

System constraints and the shaping of professorial work in teaching and research

**Egbert de Weert
Center for Higher Education Policy Studies
University of Twente – NL**

**The academic's burden - University professors under perverse
pressure?**

Ethical Forum of the University Foundation

Brussels, 21 November 2013

Traditional features of academic life

- Organized in disciplinary units (chairs/ departments)
- Peers have a decisive influence in the recruitment process, reputation and career patterns
- Freedom what to teach and what to research (knowledge for its own sake)
- Self-governance by the dominion of scholars
- Homogenous entity, performing largely similar roles on the basis of common academic values

Nostalgic reminiscence of the golden times?

- The community of scholars: a closed and hierarchical system
- Self-governance of the academic profession restricted to a small group of full professors (*catedrático*)
- Junior faculty completely dependent on chairholders
- Perverse effects of the authoritarian structure: stifling atmospheres, shadowy procedures about allocation of funds, about appointments
- An esoteric mans' world - women can infect your career

The vanishing idea of scholarly life

- Casualisation of the academic workforce as a strategy within budgetary constraints (decline of tenured positions)
- Workload agreements: managerial practices and intensified accountability, auditing and evaluation pressures
- Academics are facing resource pressures, increasing demand for research productivity, knowledge transfer, international competition, demanding students and employers
- Teaching is NOT JOB NO.1 because universities set other priorities

Back to Von Humboldt or adieu?

- Emphasis on community of teachers and learners
- To exchange and share knowledge for individual development, not subject to any constraint or limited by immediate objectives
- Resistance against an instrumentalist view on research and teaching (State / market as an economic rationality)
- Unity of teaching and research (symbiotic relationship)

Post-Humboldtian view on academic work

- Due to the massification of HE, the larger part of students will not become researchers. Universities have the task to prepare them for their future working life
- Research is not standing in its own right. Researchers should be accountable for what they are doing and achieving - this is an obligation to the general public!

However, the scale is tipping:

- Obsession with university rankings, mostly based on poor quality indicators
- Perverse incentives to increase the impact factor: fraud/ (self) plagiarism, neglect of teaching

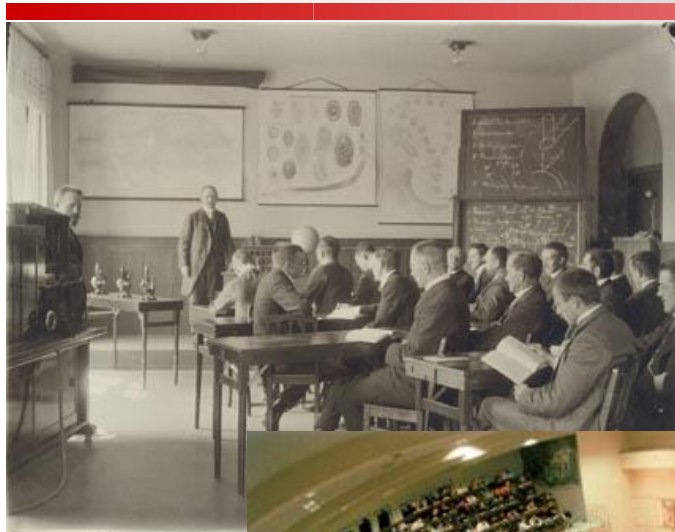
System constraints pulling research and teaching apart

- Growth of research-specific and performance-based funding shapes research priorities of universities.
- Decoupling funding for research and teaching → separate organisational settings (institutes/ centres)
- Bologna process of two phases creates divide between teaching at BA and MA level
- R/T are inherently different activities requiring different abilities and qualifications and personal traits
- R/T compete for academic time: scarcity model to use academic time productively (Hattie & Marsh)

Evolution of teaching and learning

- Shift from teacher-centred, “transfer of consolidated knowledge” type of education to developing competences and skills for the knowledge society
- Educational innovations: project-based learning processes – active, constructive and collaborative engagement of students working in teams with real world problems,
- Emphasis on ICT-enhanced learning, hype of MOOCs, OERu (Open Educational Resource University), Lifelong learning.

Evolution of teaching



The international comparative study: The Changing Academic Profession (CAP)

Survey among academics in 20 countries worldwide:

- Personal characteristics
- Working conditions
- Teaching and research tasks
- Relevance: basic/applied; useful knowledge and teaching; commercial pressures on direction and outcomes of research
- Internationalisation and globalisation
- Management, evaluation and professional autonomy

Some findings from CAP

- Pressures to increase research productivity and produce results that are useful and applicable have been identified by most academics as a threat to the quality of research
- Most academics experience growing pressure to acquire increased research funding from external sources. Dutch professors in particular experience high pressure
- However:
- They have the highest score to characterise the emphasis of their primary research as basic research and the lowest as applied/practical research

Average time spent on activities by university professors (full-time) (% of total working time)

| | NL | DE | UK | FI |
|--------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Teaching | 32% | 29% | 32% | 33% |
| Research | 40% | 38% | 34% | 37% |
| Other | 28% | 33% | 33% | 30% |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |
| total weekly hours | 48h | 53h | 47h | 47h |

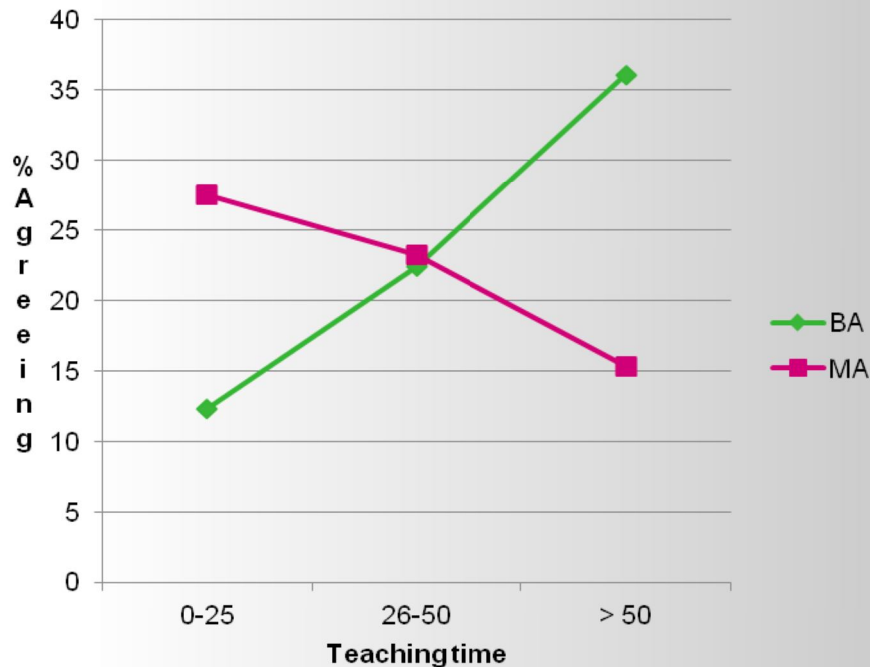
Profs spent more time on teaching than on research when classes are in session, but the time spent on research when classes are not in session outweighs this.

Are research and teaching compatible with each other?

- Hardly compatible: 33% of university profs in Germany, in Finland 37% and in NL 18%
- Junior academics are more sceptical and much higher percentages consider this as hardly compatible
- Difference between educational phases (BA-MA): a negative association between journal publication (as indicator of research performance) and teaching quality at the undergraduate level

Countries vary due to contextual factors, e.g. decline in public funding/ high tuition fees; pressures to increase research productivity or improve teaching to attract more students

% of respondents agreeing with the statement: “research and teaching are hardly compatible with each other” by teaching time in BA and MA programs (universities)



- Incompatibility increases in the extent to which the teaching proportion in BA programs increases
- For Masters it is the reverse: disagreement with the statement relates with a higher teaching time in masters program

Shifts of focus in scholarly life

- **Disciplinary specialization** → **Cross-disciplinary knowledge**
- **Self-image what to teach/research** → **Institutional management/
accountability/ (student) evaluations/
peer reviews**
- **University as an own world** → **Faculty engagement in external
world, Third Mission**
- **Homogenous faculty role** → **Diversified roles in teaching and
research and beyond/ career
resilience (T-shape)**

What kind of academic we want to be?

Manifest “*Science in Transition*” to combat perverse incentives in the system:

- Publication culture to increase the impact-factor
- Undervaluing teaching and learning
- Emphasis on the quantity of research rather than its societal value

The group (from NL/UK) advocates:

- ‘Deliberative democracy’ to determine research agendas
- Moderated by strong academic communities: bringing colleagues together to generate critical reflection on what they do

Rescue

the fire!

