

been off the tenure track. Half of all graduating PhDs in the natural and social sciences begin their careers in temporary, postdoctoral positions, and only the fortunate few move into appointments with faculty status. Perhaps one-quarter of newly entering faculty change jobs and employment status in the first three years following their first employment. And two-fifths of full-time faculty who begin off the tenure track leave the higher education sector in the first career decade. The type of contract upon which you enter academe—be it full or part-time, tenure-track or fixed—circumscribes your likely career trajectory. There is minimal permeability across career tracks. And there is relatively little in-migration to the academic profession from industry and government.

The “new” model of academic work and careers in the United States is built on an increasingly contingent, stratified academic workforce; the unbundling of the traditionally integrated role into specialist teaching, research, and administrative roles.

Across the system, American academics—like those in other nations—have experienced increasing workload demands for teaching more courses, more students, and concurrently for producing more research publications (preferably with competitively secured external research funds), while being increasingly subject to new demands for accountability. All in all, a much less attractive working situation and much less promising career prospects—a situation reflected in declining, albeit still high by most standards, job and career satisfaction. Following a brief period of real growth beginning in the mid-1990s, academic salaries have stabilized and are only just now beginning to recover from the Great Global Recession. Salaries for the very best entry-level jobs (tenure track assistant professorships) do not bring incumbents to the level of median family income. New faculty, even those employed full-time, find themselves increasingly economically marginalized.

INTERNATIONAL BENCHMARKS

As a bonus for IHE readers, this volume includes two chapters that explicitly place the US faculty in an international perspective, based largely on the results of the 2007–2008 Changing Academic Profession survey. The first examines trends in the internalization of the teaching and research/

publication activity of American faculty. The second explicitly compares the profile of teaching, research, and governance of academic staff in the United States with those in other English-speaking countries, in Western Europe, and East Asia. What did we learn? To begin with, the American faculty emerged largely as insular and inward looking as they did in the original Carnegie Foundation Advancement of Teaching 1991–1992 International Survey. Only about one-quarter integrated international perspectives into their teaching and research; and only about one-third collaborated with international colleagues. What distinguished the American faculty “internationalists,” was their overall research productivity and their extended, professional border-crossing experience. Compared to faculty in other English-speaking countries, in Europe, and East Asia, American academic staff tended to be less oriented to research, to spend more time in teaching, to publish less, to be less influential in institutional governance outside of their own home academic unit and in education public policy, and to be relatively well compensated and relatively satisfied—in the middle of the pack, rather than firmly at the top.

What emerges is a picture of an increasingly fragmented and weakened profession that threatens the future preeminence of US higher education. In a cruel irony—at least for Americans, as many nations across the globe explicitly seek to emulate the American model as part of their strategy to increase their global competitiveness in the knowledge economy, the United States is watching the foundation of its preeminence erode. ■

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Tajikistan: University Challenges and the Professoriate

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Tajikistan’s higher education is going through a difficult and challenging period. Tajikistan is a small, landlocked, and isolated country with a population of 8.5 million. The country borders with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China. Ninety-three percent of its territory is covered by mountains. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, secondary and higher education were deeply af-

affected as a result of the civil war and the discontinuation of financial subsidies from Moscow. A long period of educational reforms began after political stability was restored by the end of 1990s and the early 2000s. The collapse of the former Soviet Union negatively impacted the status of the academic profession in post-Soviet states, with salaries and professional development opportunities spiraling down. At the same time, the liberalization of the economy and the promise of higher education access led to a rise in the demand for higher education and public clamor for greater university access. Colleges and universities in Tajikistan rushed to hire lesser-prepared faculty members, as those more seasoned or talented among the professoriate left for the private sector or migrated abroad. Those who stayed started selling goods in markets or working in a few available businesses, or moved to international organizations. Nevertheless, the higher education system in Tajikistan today consists of 38 higher education institutions with almost 9,000 full-time faculty members and 167,000 students.

SALARY AND REMUNERATION

The Republic of Tajikistan is one of the smallest countries of former Soviet Union with a per capita GDP of only US\$926. The higher education budget comes from the state, non-state sources, and, increasingly, from tuition fees. The average monthly compensation is approximately US\$550 for rectors of universities and only US\$69 for assistants of departments, the lowest academic rank; the wage of full-time professors is around US\$270 per month. Although salaries have been gradually increasing, they are still not sufficient to cover living expenses for the faculty and their families.

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

As the salaries of teachers and faculty members do not correspond to the cost of living, academics do not have any other choice but to look for other means to earn an income. Younger faculty members do not want to join academia because they know that salaries in universities are very low. Compensation and working conditions faced by faculty members compel them to use a variety of strategies just to survive, let alone flourish. At best, they are involved in projects supported by international organizations, working as translators, private tutors, or in related small businesses. At worst, they become salespeople on markets, or have fled the country looking for better wages. Those that do not have additional jobs are supported by their parents and spouses. Under such conditions, faculty members are not interested in improving their knowledge and skills, and thus are less prepared to be effective instructors. Moreover, faculty members believe that their most important task, apart from teaching, is research, and to engage in research they need adequate income and time; most of them rather spend time

looking for additional income in order to survive.

CHALLENGES TO RESEARCH

Faculty members usually teach 15–20 academic hours per week, which does not allow them to pursue their research and publication needs. As a result, the number of faculty members with academic degrees such as *kandidat nauk* and *doctor nauk* is decreasing. During the economic collapse and the civil war, most libraries throughout the country were damaged. Often, during winter, there is no electricity; some archives with books and journals, which need to be kept at a certain temperature, have not been maintained. Electronic resources are not easily accessible—and the few professional resources available are primarily published in Russian; almost none are published in Tajik. There are few Russian websites that faculty members have access to, but even those sites require fees to download information. Unlike in most developed countries, there are very few external grants to fund research. There are no national dissertation committees that can confer degrees. Until very recently (2015), all dissertations needing approval had to be sent to the Russian Higher Attestation Commission for completion, a lengthy and costly process borne by faculty themselves.

Compensation and working conditions faced by faculty members compel them to use a variety of strategies just to survive, let alone flourish.

Universities in Tajikistan have also experienced a lack of adequate facilities for teaching and learning. Many faculty members work in classrooms lacking modern equipment, such as computers and electronic boards; laboratories are also lacking modern technologies to provide sufficient training to students and young researchers. Given all the professional and personal barriers faced by Tajik faculty members, it is no wonder that only a few of the younger ones pursue further training and advanced academic degrees. Instead of believing in the process of further education and returns to such investments, most, typically, decide to leave academia. The statistics of the ministry of education show that less than 30 percent of faculty members working in Tajik universities have suitable terminal degrees to teach—while governmental policy papers call for enhanced research capacity.

FUTURE STEPS

Despite the harsh conditions and realities faculty members experience, those who remain often do enjoy teaching and working with students. This appears to be their main reason for staying. However, such personal feelings of satisfaction seem insufficient to motivate the next generation of university instructors to prepare to enter the profession. What they need is to be provided with basic working conditions and salaries that they can live on, so they can fully dedicate themselves to teaching, research, producing knowledge, and preparing well-qualified specialists for the future development of the country. Tajik universities and the government need to work on establishing adequate policies and opportunities to enable prospective candidates to regain the status of valued professionals within academe, a condition for allowing their institutions to participate in the growing global educational competition to create a knowledge society. ■

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Making the Gap Year a Reality: Six Issues for Consideration

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A "gap year" refers to an experimental period of travel, work, or other personal and professional development opportunities. It is typically taken before students commence their postsecondary education. Students can undertake a gap year domestically or abroad, the latter having greater appeal among participants. The concept is more familiar for students in the United States and the United Kingdom, with a lucrative industry built in support of the students' pursuits.

Malaysia will incorporate a gap year as part of its undergraduate curriculum. Idris Jusoh, the minister of higher education, made that announcement during his New Year address on January 12, 2017. Starting in 2017, undergraduates from eight public universities are given the option to take a year off during their studies. They can take part in industrial training, pursue their interests in the arts, or work

on volunteering projects. The intention is for the students to gain exposure, discover their potential, and develop intellectually. Their gap year experience would also enable them to be more adept in a highly competitive job market.

This article lists six pertinent issues, before the gap year option enters its inaugural implementation phase in the coming 2017/2018 academic term.

ISSUE #1: AWARENESS

The gap year is a new concept and has never been implemented before. If the minister's policy statement is taken literally, Malaysia's version of a gap year will be different than the norm. It must be clearly defined and communicated to the undergraduates. Students should also be convinced of the merits in undertaking a gap year, and the different ways in achieving memorable and impactful gap year experiences.

Parents play a significant role in the undergraduates' decision-making processes. They are accustomed to the conventional pathway of studying and getting employed upon graduation. It will take a while before they can accept the alternative notion of their children taking time off from education to "see the world." Universities should reach out to parents, particularly during orientation, to introduce and obtain parental buy-in.

ISSUE #2: TIMING

As students are expected to take a gap year during their study period, some clarification on timing is required. Should it be done in the second year of study, when students have completed their fundamental courses? Can it be done in the students' third year of study, when they have identified their desired specialization and are more mature in their demeanor? Alternatively, can a student break the gap year duration into two, and sandwich the gap periods in their second and third years of study?

ISSUE #3: DESIGN

Based on the minister's statement, students can work, volunteer, or deepen their knowledge in particular fields during their gap year. Should the students pick only one of the three, or are they allowed to toggle between the options? Student A might choose to work in a company for the full duration of his/her gap year, while student B may prefer to volunteer in a community project for the first six months, before proceeding with a six-month internship in a company. Faculty members and academic advisors should be given clear guidelines before they advise their charges on the best gap-year design to take on.

ISSUE #4: INCENTIVIZING PARTICIPATION

Taking time out for a gap year can be a costly affair. Sub-