BOOK REVIEW

Philip G. Altbach, Liz Reisberg, Maria Yudkevich, Gregory Androushchak, Iván F. Pacheco (eds): Paying the professoriate: a global comparison of compensation and contracts


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This book takes on the gargantuan task of describing the issue of paying to the professoriate in a variety of diverse national contexts. This issue is being considered in the context of major changes in higher education systems, reshaped by the key forces of massification, growing private sector, and globalization. The authors present the first comparative analysis of academic salaries, remuneration, and contracts for college professors in 28 countries throughout the world. As the editors acknowledge, “This research project remains exploratory in the sense that we do not have all of the answers, and the data sources remain inconsistent and in some cases problematical.” (p. xiii–xiv) One clear merit of the project is that it aims not only at such giants as the US and China, and heavyweights, such as Russia and Brazil, but also such small national systems as those found in Armenia and Latvia. This variety in size distorts comparison, as Altbach, Reisberg, and Pacheco acknowledge (p. 19), but the distortion does not diminish the merit of the attempt. The selection of countries presented in the case studies is excellent, although some heavyweights are missing, such as the dynamically developing and internationalizing higher education sector of South Korea and stagnating sector of Ukraine.

Some large-scale and essential problems are touched, but not sufficiently enough. For instance, the authors note that “Conditions that encourage inbreeding constitute tradition, the lack of a national market, the absence of financial incentives to move, and significantly less attractive working conditions elsewhere. Most analysts feel that such a scheme is a detriment to academic creativity, since it emphasizes the continuity of ideas and practices rather than innovation.” (p. 7). This worry appears minimal as compared to academic rigidity, when academic inbreeding has been converted into nepotism. And in some countries this nepotism is rife, transforming the faculty hiring process into a meager decision on increasing family income. Some departments observe dynasties of so-called professors, with children, grandchildren, and other relatives of professors moving up the academic ladder and teaching in the same colleges, faculties and even departments. In fact,
this inbreeding and promotions start from high school, with places in college, doctoral programs, and eventually a faculty position are being reserved years ahead, often with no merit. The notion of a teaching only professor fits well into this scheme, for these offspring are not capable of being productively involved in any kind of research and scholarship, even if they would be encouraged to do so and remunerated for it, which is not the case.

Professors are not paid exclusively by the state or, in the case of private colleges, by the administration. Today’s college professors are economically active, so-called businessmen in academic gowns. In India, “Moonlighting by university and college teachers is not totally unknown. Some teachers undertake consultancy and run insurance, transport agencies, or even retail trade. To circumvent institutional regulations, these are mostly done in their spouse’s name.” (p. 165) In Russia, working three or more teaching jobs in different colleges is a norm. The notion of economically active professors refers not only to consulting, research grants, and other external funding. Narayana Jayaram says that “One source of additional income for some college teachers… is private tuition.” Apparently, the author means private tutoring, as he continues “this raises the question of professional ethics, and in some states it is even declared illegal.” (p. 165) The author falls short of mentioning possible conflict of interest in cases of private tutoring linked to admissions decisions. Another source of income or pay that professors receive is illegal benefits, including bribes in cash, kind, and services. These “entrepreneurs of knowledge economy” (p. 327), including those vastly underpaid, compensate themselves by collecting illicit benefits in numerous forms. Professors are paid by prospective students (bribes in admissions), current students (bribes in exchange for grades), and in cases of unauthorized private tutoring. These illicit incomes should not be underestimated, as some “masters of the trade” manage to double and even triple their legal income. Not only bribes, but nepotism, clientelism, and other forms of corruption have clear monetary value. It is surprising that this grand issue was simply overlooked by the authors. Indeed, the book has no explicit mention of corruption, and authors avoid this issue of paramount importance.

One of the real purposes of this work is to learn what to ask for in terms of salary and total remuneration when being hired for an academic position outside your own country and what to expect in terms of pay and compensation. One of the key underlying questions is: Is it worth going to teach in another country? The present work is very discouraging. It indicates slow dynamics of internationalization and transnational exchanges. The cost of relocation with family is too high, not worth it. Nevertheless, the authors suggest that “With shifting patterns in the global economy, greater investment in higher education, generally, and in academic staff, specifically, is more likely to improve the circumstances of academics in emerging economies such as Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, and South Africa, rather than the ‘titans’ of the last century.” (p. 19) This suggestion, optimistic for rapidly developing nations and not so optimistic for developed ones, points to a possible reversal in brain drain and brain gain trends and directions.

Despite some shortcomings and weaknesses, the merit of this highly ambitious project outweighs its shortcomings. First, it encourages the dialog between different nations and facilitates it with sometimes quite successful attempts of generalizations and universalization. No wonder then that this volume is largely a product of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, perhaps the only continuously active center of comparative and international education based in the US. Second, this book has a future. There are plenty of countries left aside, which may be included in future works aimed in the similar direction. Moreover, academics who do not read English texts, likely also want to know what is going on in terms of pay rates outside of their respective countries. Thus, this work will eventually face the need of translation, at least in major world languages. This important task rests, at least in part, with the Center.