	65	22	50
Technical universities	31	9	26
Academies of agriculture	54	20	42
Academies of economics	63	30	50
Pedagogical institutions	73	18	50
Medical schools	70	30	52
Academies of the arts	60	21	35

Notes: Data from *Higher Education: Basic Data*, 2000 pp. 42–59, 77.

<sup>a</sup>senior faculty: full professors;

<sup>b</sup>junior faculty: associate and assistant professors.

education (57 percent, in 1999) and the percentage of women entering the academic profession each year. The gender distribution in the student body varies by type of institution, as shown in Table 4. Thus, both in terms of students entering the system and those graduating from it, women are in the majority.

The increase in the proportion of women working in higher education is in part a function of the decreasing public prestige of the academic profession in a time of economic, political, and cultural transition. Another factor is the sharp decline in salaries in higher education, compared with other professions. The current average salary in higher education is slightly below the current average salary in industry – U.S.\$500 per month – far less than the amount required to maintain the standard of living that academics have traditionally come to expect.

Another cause for the relatively low percentage of women among senior faculty (22 percent) seems to be a reflection of the relatively traditional division of roles in families, which places men in the position of the primary breadwinner. The highest levels of the academic profession were reserved for men (with notable exceptions), although the decade of the 1990s saw a growing number of women in senior academic positions. Given that the average age of senior faculty is between 50 and 60 years, it will take a long time before the gender distribution among senior faculty becomes more equal. Moreover, academics who will be in a position to move up to the senior ranks when the current generation retires are largely males. Yet, the number of women with Ph.D.s is constantly growing.

Unfortunately, the outlook for junior faculty in the coming years is for higher workloads and renewable, periodic, performance-based contracts,

which may cause some of the most mobile junior faculty to leave the public system altogether and either move into private higher education or change professions entirely. The number of part-time faculty in the public sector is expected to expand considerably from its current insignificant figure. Under these conditions, Polish higher education is likely to see a good portion of male junior faculty leaving the academic profession, while female junior faculty may stay or even enter the system at a faster pace. This prognosis will hold especially if the current downward pattern of academic salaries is maintained in the future and if the expansion in the number of female graduates and Ph.D.s continues.

### **Employment and working conditions**

There are two basic kinds of employment in the academy: first, by appointment to a full-time academic position, following competition for a particular academic post; and second, on the basis of a work contract for an academic staff position. So, currently, academic faculty are employed either by appointment to full-time positions or through renewable work contracts for part-time positions. The official appointment, signed in each case by the rector of the particular institution, includes the specific position and the place, the type and duration of the appointment, remuneration, and the conditions. Academic faculty are appointed by the minister of education, at the rector's request, in the case of an ordinary professor; by the rector, at the dean's request, in the case of an extraordinary professor, university professor, or associate professor. Ordinary professor is the special university rank of professor with the scientific title of professor. Extraordinary professor corresponds to the university rank of professor with or without a scientific title of professor but with a degree of *doctor habilitatus*. Appointment to the position of ordinary professor, extraordinary, or university professor (in the case of persons with the scientific title of professor) is for life – that is, the equivalent of lifelong tenure. The initial appointment to the position of extraordinary professor (in the case of persons without the scientific title of professor) is for five years; the second appointment, after five years, is also for life. Appointment to the position of associate professor is for an unlimited period of time. The only condition is that a person without a habilitation degree may not be employed for a period longer than nine years. In effect, this means that associate professors have nine years in which to complete their habilitation dissertation. (Until very recently, it was also customary for rectors of some institutions to allow them an additional three years, for a total of 12 years.)

Assistant professors are rarely recruited now, but those who are already employed in higher education have eight years in which to write their Ph.D.

dissertations. The above legal guarantees, with respect to assistant and associate professors, make it virtually impossible to dismiss faculty from these two categories for a period of up to 17 years after graduation. Academics who have failed to write their habilitations may not have to confront their problems until they are between 40 and 45 years of age. Thus the actual period of evaluating an individual's research and teaching at an academic institution is very lengthy indeed. Periodic reviews of faculty are performed, but they generally do not have any direct consequences for academics. Obviously, it is very difficult to make any decision concerning the employment of this relatively large group of junior faculty of mature age: they are usually considered too old to start over in a new profession and too old to launch brilliant academic careers. For legal, social, and humane reasons, in recent years such academics are increasingly allowed to remain in the public higher education system after final attempts to write and last-minute, but usually successful, attempts to defend, their habilitation dissertations. The feelings of compassion usually outweigh an effort to evaluate their past and current research and teaching activities.

The second kind of employment in academia is illustrated by faculty who seek additional positions in the system or wish to work part time. They are provided with standard work agreements that can be terminated at any time if both parties agree or at the end of the academic year. Generally speaking, the current legal context in which Polish higher education operates allows academic faculty to work at several higher education institutions at the same time. That legal environment contributed enormously to the expansion of the private sector, by providing easy availability of well-educated and chronically underpaid academics. However, as mentioned, the pressure of holding multiple academic positions at one time has threatened the quality of teaching and research.

Comparing the Polish system of academic appointments to the American system of tenure, it should be noted that under the current higher education law junior faculty do not have tenure while senior faculty have it. From a legal perspective, junior faculty may be removed from the public higher education system for failure to write and defend their habilitation dissertations within 9 to 12 years after the completion of their Ph.D. theses. In practical terms, senior faculty are now guaranteed the equivalent of academic tenure. Professors in the public sector are not state employees as is common in Western Europe, nor is progression automatic up the ranks in public higher education. The most important factor for advancement is research rather than teaching, and passage from the junior to the senior ranks is guaranteed by attaining the scientific degree of habilitation. Until fairly recently, habilitation guaranteed one, eventually, the post of university professor, which after five

years might be renewed for life. However, this practice may be changing. In the public sector, the number of university professors in a department may not exceed the number of full professors by more than 20 percent. In the meantime, the number of habilitated faculty without the position of university professor is growing. Jagiellonian University in Krakow, the oldest university in Poland, is an example of an institution that no longer gives habilitated faculty the right to compete for the post of university professor, reserving that for persons holding the scientific title of professor. In other words, academics may become university professors only after they receive confirmation of the scientific title of professor from the president of Poland.

Although there is no automatic progression up the ranks, in recent years academic faculty have tended to complete Ph.D. dissertations within 6 to 8 years and habilitation degrees within next 8 to 12 years. While a small part of the academic professoriate left the public higher education system over the last 10 years, generally there has not been large-scale movement to other professions. The single most important factor that enabled academics to stay in the public higher education system, despite the steadily deteriorating financial situation, was the parallel creation of the new private sector. Higher up the ranks, advancement is much less certain, since to become a full professor an academic is required to hold the scientific title of professor, which may be unavailable to most university professors. However, it is perfectly possible for people to continue working in the system at the level of university professor.

Although the public higher education system apparently operates on a competitive basis, in practice the competition is just local: within a given department rather than on a nationwide basis. It is still unthinkable for an academic to win the position of university professor or full professor at an institution other than the one in which he or she is employed (the few exceptions serve merely to confirm the general rule). What differentiates the Polish system from the German one – which exerted heavy influence on the Polish academy before World War II – or from the American one is the extremely limited mobility of the faculty (Altbach 2000; Enders 2000). In the major intellectual centers academics spend their lives without changing departments or institutions, not to mention cities. Typically, Polish academics stay at the same institution from their late 20s to early 60s. In the case of senior academics it is highly unlikely that they would move to a different city and change institutions. There are several social and economic reasons for this: the salary levels at public institutions are generally the same all over Poland, and it is extremely difficult to change one's place of residence in terms of buying and selling apartments or houses. Moreover, above all, Polish academics have traditionally spent their professional lives at one institution, especially in the case of the major research universities. In Poland, there are

no mechanisms that promote academic mobility, as in Germany, France, and the United States.

Although professors are not civil servants, they are guaranteed raises in salaries each year as are other employees in the public sector – slightly (usually 1 percent) above the expected level of inflation. In terms of working conditions, academics have longer holidays, when compared to other professions: generally six weeks in summer and a week in winter, plus the yearly raise in salary and some support for summer holidays. Academia is still a relatively noncompetitive environment for most academic faculty. Part-time faculty form a negligible segment of the academic body in the public sector.

In the private sector, however, working conditions are quite different. Almost all academic faculty are employed part time, except for the minimum number of full-time faculty required, which as mentioned earlier is eight professors per institution. The part-time faculty members are fairly mobile, often travelling to other institutions where they hold renewable yearly work contracts. In such fields as economics, business, management, marketing, and the law, the work environment is very competitive and salaries vary according to seniority and the scale of involvement. Promotions in this sector are generally unknown since the main place of work for most academics is the public sector, in any case. While lectures are given by professors, classes are most typically taught by recent Ph.D.s or even recent graduates, many of whom do not hold other academic posts and may work long hours. Although in the public sector the average weekly teaching load is 6 to 8 hours, for junior faculty in the private sector the teaching load can be as high as in secondary schools – up to 20 hours.

### **Financing and salaries**

A great failure of post-1989 Poland is the disastrously low level of higher education funding. As discussed earlier, remuneration is extremely low, both for academics at the beginning of their careers and for senior faculty. In 2001, the percentage of the public budget allocated to science was 0.426 percent and for higher education, 0.83 percent. Other categories in the “elastic” parts of the budget, which make up 8 percent of the whole, include culture (0.123 percent), health care (0.52 percent), justice (0.58 percent), the army (1.27 percent), security (1.03 percent), transportation (0.61 percent), and agriculture (0.46 percent). Each year higher education’s share of the budget has declined. The spending per academic in Poland is the lowest in all OECD countries – four times lower than the average in the European Union, three times lower than in the Czech Republic, and similar to spending in Latin America. The new draft higher education legislation lacks any proposals that

might address the crisis in higher education finance. Policymakers and legislators seem to have been operating under the utopian belief that reforms can be realized without additional public funds.

The decline in academic salaries has been especially striking in recent years. Between 1997 and 2001 the average monthly salary in public higher education fell, in relation to the average monthly salary in the national economy, from 109.2 percent in 1997 to 95.5 percent in 2001, or approximately U.S.\$500, before taxes. This downward trend in academic salaries threatens the very foundations of public higher education. By way of comparison, in the countries of Western Europe the average salary of a university professor is 3.5 that of the industry average.

Because it has proven to be socially and politically very difficult to pass the new law on higher education, the Ministry of Education has instead recently proposed some small changes in the structure of academic salaries. One proposal calls for gradually increasing the salaries of assistant professors from their current level at 74 percent of the average industry salary to 100 percent in 2003. The proposal includes a change in the salaries of senior academics, which will be set at 2.8 times that of a assistant professor's salary. Such a proposal could not possibly satisfy any part of the academic community, at either the junior or senior level. It would perpetuate an extremely difficult situation in the academic profession. Academics would have to relinquish expectations of a middle-class standard of living, not to mention the generally accepted upper-middle-class social status of the professoriate in the richest countries of Western Europe. It would also perpetuate the disparity between the salaries of educated professionals and those in the academic world.

Salary levels do not vary much by region or specialty. Variations between ranks are small compared to Western standards: the difference between the salary of an associate professor with a Ph.D. (U.S.\$300) and a university professor with a habilitation degree (U.S.\$500) is about 60 percent. Considering how low salaries in public higher education are overall, these small gradations in salary do not affect standard of living. The salaries in the private sector vary according to the rank and area of specialization of professors: in the case of high-ranking full professors at the top private institutions in lucrative, high-demand fields, salaries can reach as high as U.S.\$2,500 per month. At these institutions, salaries are 20 to 30 percent higher than at public institutions.

Not surprisingly, the public academies of economics and the technical universities are generally doing better than the public universities. Likewise, professors of economics, law, and related fields are doing much better in the private sector of higher education, where they seek parallel employment. It

is much more common for faculty in these fields – as well as in the social sciences and the humanities – to hold multiple positions than for those in the hard sciences. The private sector does not seem interested in the hard sciences – just as it is generally not interested in research.

### **The “basic workplace” debate**

The 1990 higher education law placed no limitations on how many positions academics were allowed to hold at the same time. This lack of regulation has been fully exploited by faculty and institutions. The 2001 draft proposed radical changes. It introduced the concept of the “basic workplace,” defined as the academic’s place of full-time employment. For senior faculty, the position is their basic workplace. To work at other institutions or undertake independent entrepreneurial activities requires the rector’s agreement. Senior faculty are able to serve in the senate and on department councils only at the institution defined as their basic workplace. An earlier draft of the law had a provision intended to stop the practice of faculty working in multiple positions, by dividing the academic salary into a base part and a bonus part – the latter to be provided if the institution is selected by the academic as his or her basic workplace. The current draft drops the idea of splitting the salary into two parts but retains the 30-hour per week limit on faculty employment.

The ministry’s intent is clearly to have academics working at one place only, and doing more work in terms of teaching. In the absence of additional public funds, the only way to address the problem of low salary levels is to dismiss some faculty members at public universities and to increase the teaching load of the remaining faculty. In this scenario, academics would have to work much harder for the same low salaries, without the right to take on additional jobs at private institutions as many now do. If they are deprived of being able to hire academics from public institutions, private institutions, for their part, would be doomed to an early death.

The current crisis facing the Polish academic profession is occurring at a time when the tradition of academics as scholars is giving way increasingly in a globalized world to the economic rationale of an academic labor force. The fact that academics have been able to hold multiple jobs very likely helped the academic profession to survive in very difficult times, preventing a massive escape to much better paid professions in the 1990s. These flexible employment practices also made possible the rapid development of the private sector and rise in enrollments.

Unfortunately for the academic profession, the negative implications of holding multiple jobs often seem to predominate. It is difficult to pretend that academics are able to devote adequate amounts of time to both their teaching



and research. Inevitably, research is carried out in a superficial manner and teaching in a repetitive way. While this state of affairs may be acceptable for a certain period of time, it is untenable in the long term, which is why there is a huge need for new policies concerning higher education in Poland and for stronger financial support for higher education.

The debate over the basic workplace is occurring at a time when between 50 and 60 percent of academics are involved in some sort of additional teaching in the private sector. Although holding multiple jobs has many drawbacks, especially for younger faculty, the experience of moving between the public and the private sector could be healthy for all the parties. In terms of the future, the most probable arrangement will be one private job combined with one public job, perhaps with some legally mandated reduction in the remuneration from the public sector.

### **Changes in career paths**

In the 1990s, two important changes occurred with respect to faculty positions and promotions. First, it became increasingly difficult to get an academic job at the level of assistant professor – that is, to start an academic career without a Ph.D. Previously, up until the late 1990s, an academic career began right after graduation, with eight years available to complete and defend one's Ph.D. dissertation. Now, most public institutions of higher education, especially of the academic type, recruit for the position of assistant professor only academics who have already defended their Ph.D. dissertations and had their degree confirmed by the Central Commission for the Scientific Title and Scientific Degrees. The second important change during the 1990s was the abolition of one of the positions on the academic ladder of career development – that of *docent* (reminiscent of the German rank of *Dozent*), which required the publication, defense, and confirmation of the habilitation dissertation. Most former *docents* were promoted to the academic position of university professor.

These two institutional changes introduced important shifts in the academic landscape. First, it became increasingly obvious that an academic career in public higher education institutions requires a Ph.D. dissertation at the outset (although there are still assistant professors without doctorates who were hired before these regulations were introduced). And second, the academic community now contains many more professors. The rank of full professor has been joined by a new rank of university professor (comprised of former *docents* and faculty who have doctorates and habilitation). A department may employ as university professors 1.2 times the number of full professors (with some exceptions). So, it is now easier to become a univer-

sity professor, but in the process an inflation has occurred in the meaning of “professor,” which until the mid-1990s was reserved for the current rank of full professors. As an example, 10 years ago, the average 50-person department had 5 or 6 professors; today that number would be 15 to 20. The very German concept of “professor” gave way to a much more American system in which all academics are professors of some rank.

### **Scientific degrees and titles**

In 1999, the number of scientific degrees of doctorates and habilitations awarded in Poland at institutions of higher education, institutes of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and research and development institutes was 4,000 and 915, respectively. Interestingly enough, 60,000 people in Poland are reported to hold Ph.D. degrees, of whom slightly over 41,000 were working at public higher education institutions in 1999. People holding Ph.D. degrees are found at higher education institutions, research institutions, in industry, and in administrative positions in government. At present, only one private higher education institution has the right to confer Ph.D. degrees, the Leon Kozminski Academy of Entrepreneurship and Management (Warsaw).

The number of doctoral degrees awarded annually decreased from almost 4,000 in the late 1970s, to about 3,000 in the early 1980s, with another decline in the late 1980s and early 1990s to about 2,000. Interestingly enough, by the end of the 1990s the number rose sharply again to the highest level ever (4,000). Government and independent policy reports had set the replacement level for doctorates awarded per year at 3,000, taking into account the number of people with doctorates who leave the country. Obviously, the increase in Ph.D.s in 1999 indicates a trend toward getting higher credentials, but not a greater influx of new Ph.D.s into the higher education system. The number of people with Ph.D.s choosing and then embarking on academic careers has actually declined. It will be impossible to reverse the trend of young people turning away from the academic profession without a substantial change in salaries and without the introduction of professional development programs.

Twenty-six percent of doctorates are awarded in the medical sciences, followed by the humanities (19 percent), and the technical sciences (19 percent). For the habilitation degree, the most dynamic disciplines are in the humanities (22 percent), followed by the medical and technical sciences (16 percent for each). A brief overview of the scientific degrees awarded in 1999 shows that women were awarded 41 percent of the doctorates but only 29 percent of the habilitations.

Doctorates may be awarded by higher education units that employ at least eight full-time academics with the scientific title of professor (i.e., full

professors) or the scientific degree of habilitation. The Ph.D. degree may be granted to a person who holds an M.A. degree and has passed all required doctoral examinations and has presented and defended a thesis. The thesis is supposed to contain “the author’s original solution to a scientific problem, demonstrate general knowledge in a given field of science, and show the author’s ability to carry out independent research.” The degree is granted by an eligible institution but is valid only after confirmation by the Central Committee on the Scientific Title and Scientific Degrees. Currently, Ph.D. holders may start academic careers at the rank of associate professor.

To initiate the process of attaining the habilitation degree, a person must have a Ph.D., considerable scientific or artistic output, and an already presented habilitation dissertation. The habilitation dissertation should consist of “a considerable contribution to the development of a particular scientific discipline.” Publication of the dissertation in total or in its substantial parts is required to allow the academic community of a given discipline to have access to the work. After the review process, successful completion of the habilitation colloquium and the habilitation lecture, and the granting of the degree, the decision must be confirmed by the central committee as well. The habilitation degree forms a dividing line between junior and senior faculty, regardless of how long it takes for habilitated faculty to become university professors. In the 1990s, several attempts were made through higher education law proposals to abolish the habilitation degree. However, the attempts were very unfavorably received by the academic community, especially by senior faculty. In all likelihood, the degree will not be abolished, at least not according to the latest proposed higher education law drafts.

The pinnacle of an academic career in Poland is the scientific title of professor within a given discipline of science or domain of the arts, in some cases followed by the position of the ordinary professor. The title of professor (separate from the academic rank of professor) is awarded by the president of the Republic of Poland and is held for life. The title of professor requires holding the habilitation degree, a “considerable increase” in scientific productivity, as well as significant achievements in teaching. In 1999, the total number of professors with the scientific title of professor employed at public higher education institutions was 6,900 – 37 percent at universities, 24 percent at technical schools, and 10 percent at medical schools.

## **Conclusions**

The academic profession in Poland has at least one thing in common with the profession in many other parts of the world: its uncertainty. After the turbulent

decade of the 1990s, the Polish academic profession still does not know where it is heading – as a result of the failure to implement any major reform of Polish higher education. The future of both the public and the private sector is undetermined financially and legally (Kwiek 2001). The working conditions and salaries in the public sector have worsened considerably, resulting in frustration and discontent. At the same time, new opportunities have appeared in the booming private sector. Academics have certainly not benefited from the economic transformation and reforms in Poland to the same degree as other professionals, especially those in the private sector of the economy and in positions in the government bureaucracy. The context in which the faculty will have to operate in the future will, in all probability, be much more competitive and unpredictable, while their public institutions will still be underfunded.

In this context, public policy analysts often recommend the privatization of public higher education, following the introduction of a new higher education law. Privatization is understood as a gradual process in which higher education leaves the state-supported public sector and moves toward self-sustainability. The other options seem less realistic – such things as greatly increasing public spending on higher education, reducing research activities in order to improve the quality of teaching, involving industry and the military in the financing of higher education, or merely maintaining the current level of state financing for higher education while avoiding the collapse of the system (Kwiek 2000). If implemented, reforms of the higher education law could facilitate the process of gradual privatization of higher education. Unfortunately, decisions concerning the future of public higher education are strictly political – and therefore difficult to make. Clearly, however, public spending for higher education in Central Europe generally is expected to decrease due to other huge social needs.

What is most probable in the foreseeable future is declining state support combined with far-reaching changes in the structure of the academic profession, leading to greater accountability and managerialism, far fewer full-time appointments in favor of part-time contracts, much higher workloads, and a greater emphasis on teaching activities. Traditionally, academic prestige was gained through advanced research; teaching was an undervalued activity associated with a research-oriented academic life. But as the importance of teaching is increasingly recognized and workloads grow, greater emphasis will be placed on teaching performance. At the same time, the higher profile of teaching at the expense of research within the “mission” of the academic profession may lead to an increasing division between core full-time academic faculty and peripheral segments of poorly paid, part-time teaching staff.

The academic profession has already become an unattractive career prospect for the vast majority of graduates and a considerable portion of recent Ph.D.s. Career opportunities are poor in terms of promotions and especially remuneration, which makes it more and more difficult to draw talented young people into academia. The functional equivalent of tenure that now exists for senior faculty will most likely not be continued under the new higher education law, to be replaced with renewable five-year contracts. The future will also probably bring a strengthening of the private sector and an increasing movement of academics between the two sectors, especially if the notion of the basic academic workplace is implemented in its restrictive formulation. Finally, to offer at least one brighter perspective for the future of the academic profession: Poland will soon enter the European Union and its academic labor market, which will create new opportunities for Polish academic faculty in closer cooperation with the globalizing academic world. That represents a huge opening for the coming decade.

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