

THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR AND HER ROLE AS A TEACHER

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ABSTRAC

The work of professors is key to developing a new model of education. The professor is responsible for initiating the educational function that introduces and shapes the student in the technical discipline that they are studying, as well as in their training to function prepare the student to properly develop as a professional and as a person. Thus professor orientation should enhance student learning, conduct close monitoring of the evolution of their skills and knowledge and correct, if necessary, any deviations. Training plans must be developed to go deeper into the treatment of skills, in the students assessment, in techniques and systems that promote lifelong learning , and to among students the ability to work in teams and, synthetically , to offer training programs whose main purpose is not to convey a repertoire of knowledge but find the system for tutoring the learning experiences of students.

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The university professor is a professional whose job is to achieve the goals set by the university in order to meet the demands of society that are given to it. A professor must be a reflective, critical, and competent professional in the field of their discipline, trained for teaching and for research (Benedito, 1992). While historically the teacher's role has been to act as custodian and transmitter of knowledge, today we can say that role has changed. The mission today is to provide the student access to knowledge and helping at the same time to develop their capacity for understanding and reflection and encouraging them the skills and abilities which will together provide them a position in the labor market.

ROLES OF A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

Traditional functions: teaching, research and administration

The main functions of a university professor include (Benedito, 1992: 80):

- a. Study and research
- b. Teaching and organization and the improvement of both
- c. Communication on their research
- d. Innovation and communication of educational innovations
- e. Mentoring and student assessment
- f. The responsible participation in the selection of other teachers
- g. Evaluation of teaching and research
- h. Participation in academic administration
- i. The establishment of exterior relations regarding, culture, etc.
- j. Promoting interdepartmental and inter-university relations and exchange.

All of these functions can be grouped into three functions that have traditionally been attributed to the university professor, which are teaching, research and administration. Thus, according to Marcelo (1992: 6):

First, the university teacher is a person who is professionally engaged in teaching (...) Secondly, he is a specialist at the highest level of science,

which involves the ability and habits that enable researchers to approach and enlarge the frontiers of their branch of knowledge. Thirdly, he is a member of an academic community, which means accepting and shaping behavior to a specific set of norms, values and attitudes (...).

However, the weight and importance of each assumption is not equal because, depending on the collective role one would have greater importance than the other. For students the university teacher is a mere transmitter of knowledge, ignoring the other two functions. For teaching staff, the research mission and the teacher are inseparable and interdependent and therefore are given the most effort and time.

Administration must be added to these two important tasks. Active participation in the various university organizations is part of the basic work to do in order to adequately fulfill their functions as a professor. All professors to greater or lesser extent are involved in the operation of their center, department, area of knowledge or other part of the University, assisting in fulfilling the respective objectives. The need for teachers to take on these tasks is clear and its impact on the work of teaching and research is also apparent. However, administrative tasks are understood in many cases to be a burden on the teacher, and there is less time for the development of the aforementioned functions, forgetting the importance of these administrative tasks have for the positive functioning of the university.

QUALITIES, SKILLS AND CHARACTERISTICS REQUIRED OF A UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR FOR THE PERFORMANCE OF THEIR DUTIES

According to De la Cruz (1994) in order to perform their functions, the professor must possess the following qualities:

- *Appropriate training.* They must have the necessary and sufficient knowledge to address the teaching of the discipline with guarantees and responsibility.
- *Creativity.* Teaching is a creative act of answers and motivation for the student. That is why the teacher must be able to

generate interest in the discipline, have a desire to learn and have a personal, independent critical consciousness.

- *Certain personality traits* (patience, tolerance, flexibility, sense of humor, availability, flexibility, authority, fairness) and certain personal skills (interpersonal skills, ease of communication, stress management).
- *Pedagogical Aptitude*, such as proper planning to impart knowledge, simplicity, enthusiasm for the subject and encouragement of student learning, organizational capacity and management of situations and learning resources, stimulation of the students interest,. ..
- *Awareness of social responsibility*. People engaged in educational tasks cannot escape questions about the means and ends of their work, giving their activity a sense of ethics. They must be aware that they are guides and that the course of their work transmits, perhaps unconsciously, a set of values, attitudes and behaviors.
- *A vocation for teaching*.

Gairín (2003) identifies five types of knowledge that must be mastered by college professors to successfully perform their duties:

- a. Specialized scientific knowledge, linked with the corresponding field or area.
- b. Cultural knowledge, related to the given topic and in general with the world of culture.
- c. Psychopedagogic knowledge linked to the processes of teaching and learning, curriculum development (programming and evaluation, among others), and institutional organization.
- d. Knowledge about teaching related to the teaching experience, professional socialization, communication skills, methodological resources, and tools for reflection on practice.
- e. Personal knowledge about himself.

Regarding the characteristics of the university professor, the teacher's attitude and aptitude are key to the formation process in order to reach targeted objectives. Therefore, knowledge of the subject by the teacher is a necessary but insufficient condition. The attitude of the

teacher in relation to their role towards students and their teaching skills will affect final results. A positive attitude towards students is characterized by knowing their profile and interests, to value them and to be convinced of the influence that is exerted on them. Pedagogical skills are other critical elements: the teacher must master both movements such as their voice, as well as teaching means and methods.(Pedraja: 2001).

Additionally, there are a number of characteristics that affect whether the teacher's task is more or less excellent. As indicated by Lang (1986) the characteristics that determine success in teaching and are extensible to any university professor are:

- a. Enthusiasm and conviction for the practice of teaching.
- b. Mastery of the subject to be taught.
- c. Use of teaching methods appropriate to the type of students and specific subject matter.
- d. Highly-skilled in the use of oral and written communication.
- e. Wide and positive relationship with students which in any case is useful to maintain effective control over their progress and behavior.
- f. Maintain ongoing professional development through study, participation in research projects, membership in professional associations, etc.

It is difficult to say which of the analyzed characteristics play a more important role, and surely it is crucial to achieve proper consistency between all of them. Lumsden (1974) obtained the features of professors which are most relevant to students: the clarity of their presentation, and enthusiasm and respect for student opinion. Meanwhile, Carmona and Carrasco (1998) obtained as most appreciated by the students qualities such as clarity of expositions, the ability to combine theory and practice, dedication, knowledge and amenity. Finally, Meshing and Perez (1995) obtained as most the valued aspects of a university professor: the daily planning of their classes, methodology, clear and precise expression, student motivation with the subject matter, and general knowledge of the teacher's especially practical knowledge.

Among the least appreciated aspects appeared personal characteristics and the professional status of the teacher.

THE NEW ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

The functions that the teacher performs are dynamic and must adapt to changes in the system. Today, society is demanding a new role for teachers (Luzon et al., 2009). In the words of Arbizu (1994, p. 96), “one can speak of an assigned role (assumed by tradition) and a respondent role (the new role that is asked of a professional). The college professor has a role which traditionally has been assigned, but today society demands a number of new roles that will shape the new role of teacher.”

The teacher, in the words of García-Valcárcel (2001) thus ceases to be the sole or primary source of information to become:

- a. A specialist in the diagnosis and prescription of learning.
- b. A specialist in learning resources.
- c. Facilitator of learning in the community.
- d. A specialist in the interdisciplinary convergence of knowledge.
- e. A classifier of values.
- f. A promoter of human relationships.
- g. A professional counselor

Therefore, the change of current legislation and adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) suggests that the tendency of the work that is done by a university professor should focus on encouraging students to “learn to learn” (Arias Gundín et al, 2008;.Díez et al, 2010;.Díez et al, 2009).. To achieve this goal, a previous acquisition of certain skills by the teacher which can be improved through teacher training is required. In fact, most if not all universities already have university staff training programs. For example, there is the case of of the University of Valencia which has a beginner course for university teaching and other techniques such as voice, classroom teaching, etc. There is also specific training offered for teaching groups of innovative teachers and courses focusing on

the aspects related to the EHEA. All of these are given through the Servei de Formació Permanent.

It is interesting to consider the following proposed initiatives with regard to teacher training made by the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC: 2006):

- Conventional training programs.
- Online courses on teaching.
- Mentoring programs for novices.
- Training on specific methodologies.
- Visits to leading centers.
- Visits by professors from other relevant universities.
- Research on teaching methodologies.

It is also interesting that the teacher adopts an orientation to the market. In this manner, previous investigations (Flavian and Lozano: 2002) apply the concept of market orientation to teachers of Spanish Public Universities and it is observed as to how there is a greater willingness of teachers to understand the needs of students, to collaborate with other teachers in the same or in other colleges, and have interest in alternative training and research which implies greater market orientation activities with the collection and dissemination of information on the needs of students and the designing of effective responses based on those needs. Fenollar et al. (2008) concludes that one can identify positive effects on academic performance of the direction of learning and self-efficacy that is perceived by students and suggests the need for the teacher to enhance the direction of student learning. To do so, he advises teachers to undertake close monitoring of the evolution of the skills and knowledge of their students, correcting if necessary possible deviations and encourage students in their ability to confront subjects in the area.

However, it is important to note that despite the importance of the implementation of the new educational model, there are several causes that hinder the change of teaching methodologies. Among them include:

- » The low recognition of teaching versus research.
- » The concentration of the efforts of teachers in the transmission of content.
- » The low pedagogic and didactic teacher preparation derived from the absence of a strong system of initial and ongoing training of university teachers.
- » Teacher resistance to change of methodology.
- » Lack of information and awareness of teachers about the change of educational culture which involves the EHEA.
- » Lack of tradition of cooperation in education.
- » The need to manage new teaching planning techniques.
- » The lack of universally accepted models for assessing generic skills.
- » The size of the groups, which is still excessive in some degrees.
- » The difficulty of engaging students in their own learning processes.
- » The inadequacy of administrative processes in moving towards a diversified model, which greatly increases the work of academic planning and management.

Characteristics of university professors from the student's perspective

Some authors have analyzed the opinion of students and have found that the teacher's performance is regarded as a fundamental aspect that explains their degree of satisfaction with the education they received at the University (Rodríguez et al .: 1995).

Table 1 shows some of the most relevant findings of the major studies that analyze the characteristics of university teaching from the perspective of students.

Table 1. Characteristics of university professors
according to students

Wotruba and Wright (1975) Marsch (1987)

Wotruba y Wright (1975)	Marsch (1987)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favorable attitudes toward students • Mastery of subject matter • Communication skills • Encourages students to think for themselves • Impartiality in exams and grades • Enthusiasm for their subject • Good organization of the program and course • Good speaking skills • Enjoyment of experimentation, flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest and relevance of content • Teaching load and appropriate learning • Organization of content • Clear explanation • Enthusiasm • Openness • Empathy • Appropriate course demands
Castonguay-Leblanch and Couturier-Leblanc (1989)	Belando (1999)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of the subject • Availability • Fair evaluation • Union between theory and practice • A like for teaching • Methodical and structured • Respectful of students • Clarity of presentations • Promotes intellectual development of students • Interesting presentation of the subject • At ease with speaking • Skilled in human relations • Personal and original thinking • A sense of humor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional stability and self-confidence • Ability to adapt to different situations • Creative thinking • Commitment that students learn how to learn • Sufficient pedagogical and scientific training in their specialty • Good knowledge of methodology, resources and techniques necessary for optimal job performance • Ability to diagnose and provide critical appraisal • Capacity for dialogue and teamwork

Source: Garrido (2003).

In the field of business studies, Meshing and Perez (1995) conducted an investigation in order to know what the ideal teacher was from the point of view of their students. Table 2 shows the main results.

Table 2. Features of the ideal teacher from the business studies students perspective

ASPECT THAT WAS ANALYZED	MOST VALUED ELEMENTS FOR STUDENTS
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater value given to the practical knowledge on the subject than on the theoretical. • A poor assessment of knowledge of other subjects and about the supplementary readings.
Classroom teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily worry about the class • Continued attendance to the class • Ability to make up class • A greater emphasis on the consistency of creativity
Dedication to tutorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally not highly valued • Total availability of the professor • Little interest in the organization of activities outside of the classroom period
Relationship with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Order of the exposition and the value placed on the subject in the real business world. • Lack of interest in the use of less traditional resources.
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and precise expression • Motivation of the student on the subject matter

Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater value given to daily programming of classes that encompass the program.
General aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater importance given to intangible qualities
Professional category	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching ability is not associated with professional category

Source: Martín (2007).

CONCLUSIONS

The teaching profession is no easy task, and it is complicated in many cases even more as a result of overcrowding in our university programs. The appearance of a professor with greater pedagogic preparation should be promoted in such a way that the development of the teacher is not only the consequence of her experience or interaction with fellow professors, but rather through her reflection about the results of her actions while seeking means and materials that allow for an improvement of her professional practice.

In conclusion and in seeking consensus of opinion among experts and the aspects that student's value, a university professor must above all:

- » Be a specialist in their area of expertise. This specialization must be linked to research on the content of their subject that they are teaching.
- » Must be professionally trained in each of the tasks needed to perform: teaching, research and administration.
- » Must be motivated to research and teach of their subject with enthusiasm, interest and dedication.
- » Must possess certain personality traits that teaching and investigating requires, such as patience, tolerance, empathy,

fairness, openness, flexibility, availability, concern for others, creativity, etc.

- » Must have some basic personal skills: facility for interpersonal relationships, communication skills, tolerance for frustration, control of stress, ...
- » Must have specific teaching skills: organization and structuring of knowledge to impart and plan on the short-and long-term, and promote independent and critical thinking, etc.
- » Must possess a critical and reflective attitude about their own performance as a teacher.
- » Must be innovative and open to change in their professional performance.

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