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Career possibilities of academic teachers in Płock illustrated with an example of a major in social work

Rocznik Towarzystwa Naukowego Płockiego 5, 114-126

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych oraz w kolekcji mazowieckich czasopism regionalnych mazowsze.hist.pl.

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Streszczenie: W artykule poruszono problem kariery nauczyciela akademickiego w zakresie pracy socjalnej

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciele akademicy, kariera

Summary: The paper presents assumptions and needs for establishing a new major in social work. Development and promotion possibilities of academic staff have been considered to be significant. Academic career paths and possibilities created by this very major have been discussed.

Keywords: academic teachers, career

Expansion of the range of services within education and research studies was an important event for the school. For the past 20 years Pawel Wlodkowic University College in Płock (SWPW) has become an integral part of the Płock society, its economy, science and culture. This school, wishing to operate in line with the region's needs - which has been indicated in its mission and strategic objectives - applied to the Minister of Higher Education for approval to conduct a major in social work¹. This approval was granted in September 2011². While undertaking its mission, SWPW invokes the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It acknowledges that access to knowledge and higher

¹ A proposal of the Minister for Science and Higher Education of 9. 03. 2011 no. L.dz. R19/03/11. This approval was granted in September 2011.

² A decision of the Minister for Science and Higher Education of 20. 09. 2011 No. MNiSW-DNS-WUN-6022-14473-2/SP/11.

education should be based on abilities, efforts and perseverance of a person wishing to have said access. Poverty, social classes, or place of residence may not hinder availability of education. With relation to this all the members of academic community, particularly those teaching at newly established majors, refuse to accept any forms of prejudice, i.e. racial, gender-based, language or religious discrimination, as well as economic and cultural determinants, or disability. The aforementioned premises have constituted grounds for establishing a new major in social work. It has also been assumed that students should function in accordance with the region's needs, so that they would be able to perform in their target situations, to demonstrate wisdom, knowledge and professionalism within the local market and in uniting Europe.

Graduates of this major - i.e. social work - acquire knowledge by means of implementing the curriculum including teaching standards, internships, preparing social projects, reports and presentations, attending lectures, seminars and working independently, which allows them to understand a human being and social processes. Therefore the curriculum includes principal subjects such as: methodology of social work, social issues and threats, social policy institutions. Development of proper competences by graduates also requires acquiring knowledge of pedagogy, economy, law, administration and operation of IT systems.

The main objective of education is to prepare staff for the present and future work market; therefore great emphasis is put on teaching subjects connected with social work and its practical use.

Acquired education should prepare graduates in social work for work in social policy centers, social welfare centers and also for work with foster families, at educational care centers, at nursing homes for the elderly and for people with special needs, at support centers, institutions helping the homeless, alcoholics and drug addicts as well as non-governmental institutions dealing with problems of people in difficult life situations.

Meeting the assumed above presented objectives related to implementing the said major in social work requires properly trained and motivated teaching staff of a given major, as well as relative majors, e.g. pedagogy, management, administration or information technology.

The Senate of SWPW, meeting the expectations of scientific and teaching staff, passed a resolution in March 2008 on strategic objectives, focusing on five basic areas of activities, i.e. science, teaching and quality of the didactic process, surroundings, the school's internal environment as well as cooperation with domestic and foreign centers³.

Participation of academic teachers in the European Research Area has been considered important as well. Promoting their scientific activity and applying scientific research results in the didactic process should contribute to a constant increase in the quality of teaching. Scientific and didactic activity should be in a close relationship with the needs of the Płock region and should impact its development.

It is also important to integrate the school's academic community in order to establish the atmosphere of trust, mutual help, and to build a permanent organizational structure. It has been considered important to strengthen cooperation with domestic and foreign centers through exchanging experience, personal contacts, international research studies, attending domestic and international conferences and scientific meetings and the like.

The school, in relation to scientific career of particular scientific workers and teachers, creates conditions and grounds for obtaining subsequent degrees and scientific titles, supporting all activities leading towards their scientific development. These activities are particularly important for newly established majors, such as social work, yet simultaneously they may not be ignored for those which already exist.

A fundamental asset, necessary for correct functioning of the school is its powerful internal scientific environment. Higher schools are among the most complex communities functioning in the contemporary world.

Human beings, their development as well as moral and ethical standards bear great significance here. Commercial success of a higher school without highly trained staff is not possible. Knowledge is a strategic asset particularly in the case of universities. Within the academic community where we can observe relations between professors and assistants, or teachers and students, interpersonal relations

³ Resolution no. 01/2008 of the Senate of Pawel Wlodkowic University College in Płock of 31. 03. 2008.

and issues related to improving the quality of human capital gain a special meaning.

Higher schools in their functioning, particular within its factual areas, are highly hierarchized, similarly to an army, other uniformed services or the church. Career prospects of academic teachers are strongly connected with degrees and scientific titles.

The issue of career development of academic teachers has been under discussion for a number of years. It may be stated that it has not been solved to a degree fully satisfying the scientific community, or meeting the needs of science. This issue is all the more important since the career development model of scientific workers undoubtedly influences the level of Polish education, as well as it impacts the training of university graduates for functioning within a dynamically changing job market. Discussion on this subject reveals shortages and imperfections of the currently effective legal solutions.

As it has been mentioned before, scientific career is strongly connected with obtaining subsequent degrees and scientific titles. In Poland there are two scientific degrees (PhD and a post doctoral degree referred to as doctor habilitated), and one scientific title (professor). Procedures for obtaining said degrees and title have been set out by the Ordinance of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 22 September 2011 on the detailed mode and terms of proceedings for conferring the degree of doctor, habilitated doctor and the title of professor⁴.

Scientific careers officially starts after obtaining a Ph.D. degree. It is the first step of career development. An organization duly authorized organization by the Central Commission for Degrees and Titles (Central Commission) may award these degrees and titles. Such an organization may be a department or other organizational unit of a higher school, as well as another scientific center such as the Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

A unit authorized to award doctoral degrees must comply with specific personnel requirements, i.e. being the first employer to at least eight independent scientific workers representing a given field

⁴ The Act of 14 March 2003 on Scientific Degrees and Scientific Title and Degrees and Title in the scope of Arts (Journal of Laws No. 65, item 595 as amended).

of science or arts, whereas in the case of awarding the degree of a habilitated doctor, at least twelve independent workers. The said number of scientifically active independent workers, i.e. habilitated doctors and professors, is necessary in order for a particular unit to receive specific competences for awarding scientific degrees. Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that the name of a higher school depends on the number of organizational units which have competences for awarding the degree of doctor. The nomenclature is determined in Art. 3.1 of the Act of 27 July 2005⁵.

Persons constituting the minimum staff of a given unit performing particular activities in the course of a Ph.D. program must have particular knowledge and experience in the field in which the said scientific degree is to be awarded.

The effective legal regulations, and particularly the Ordinance of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of 22 September 2011 expressly indicate who may attempt to obtain the degree of doctor, or doctor habilitated.

The person attempting to obtain the degree of doctor submits, along with the application, the original document confirming his or her master's degree, the proposed title and concept of the doctor's thesis indicating the area of knowledge and the field of science under examination. Submission by a candidate of a list of scientific works or creative occupational works as well as information on activities promoting science is a novelty in the currently binding regulations.

Presentation of a scientific dissertation in the case of a program for the degree of doctor as well as doctor habilitated is required in order to obtain a scientific degree. The aforementioned Ordinance allows a possibility of submitting part of a joint work, or a series of articles in the case of a thesis for the degree of doctor habilitated. In practice projects for the degree of doctor or doctor habilitated whose dissertations constitute partly of a joint work are extremely rare⁶.

⁵ The Act of 27 July 2005. Law on Higher Education (Journal of Laws no. 164, item 1365 as amended).

⁶ *Szkolnictwo wyższe w Polsce. Ustrój – prawo – organizacja (Higher education in Poland. Political system – law – organization)*, eds. St. Waltoś, A. Rozmusa, Rzeszów 2009, p. 239.

Meeting the aforementioned requirements, while attempting to obtain the degree of doctor, requires passing three doctoral examinations (in a foreign language - before a three-person committee, yet an relevant language certificate may suffice instead; in a principal field corresponding with the thesis subject - before a four-person committee; in an additional field - before a three-person committee as well as a public defense of the doctor's thesis. The doctor's thesis is evaluated by two reviewers.

A person attempting to obtain the degree of doctor habilitated, submits an application to the Central Commission for registering a habilitation procedure. The original document or its copy that confirms having the degree of doctor, a summary of professional accomplishments, a list of published scientific works or creative professional works are attached to the said application. Moreover, the candidate for the degree of habilitated doctor provides information on his or her didactic achievements along with a list of doctor's theses in which he or she was an auxiliary thesis supervisor (this is a new statutory idea) as well as information on cooperation with institutions, organizations, learned societies in the country and abroad, and also information on activities promoting science. Subsequently the Central Commission appoints a habilitation committee within six weeks from the receipt date of an application in order to conduct the habilitation procedures. This committee includes:

- a) four members with recognized scientific reputation, including international recognition, appointed by the Central Commission. The chairperson and two reviewers are indicated from among these people;
- b) three members having the same qualifications as these indicated in point a) appointed by the organizational unit conducting such habilitation procedures, and from among these people a secretary as well as a reviewer are indicated.

Reviewers, not later than within six weeks, present their reviews, evaluating whether scientific achievements of the candidate meet the statutory requirements. The habilitation committee submits its resolution to the organizational unit conducting the habilitation

procedures including opinions on awarding or refusing the degree of doctor habilitated alongside with its justification. On the basis of this resolution the organizational unit passes a resolution awarding or refusing the degree of doctor. Such a resolution is legally valid the moment it is passed.

A degree equivalent to the degree of habilitated doctor may be acquired by a person who obtained the degree of doctor abroad or in Poland while working in another country for at least five years independently managed research teams and has significant scientific achievements. A decision on this matter is taken by the rector of a school which employs a given person. The rector informs the Central Commission of his or her decision. The mode for awarding the degree of habilitated doctor, according to the legislator, is supposed to facilitate, streamline and accelerate procedures for awarding this degree.

The highest position of a scientific career is the title of professor conferred by the President of the Republic of Poland on the basis of a request made by the Central Commission. The title of professor may be conferred to a person who obtained the degree of habilitated doctor or acquired competences equivalent to those of a habilitated doctor. A person pursuing this title must represent:

- a) scientific achievements exceeding those required in the course of habilitation procedures,
- b) experience in managing research teams implementing projects granted by means of domestic and foreign competitions,
- c) achievements within academic auspices - has promoted at least three doctors as well as participated in doctor's theses or habilitation procedures at least twice as a reviewer,
- d) completion of academic placements and scientific works conducted at international or foreign institutions.

A request for conferring the title of professor are made by the council of an organizational unit, authorized to award the degree of habilitated doctor within a given field. The council presents the Central Commission with a list of ten candidates for reviewers from among people who are not members of a given council or unit in which the candidate for the aforementioned title is employed.

The Central Commission appoints five internationally recognized reviewers from among the list presented, or from among other people. On receiving reviews, the council of the unit passes a resolution on conferring or refusing the title of professor and sends it to the Central Commission. The Central Commission, within six months, passes a resolution on presenting the candidate for the title of professor to the President of the Republic of Poland.

This model of scientific career in Poland arouses considerable controversy in the academic community. This applies particularly to habilitation procedures. Moreover, people who wish to be awarded with the title of professor have grave doubts as well. Numerous critical opinions were expressed in „Forum Akademickie” (Academic Forum)⁷, or in other circles, such as the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland. Final provisions of the amended Act as well as amendment to the Ordinance on the detailed mode and terms of proceedings for conferring the degree of doctor, habilitated doctor and the title of professor will have to be waited for since only recently the first procedures complying with the amended provisions will be conducted.

An academic career, as opposed to a scientific career, should be considered from two perspectives: firstly as a career based on the position, and secondly – on the functions held. Both these paths mean employment with a higher school. Pursuant to the Act scientific workers and faculty members may be employed in the following positions: full professor, associate professor, visiting scholar/professor, assistant professor or assistant. Whereas faculty members are employed in the positions of senior lecturer, lecturer, or foreign language teachers or instructor. The Act determining the positions in which academic teachers may be employed also indicates what requirements they need to meet. The Act provides the minimum requirements necessary for holding a specific position. The statute of a higher school may determine or specify criteria thus increasing said requirements since the Act neither includes an automatic promotion after achieving

⁷ I.S. Olędzki, *Spory o model kariery (Disputes over a career model)*, „Forum Akademickie” 2006, no. 7-8; A. Malinowski, *Uproszczenie czy dewaluacja (Simplification or devaluation)*, „Forum Akademickie” 2006, no. 7-8.

subsequent levels of a scientific career nor associates particular positions with a specific scientific degree or title. In practice it happens that doctors are employed as assistants or habilitated doctors employed as assistant professors⁸.

Functions held by academic teachers within their higher schools constitute yet another area of an academic career. The Act provides only one position at a higher school, i.e. the position of rector, which depends on education. An article of this Act indicates that a higher school's rector must be a person having at least the degree of doctor. This provision applies to both public and private schools. Additionally, such a person's first employer needs to be the very school where he or she holds the position of rector. Whereas in the case of vice-chancellor particular requirements are described in the statute. Limitations only apply to employment with a higher school as a basic workplace, as it is in the case of rectors. In the case of these functions it seems to matter whether candidates for rectors or vice-chancellors possess skills in human resources management. Possession of a scientific degree or title does not directly translate into such guarantees.

In practice, the course of an academic career depends on a scientific career. Although scientific promotion is not required in each and every case. Higher schools impose significant restrictions on their own. Such activities result in blocking academic careers of young teachers in an effective manner, thus preserving the existing solutions. Paradoxically, a significant group of those who could change them is interested in maintaining them. Revoking these limitations would weaken their positions⁹.

A presented course of a scientific and academic career as well as its dependence on numerous factors indicates the existence of many complex mechanisms preventing higher schools from conducting fully independent personnel policies. This factor considerably differentiates higher schools from other organizations which can implement their personnel policy in a flexible manner. Restrictions imposed upon higher schools significantly influence the quality of teaching and scientific research being carried out.

⁸ *Szkolnictwo Wyższe w Polsce...*, quote, p. 250.

⁹ *Szkolnictwo Wyższe w Polsce...*, quote, p. 254.

Employing independent scientific personnel in highly paid positions is not reflected in the quality of teaching by any means. Presently, in the era of the National Framework of Qualifications, evaluation of teaching effects as well as constant monitoring of graduates' professional careers, maintaining unproductive personnel only in order to obtain a license for conducting BA or MA courses is pointless. Currently, the Polish Accreditation Commission focuses on verifying teaching effects. Despite this, innovative, modern and perfectly educated scientific and teaching personnel are necessary for development of higher schools, for carrying out scientific research, and first of all for teaching. Yet, a full-time employment model leaves a lot to be desired. It forces higher schools to implement irrational employment policies, thus leaving them in a difficult situation, particularly in smaller centers, as far as management of their basic assets, i.e. scientific and teaching personnel, is concerned.

Nevertheless one of the basic functions of each higher school is to create conditions for acquiring, training and maintaining independent scientific workers. A shortage of this group, as it has been already mentioned, or lack of its scientific activity, marginalizes the functioning of a given scientific unit, and in extreme cases results in their liquidation. This may apply to single organizational units, e.g. departments, or to whole scientific centers, institutes or schools. These workers are particularly important for small higher schools situated in small academic centers. In such centers a loss of one or two of their independent workers may lead to a shortage of a minimum personnel necessary for maintaining a given major.

Another very important role that independent workers play is to train and develop young scientific personnel. Education is not only formal training, but also informal knowledge. The entirety of influences and effects of prospective and voluntary young scientific workers has an undeniable impact on their development. Such workers need to expand their knowledge through constant training and undertaking specific scientific and research activities. Their teamwork abilities, cooperation, engagement and competitiveness are formed. Development of cultural personality of young people available in their surroundings, in personality patterns and experienced interactions with other people cannot be overestimated as well. Such development occurs in the course

of a spontaneously evolving social life. These processes may take place if there is a positive relation among various groups of scientific workers. Contacts of independent workers with their younger colleagues become indispensable not only within professional and scientific areas, but also within culture, customs, exchange of views and the like. Discussions, exchange of views on scientific issues, talks result in reflection, which is very needed in scientific work, thus leading to a positive scientific 'unrest'. Without developing its own faculty, which means developing young workers, a higher school cannot expand and mark its own, permanent position on the market of educational services. Local people, directly connected with a higher school, are particularly important in such groups of workers. It becomes very important for young workers to be in touch with independent workers, both formally and informally. In this manner relations „master - student” are formed, which shape a young scientist, influence his or her moral and social conduct, develop his or her ethos of an academic teacher and scientist.

It needs to be remembered that higher school operating in small academic centers the number of independent workers is relatively small, which directly translates into academic competences that a given unit possesses. Scientists employed at such higher schools must obtain their degrees at large scientific centers, frequently having an unfriendly attitude towards them, where it is difficult to go through an impenetrable maze of regulations and cliques existing in scientific circles. Undoubtedly, acquiring scientific promotion before 'friendly' department councils is significantly easier. Numerous factors contribute to this phenomenon, among others knowledge of research issues, friendliness of one's own environment, knowledge of a specific person (broadly defined abilities, diligence, kindness and the like), self-restraint in criticizing one's colleagues and the like¹⁰. Therefore small higher schools or their organizational units in order to develop their own scientific personnel need to seek cooperation with universities which have vast scientific potential, or with their organizational units.

¹⁰ See: Z. Kruszewski, *Trudno realizowana funkcja regionalnych szkół wyższych w Polsce (A function of regional higher schools which is difficult to carry out)*, in: *Politechnika Warszawska Filia w Płocku na tle społecznych i gospodarczych uwarunkowań szkolnictwa wyższego (Płock Branch of Warsaw Technical University in comparison with higher education circumstances)*, eds. R. Marcinkowski, Warsaw 2012, p. 28.

Płock higher schools, not only Pawel Wlodkowic University College, face problems of their own independent scientific personnel. The situation looks the most optimistic at the Higher Theological Seminary, yet due to the specificity of this school, its number of students and majors independent workers are and can be useful at other higher schools only to a limited extent. Although declarations issued by this environment need to be appreciated and recognized as very important, as it is in the case of assistance and involvement of some priests - independent academic teachers, and also priests with doctoral degrees who support other Płock higher schools¹¹.

In other higher schools in Płock providing basic employment for independent workers looks really unsatisfactory. Admittedly, all higher schools fulfill minimum personnel requirements for conducting particular majors at a given level, however, they rely on older workers who are often at retirement age and very often do not live at the place where their school is functioning. This phenomenon has great significance for the development of younger faculty, and for the development of higher schools as well, e.g. carrying out scientific research, obtaining grants and the like.

Yet it may be observed that their own independent scientific personnel is on a very slow increase; they associate their scientific and academic careers with their workplaces, i.e. with Płock higher schools. On the other hand Płock higher schools are not attractive enough to young independent workers to come here from other academic centers.

The issues related to the development of scientific and teaching personnel also apply to a newly established course - social work. Hopefully difficulties connected with scientific promotion of the faculty will be overcome by the management of both the department as well as the school.

Academic authorities notice the actual scope of this problem, and that is why proper measures are being taken. One needs to hope that the school will meet the requirements for a major in social work and that this course will be developing properly and will be useful for students who wish to learn this difficult profession.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 88.

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