

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND FACULTY'S ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF A SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY

Fatima Zhakypova

Many governments and academic bodies headed by their administrations are working on a solution for the question of building a successful university. There is no doubt that today the role and mission of the university undergoes a substantial amount of transformation as a result of challenges they have to face. And only those universities that will adequately react to these challenges become successful to greater or lesser degree.

At the same time, despite rapidly changing world, we should not be losing touch with beginnings, with those academic values and traditions that have been laid at the foundation of the first universities in the history of humanity. At least, the mission of the universities that aspire to success and leadership has to organically combine traditions and modernity.

What makes a successful university? At the panel of the opening session, Lynne Parmenter and her colleagues from the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education noted that there are five main components of a successful university. Moreover, some speakers used the formula of a successful university developed by Jamil Salmi (2009). Some speakers talked about the importance of reconsidering the existing interpretations of a successful university. But they all agreed that talented faculty members, who ensure high academic standards and quality of education, are the foundation of a successful university.

Therefore, undoubtedly, the talented faculty hold one of the key roles in building a successful university. Thus, it is only natural to ask: What faculty member is able to contribute to building a successful university?

In my presentation I will address three main points:

- How and in which historical contexts the teaching profession was created? What are its historical roots?
- To what extent does a modern university faculty fit the historical role at the core of this profession?
- How does the faculty's mission need to change in present conditions and what should be a successful faculty of a successful university?

The long history of the university since its establishment to this day demonstrates that it is one of the most important institutions that has stood the test of time. As the human society changed, the university changed, too. In the history of the university there were times of crisis and there were short periods of its exclusive role when ideas, promoted by university, became decisive for the future. But on the whole, all changes that the university went through were accompanied with an expansion of knowledge it stored. Hence, we may claim that the purpose of the university remained unchanged at all times. This was the place where the new knowledge was generated, place where the truth was born.

The first universities were established by those professors, who played the role of the critical mind, historical and moral consciousness and society's change. In the era of first universities, famous professors became centres of educational development. Thousands of people gathered in a city visited by a renowned scholar. At the end of the 11th century, because of the Roman Law scholar Irnerius, a law school was established in Bologna, which has later become the University of Bologna.

From the history of the University of Bologna we also know that glosses of Azzone Azzone enjoyed great authority. His teaching attracted to Bologna vast numbers of students. At times, he had to give his lectures at a square as the number of students, according to sources of those times, reached ten thousands. Faculty's responsibilities at that time included two main aspects.

First of all, the intellectual one. A professor was a scholar, who engaged in science, which was simultaneously absolute and complete. Their task was to give students the knowledge that was the closest to the truth. Thanks to this, they could not only earn fame and respect of his contemporaries, admiration and gratitude of his students, but also means of existence.

From this point of view, the faculty were meant to solve tasks not only of intellectual, but also of a moral kind. A professor should not be reproached for the way they lived or their ethical position, and this aspect of his or her life was given particular attention when they took a test to obtain a license. The earnestness of their behaviour honoured the science they represented.

The professor was aware of their public accountability. Doctrinal errors were particularly dangerous. Therefore, we can argue that the faculty of the first universities were academic aristocracy. This epoch has set foundation of the high image and social status of the faculty.

According to the Recommendations concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (General conference of UNESCO, the Preamble - Paris, as of November 11, 1997), "teaching in the field of higher education is a highly skilled profession, a form of service to society (...)". At the same time, such factors as the increasing interest of the mankind to obtaining higher education, globalisation and intensity of economic, social and political processes in this new century demand advancing professional teacher self-development.

University cannot nourish new talent and develop young people's versatile skills in case if it does not have intellectual potential. Unquestionably, outstanding knowledge is generated in the academic community which focuses on the solution of the problems experienced by the society. However, more often than not, we witness the fact that most advanced achievements of research slip away to the field of basic research, research centres and industrial companies. For example, out of eleven research achievements in the field of physics published by the Chinese Academy of Sciences only four research achievements belong to higher education institutions.

Can this serve as evidence for increasing tendency that leads to a certain devaluation of the faculty's role:

- as a key figure in the university;
- as a researcher generating new knowledge and passing it to the next generations.

Also, is it appropriate to assume that nowadays the prevailing role is assigned to university administration and, above all, to the middle management? Perhaps, it is justified by both objective and subjective reasons. Traditional university management, sometimes limited funding of higher education, intensive development of alternative sources of education (Internet, media, centres for professional development) to a great extent facilitate devaluation of the faculty's role. It is quite fair that in these circumstances the role of the university management is being enhanced. Development of anticipatory strategy of the university, creation of modern campuses, ensuring financial stability and attracting new investments, and, on the whole, development of competitive advantages and high image of the university - all of these is possible only for exemplary managers.

And, perhaps, this is why building a successful university to an increasing extent becomes the task of governments and universities' top-managers. Strategic programmes are being developed and discussed during meetings of ministers and at high-level conferences. Enormous amounts of financial resources are allocated for these purposes. With this, building successful universities becomes states' competitive advantage.

What is the faculty's role in this process? Perhaps, it lies in faculty's high expectations of implementation of their rights? In demands for creating certain conditions for their work and research?

Indeed, faculty's rights have to be respected to the full extent. These rights are enshrined both at the university level, national legislation, and at the international level. The already

mentioned ILO/UNESCO Recommendations fully reflect rights and freedoms of the higher education institutions'faculty. I will address only the main ones:

- access to the higher education academic profession should be based solely on appropriate academic qualifications, competence and experience and be equal for all members of society without any discrimination;
- faculty members, like all other groups and individuals, should enjoy those internationally recognized civil, political, social and cultural rights applicable to all citizens;
- the maintaining of the above international standards should be upheld in the interest of higher education internationally and within the country. Therefore, the principle of academic freedom should be scrupulously observed;
- faculty members of higher education institutions have a right to teach without any interference, subject to accepted professional principles including professional responsibility and intellectual rigour with regard to standards and methods of teaching;
- higher-education teaching personnel should play a leading role in determining the curriculum;
- faculty members have a right to conduct research without any interference or any suppression in accordance with their professional responsibility and subject to nationally and internationally recognised professional principles of intellectual rigour, scientific inquiry and research ethics.

At the same time, while it might be controversial, we often witness how faculty members in their work are not always guided by the newest trends in education. Utilising modern educational technologies is also not always encouraged. Research results do not fully contribute to making progress and solving the most pressing issues of the modern society.

In certain cases, demands for expanding academic freedom occur at the minimum level of awareness of professional responsibility. I dare say that all this sometimes is common to faculty members and does not contribute to preserving their historical role of pioneers and servants of truth.

Moving on to the concluding part of my presentation, I would like to go back to these questions. So, what faculty member is capable of becoming a key figure of a successful university? Should the faculty's mission change in the present conditions?

There cannot be a definitive answer to these questions. But still, in defining what makes a faculty successful, we must rely on those challenges that now face universities. And these challenges clearly point towards the importance of rethinking the mission and role of the faculty in a modern society.

Most likely, we need to go back to the cradle of teaching profession, to its global definition: "teaching in higher education is a form of public service". Perhaps, not all colleagues will agree with me, but still, when we talk about a successful university, I believe it is important to evaluate the extent to which duties and responsibilities, which, just as rights, have historically been a foundation of the teaching profession, are being fully implemented. I will refer to some of them:

- Teaching, research and scholarship should be conducted in full accordance with ethical and professional standards and should respond to contemporary problems facing society;
- With their work, faculty members must preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the world;
- Profound knowledge and specific skills must be maintained through vigorous training and research throughout their lives;

- Faculty members should seek to achieve the highest possible standards in their professional work, since their status largely depends on themselves and the quality of their achievements.

To undertake such appropriate duties as are required for the collegial governance of institutions of higher education and of professional bodies. Faculty members should contribute to the public accountability of universities.

To conclude my presentation, universities that do not produce existential knowledge cannot claim to success, competitiveness and leadership. The academic life teaches us how profound knowledge is produced by a community of equal people, who, while choosing a profession, must be honest to themselves and to future professional expectations.

I can assume that certain points of my presentation may not have found an absolute support from all the panel speakers. However, the value of the Forum is that it allows for discussion and search for the most accurate answers to the fundamental question of our session.

References

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