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In this issue:

**Complex Realities: Contractual Regulations
and
Institutional Employment Practices
for Academic Staff**

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Introduction to the Issue

GLEN A. JONES

The observation that academic work is changing is neither original nor insightful. ‘Reform’ has become an ubiquitous verb within the higher education research literature, and discussions of the systemic implications associated with the pressures of globalization, the responses to marketization, and the emergence of academic capitalism have become essential ingredients in almost every scholarly conference in this field of study. If the world of higher education is changing, it is logical to assume that the day-to-day experience of the professoriate is changing as well.

Yet there has been surprisingly little empirical research on the changing nature of academic work, and most of the studies that have been conducted have focused on the experience of the professoriate in a handful of countries. Given that academic staff are higher education’s ‘most important assets and most costly resource’ (Barblan and Sadlak, 2005), it becomes essential to understand and explore the changing nature of academic work, and the increasingly complex ethical and professional issues associated with this new working environment.

With this objective in mind, UNESCO-CEPES held an international seminar to explore a range of issues and discuss country case studies focusing on the changing nature of academic work. This seminar, organized in collaboration with the Magna Charta Universitatum and the German Commission for UNESCO, took place in Berlin in October of 2005 and involved leading higher education scholars from Europe and North America. Given the dramatic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe and the relative paucity of published research on the impact of these reforms on the professoriate, considerable attention was given to reviewing the experience of several countries in this region.

This special issue includes most of the invited papers that were presented and discussed at the Berlin seminar. A number of the authors contribute to our understanding of the restructuring of academic work by illuminating some of the broad transitions and trends that are impacting the ways in which teaching and research are being repositioned as a function of the changing economic context, and the complex ethical and professional issues that are associated with this new environment. Others present empirical studies focusing on the experience of a particular jurisdiction and highlight the impact and implications of system or institutional reforms for academic staff. In the concluding essay I attempt to summarize the key themes that emerge from these papers, and from the thoughtful and stimulating discussions of these issues in Berlin.

The terms and conditions of employment played a central role in these discussions, especially in the review of jurisdictional case studies. The structural arrangements of academic work in terms of the ‘first place of employment’ had been a key theme identified by the conference organizers, and these arrangements obviously include the level of faculty salaries, the existence of a promotional hierarchy, the availability of tenure or some equivalent form of job security, and, in a more general sense, the balance of responsibilities in terms of teaching and research. It is easy to wax poetic about the essential role of the university in terms of the creation of new knowledge and the development of an educated labour force, but when a higher education system

fails to provide its faculty with a competitive salary and hence academics are forced to undertake additional employment to simply put food on the table, then the higher education system can never fulfill its true promise.

The legal and regulatory arrangements associated with the “first place of employment” also become important given the growth in multiple contract arrangements. Multiple employment relationships can be increasingly found in a variety of higher education systems, and they now include, for example, the shared appointment of professors with international reputations between elite institutions, new hybrid contractual relationships with industry, and academic staff who undertake teaching responsibilities for multiple institutions in order to simply earn a liveable income. There are a range of complex issues associated with these multiple employment situations, including potential conflicts of interest, real or perceived ethical concerns, shifts in the balance of work (and quality of life) of the professoriate, and challenges to the notion of community within the academic profession.

The contributors to this special issue provide insightful analyses of the changing nature of academic work in quite different jurisdictions. Faculty work is being restructured, and this volume illuminates at least some of the incredibly complex and nuanced implications of these patterns of change.

References

BARBLAN, A. and SADLAK, J. Report of the International Seminar on Contractual Regulations and Institutional Practices Related to “First Place of Employment” and Additional Teaching/ Research/Consultancy Contracts of Academic Staff. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2005.