

Academic Profession as Perceived by Faculty

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the findings from a study of faculty's perceptions of teaching as the most significant component of the academic profession. In a broader context, it investigates into the transformation of the academic profession, meaning that professors in Russia as well as around the world tend to perform research, administrative, and expert functions more and more often. Previously, Russian researchers observed a conflict between faculty's perception of teaching as the most important profession component and administrators' publication productivity requirements. A number of publications present strategies that professors use to adjust to the changing administrative requirements. However, the existing findings mostly reflect administrators' perception of the academic profession, on which the faculty's perspective is considered to be implicitly dependent. Available literature offers little evidence of how professors perceive the content, meaning, and goals of the academic profession.

The present study was designed to find out by which goals and norms faculty members are guided in doing their work and to determine the logic behind the way they allocate their efforts among various aspects of teaching. Data was collected using focused in-depth interviews carried out in a Yekaterinburg university. Research was performed within a methodological framework of grounded theory and narrative analysis which traces its origin to hermeneutics. Findings indicate that professors share similar perceptions of the skills necessary to do their work, the goals of teaching, and the criteria for maintaining educational quality. Meanwhile, there is no platform for building those perceptions, faculty's attitudes being shaped under the influence of their mentors and personal experience. The study also evaluates the impact of other university actors (students, colleagues, administrators) on the respondents' perceptions of the teaching process. Finally, a rationale for building professional solidarity within the university's academic community is provided.

Keywords: academic profession, teaching, university, teacher autonomy, in-depth interview.

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Academic profession is a significant issue in modern educational research. In Russia, researchers in this field analyze faculty contracts and the recruiting system [Sivak, Yudkevich 2009; Andrushchak, Kuzminov, Yudkevich 2013], identify professional preferences and roles of

faculty members [Kozmina 2014; Abramov, Gruzdev, Terentev 2017], and assess the extent of academic freedom inside the hierarchical structures of universities [Kurbatova, Kagan 2015; 2016]. Authors seek to link their findings with the changing faculty working conditions. Those changes are often associated with updates in administrative requirements imposed on faculty, so studies often reveal conflict in the relationship between faculty and administrators. Meanwhile, the content of the academic profession is largely formed by the administration and thus subordinates professors, who are only left to choose how exactly they will fit into the framework imposed on them. However critical the analysis of administrative requirements for faculty might be, it still problematizes only the aspects that get into administrators' optics—that is, research and service. Faculty members themselves, however, perceive teaching as a much more significant component of the academic profession [Sivak, Yudkevich 2013; Rudakov 2018b].

This article seeks to bring a broader dimension to the idea of the academic profession in Russia by reconstructing the content, goals, and challenges of teaching practices on the basis of in-depth interviews with faculty members of a Yekaterinburg university.

Universities are hard to work with, as they are deeply engaged in games of symbolic power and positioning [Bourdieu 2018:23]. Sources of hierarchy in universities must be explained prior to doing research on the academic profession. Managerialism—integration of the management principles typical of private corporations into public institutions—is a major global trend in university development, which also applies to Russia. Faculty members are losing their status to the consolidation of expert and administrative positions of managers defining faculty performance indicators, the elimination of democratic procedures, and precarization of labor [Abramov 2011; Kurbatova, Kagan 2016; Kolycheva 2019]. The Humboldtian model of university, which implies extensive autonomy of the academic community, has receded into the background [Kurennoy 2011; Kropotov 2015; Saronov 2016].

In this study, we hypothesize that, even though the managerial university model suggests providing administrators with control over academic professionalism, faculty members retain the influence on teaching, which they perceive as one of the most significant components of the academic profession. What does teaching involve for them? What goals do they set? What challenges do they face? What norms do they abide by? In other words, what perception of teaching are they guided by, and how do they construct it? Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis allow answering these questions based on the experience of faculty members.

The review of literature presented below is aimed at demonstrating that qualitative methods are indispensable in the study of the academic profession in order to clarify the perception of the meanings and

content of academic professionalism. While qualitative methods have already proved to be valid in international studies [Bogdan, Biklen 1982; Lichtman 2013], the limits to their applicability have just begun to take shape in Russia.

**Contemporary
Sectors of
Research on
the Academic
Profession**

Teaching, research, and service are the three main components of the academic profession identified by researchers. The undergoing transformations manifest themselves in the reallocation of time resources among these three types of work, first of all in the conspicuous skewness towards research to the prejudice of teaching [Gottlieb, Keith 1997; de Weert 2009]. Foreign researchers often describe the relationship between research and teaching as a conflict arising out of the introduction of scientometric indicators to assess faculty performance [Euwals, Ward 2005; Seema, Udam, Mattisen 2016; Maimela, Samuel 2016; Jung, Chan 2017; Rawn, Fox 2018]. This is true for Russian universities, too. Back in 2005–2006, faculty members were mostly rewarded for extra course load [National Research University Higher Schools of Economics 2008:209], while in 2016, extra compensation was mainly provided for research activities [Rudakov 2018a].

Not only do administrators define the performance criteria and the remuneration policy by offering performance-based contracts to faculty members, but they also highlight priorities in their perception of the academic profession. That perception, however, differs from that of most faculty members, who still find teaching the most significant component of their professional activity. Findings from the 2012 Changing Academic Profession (CAP) project show that 17% of the faculty sample prioritized teaching over research, and 43% reported being rather interested in teaching than research [Sivak, Yudkevich 2013]. According to the 2017 Monitoring of Education Markets and Organizations, 27% of the surveyed faculty members were concerned about teaching only, and 50% preferred teaching over research, while acknowledging the importance of the latter [Rudakov 2018b]¹.

The CAP-2012 findings show characteristic differences in the allocation of working hours between teaching- and research-oriented academics, job satisfaction rates being higher among research-oriented faculty [Kozmina 2014]. A study of time budgets of faculty members at the Moscow campus of Higher School of Economics allowed identifying five strategies of distributing time among teaching, research, administration, and expertise used by professors. Irrespective of the strategy followed, respondents reported feeling overloaded and having to juggle a few different activities at once. Researchers hypothesize that the incidence of faculty's dissatisfaction with the time budget

¹ Results of these two studies are incomparable due to sample divergences (the CAP-2012 sample is skewed towards research universities).

structure might be related to the institutional norms of professional and management culture [Abramov, Gruzdev, Terentev 2017].

Professors' perceptions of work overload represent an individual area of research. It was established based on qualitative data and semi-structured interviews that faculty members felt burned out and unhappy about their pay in 2014–2015 but nevertheless remained interested in teaching [Fadeeva, Fedoseeva 2015]. Participant observation and in-depth interviews with teaching staff were used to determine the factors affecting perceived professional wellbeing. An overwhelming majority of the respondents considered teaching to be socially significant, satisfying, and inducing positive emotions. Factors decreasing the level of perceived professional wellbeing included routine and force-majeure bureaucratic workload and the lack of personal time [Filonenko, Yakovleva 2019]. In those studies, interview is a key method of data collection, but the analysis methods applied do not allow going beyond the traditional view of professors as academics who choose between research and teaching and bear the costs of managerial control.

A survey of faculty members from over 40 Russian higher education institutions (HEI) of varying status was conducted to examine the techniques of evading managerial control. Over half of the respondents were found to exhibit opportunistic behavior, most of them ignoring research activities, others, vice versa, minimizing their effort in all activities except research, and still others following the rough opportunistic strategy of consistently paying no heed to the whole triad of teaching, research, and service [Kurbatova, Kagan 2016]. The survey was based on inferences drawn from the findings of 27 in-depth interviews with faculty members from seven large cities of Russia, which indicated an increase in work intensity, time spent working, and the bureaucratic workload as well as curtailing of academic freedoms under the influence of "managerial controls" [Kurbatova, Kagan 2015]. This is one of the few studies that construct the perception of the academic profession using professors' interpretation of the changing conditions of their work.

Interviews with faculty members were also used in a study assessing HEIs' quality assurance policies [Forrat 2009]. On the whole, the respondents agreed in seeing quality education as learning to learn and being skeptical about quality management at their own university. Another study analyzed university administrators and faculty members' perceptions of the rules of university life to explore how the limits of university autonomy had been shifting [Abramov 2011]. Both studies zeroed in on the relationship between academic bureaucrats and faculty. Nevertheless, they do provide a rough idea of the goals and content of teaching as perceived by modern faculty members, which follows from respondents' perceptions of "quality education" in the former case and perceived value of autonomy, including academic freedoms, in the latter.

Perception of teaching challenges is analyzed from the first-person perspective in the discussion essay *My Five Major Challenges in Teaching*, which leads to the idea of variation in teaching practices and the need to create a platform for discussing the purpose of education, the role of teachers in university, as well as the goals, standards, and methods of teaching [Radaev et al. 2018].

Generally, Russian studies of the academic profession focus on the tension between research and teaching as constituent parts of the profession, observe strengthening of managerial control over various aspects of faculty's work, and describe faculty's attitudes towards the management and incentive control systems existing in present-day universities.

The vast majority of publications approach faculty members as objects to which specific means of control are applied, their responses to external stimuli being the focus of research. There is an apparent lack of studies treating faculty as subjects who define the content and forms of their work for themselves. Qualitative research methods allow putting faculty members at the center of the academic profession issue and drawing attention to the things that are important to them, including teaching as the most significant component of their work.

Scope and Methodology

Qualitative methods of research are designed to examine “the ways and specific aspects of subjects’ reflexivity of social reality”; they allow identifying the purpose and meaning that people find in their work and seeing the logic of links among different aspects of their activity [Shteynberg et al. 2009:64–66]. Qualitative research results in analytical description, i. e. “comparing the evidence, establishing a typology, and devising assumptions and concepts relative to the structures of causal links and description feasibility.” [Ibid.: 22] Focused in-depth interview is a key method of data collection for this type of work. Eleven interviews were conducted on the condition of anonymity² in a regional university in November–December 2018. As most HEIs in Russia, that university has no special status (federal or flagship university) or category (research university), i. e. no special founder requirements apply to its research activities. This is a public institution of higher education located in Yekaterinburg, offering degrees main-

² Interviewees are assigned individual identification codes that will be used when citing their responses. In addition, descriptions contain information about the interviewee's gender, position, and the type of pay. I1—female, Associate Professor, salaried; I2—female, Associate Professor, nonsalaried; I3—female, Full Professor, salaried; I4—female, Senior Lecturer, salaried; I5—male, Senior Lecturer, salaried; I6—female, Associate Professor, salaried; I7—male, Senior Lecturer, salaried; I8—male, Senior Lecturer, salaried; I9—male, Teaching Assistant, nonsalaried; I10—female, Senior Lecturer, salaried. I11—female, Teaching Assistant, nonsalaried. Responses undergo some minor literary editing.

ly in social sciences and meeting the Survey of Performance of Higher Education Institutions' baseline requirements, with the minimum score of 70 for admission to government-funded places. The rectorate gave its consent for the survey to be conducted in one of the university's large structural units.

Interviewees were selected with regard to differences in years of teaching experience, positions, and nonacademic experience. Eight of them were salaried workers, and three were external part-timers. Three interviewees were inbred (graduates from different departments), three had graduated from Ural State University (different schools), four from other Yekaterinburg HEIs, and one from another region. Three interviewees were charged with service duties (one head of a department and two academic secretaries). The respondents belonged to different age cohorts and held positions ranging from Teaching Assistant to Full Professor. To achieve the goal of research, the interviews included a biographical module focused on educational background and career choice, questions about exemplary teaching models and professional teaching standards, and questions about the content of current work and external assessment³.

Full interview transcripts were coded using the grounded theory methodology [Strauss, Corbin 2001]. At the stage of initial coding, micro-themes were generated (e. g. "lecture plan", "search for information", "reciprocal visits", "departmental requirements", etc.), which were then broken down into categories using axial coding (e. g. "teaching skills", "interaction with colleagues", etc.). Axial coding allowed identifying the interview fragments that were the most significant for understanding the specific aspects of the respondents' teaching practices. In selective coding, connections among the axial categories were analyzed to find the core themes recurring in the interview data. Next, narrative analysis—which traces its origin to hermeneutics [Kvale 2003:53]—was applied to the core themes. This method implies several cycles of analyzing the narrative from its parts to the whole and back while explaining its details as well as overall connectivity at every stage. Narrative analysis allowed interpreting individual interview plots, comparing evidence from different interviewees, and making assumptions about the relatively unspoken professional principles underlying their actions. This resulted in an analytical description of the main components of the interviewees' teaching practices.

The data obtained provides answers to the questions, which frameworks and goals faculty members are guided by in the classroom, what they include in the minimum professional skill requirements, what teaching challenges they face, and who may be the source of

³ For the interview guide, see Appendix. Questions about research and service are deliberately excluded, but most interviewees addressed the topics themselves when describing the administrative requirements imposed on their work and the time that they spent on non-teaching activities.

change in their everyday teaching practices. Those questions will be investigated in two sections below. The first one describes how the interviewees perceive the component of teaching that depends directly on their professional effort. The second one reconstructs the respondents' perception of how their teaching is affected by other significant stakeholders.

**From the First
Person: Faculty
Members'
Perceptions of
Professional Skills
and Teaching Goals**

The interviewees' responses about teaching include description of routine tasks and examples from their teaching experiences. Although each experience is unique, the interview data reveals shared ideas of the major components of teaching, the skills required, and the challenges faced.

When describing what teaching involves for them, all the respondents enumerate activities that can be referred to as typical: lectures, tutorials, academic advising, student assessment, and development of teaching materials (for students, not for reporting⁴). Lectures and tutorials were found to be highly standardized methods of teaching; with one exception⁵, every interviewee has developed a teaching style of their own and uses methods that they find to be relevant to the course objectives. Preparing for class involves first of all updating one's own knowledge.

The interviewees shaped their perceptions of how to teach under the influence of their own experience and, to some extent, that of other professionals—usually their mentors, whom they look up to as role models. Reproducibility of personal teaching experience is provided by a set of professional skills. Judging by the interview data, this required set includes four skills: searching for information, presenting the material in an easily digestible way, constructing a student assessment system, and fostering students' interest in the subject.

Searching for information is considered to be a basic skill to update one's knowledge and fill one's course with relevant theoretical or practical material.

I3: "I've got this model that's been ingrained since I was a university student. We wrote the summary of all the three volumes of *Das Kapital*. All the questions, all the tasks referred to it as a primary source. Drawing upon the sources, that's what was instilled in me."

I10: "Also, I analyze a variety of cases on online resources such as *Sostav*, *Adme*, and so on."

⁴ The Federal State Education Standard defines development of teaching materials as additional service workload that takes away time from teaching.

⁵ An external part-timer, who had just started his university career, reported having to invent teaching methods right during the class due to no teaching guides being available.

I8: “My first summer, I had to learn a lot of new material that I might had not learned properly as a student.”

Self-education is described as a continuing process running in parallel with teaching and fueling it. The interviewees share the idea that teachers should update their knowledge as part of their own research. This is hard to achieve in real life, however, as faculty members suffer from a severe shortage of time. Most often, they learn about new teaching tools, empirical data, and theories from online courses or conferences they attend. In addition, they sometimes consult course books.

I1: “If it’s not an innovative course but just a new one for you, then you just find the right course books and read a few, up to five, I guess. Well, that’s simple, that’s what you do ideally. When you don’t have the time, you’ve got a lot of research stuff to do, you’re preparing for a conference, you have to submit a report, and you’ve got only one week before the lecture—that’s what we actually do in real life.”

For a new course to be assimilated by students, it is important to know how to get them interested and present the course material in a digestible format. Ability to deliver content in a clear manner is an integrative skill which involves putting considerable design efforts in advance, as it implies constructing the logic of every lecture and course as a whole, ensuring connections between theory and practice, and finding the right presentation format.

I1: “First of all, I always pay careful attention to making it as logical and structured as possible. Otherwise, students won’t understand anything, it will be just a jumbled mess. Second of all, I try, to the extent that I can, to deliver that material in an artistic—well, maybe not artistic but expressive—way. Because if you drone on, reading from a piece of paper or your slide notes, people will switch off in 5 to 15 minutes.”

I4: “A good course is good, understandable lectures that can be used as a learning material independently. It’s a good set of practical tasks that allow students to apply the knowledge they have gained from lectures, and some good tests—which, again, do not require literal reproduction but foster some creative skills.”

Most interviewees do not associate the task of delivering the course material with that of assessing student achievements, so the comprehensibility criteria for lectures and tutorials remain an open question. Faculty members find students’ interest a more significant factor than the level of theoretical knowledge, since interest helps maintain a productive climate in the classroom.

I3: "Getting students interested is the most important thing. Whatever is done out of fear is less productive, I believe."

I5: "You have to get them interested from the very beginning to avoid a situation where their only question is, whether they'll get their credits automatically or not—so we would develop a more... conscious approach, I guess."

According to the respondents, students often lack interest in their major or learning as such. This trend is commonplace, yet it still evokes an emotional response in faculty members.

I3: "Because the number of government-funded places is reducing, such involved students are also decreasing in number—I mean, their critical mass in student population is shrinking. That's truly sad."

I8: "Some have been forced to take that major by their parents, and they have to do it even though they don't want it at all. Of course, it can be hard at times, when you try to stir them up and they just won't!"

Faculty's perceptions of what makes up students' interest in a course are largely based on stereotypes about the benefits of praxis. Professors often decide on their own which practical skills exactly to promote, proceeding from the syllabus and their own experience. If students happen to have questions, the teacher is eager to answer them. However, such situations are rare, since the ability to articulate one's educational demands is a skill that students, by and large, lack and hardly ever have a chance to learn from anyone.

I7: "And they start asking, "Show us some real-life stuff! Where can I apply it?" But as soon as we get to solving real-life problems, they start protesting, like, "Why so difficult?"

I11: "I believe this culture hasn't been shaped yet. It doesn't come easily or quickly, so it's important that you do it patiently, step by step calling on them to have no fear, understand their own needs, and feel free to ask questions."

In situations where students' demands are highly unstable or missing, professors may adapt the course content based on their own observations.

I2: "I try to go by students' needs, because they are different every year, and you can see it, you can read it off them. And I have to find a new, personalized approach every time to turn them out motivated and with a bundle of knowledge in the first place."

To perform intermediate and final assessment of student performance, faculty members need to know how to develop points-based ranking systems and final examination criteria. According to the interviewees, transparency and consistency of grading practices must be prioritized in this type of work.

I7: "From the very first day, you need to treat students as adults, expose them to rigid rules, boundaries, and deadlines. It works for me. At the very least, it does improve performance by building discipline. At least, they send in their home assignments on time. Why? Because otherwise there will be penalties, or I will not accept them at all."

I1: "It would be fair to include in tests and exams only the topics that the teacher had the time to cover in lectures or seminars. It's wrong when students are required to study on their own the topics that they may simply not understand."

For teaching staff, learning outcomes are not only students' grades but also their output attitudes towards the subject. Some professors collect oral or written feedback on their course upon completion to find out what was the most important for students and whether they were satisfied with the learning process. However, very few do it consistently. Faculty members do not regard the feedback system⁶ existing at their university as a tool to support their work, as they find the wording and the scale misleading.

As the interviewees describe their teaching practices, they sound convinced that other teachers possess similar skills and go by the same norms. It could be suggested here that there are common normative frameworks within or between university departments, which guide faculty members in their work and make them feel professionally connected. However, cooperation with department colleagues is only mentioned in the background by the interviewees, whereas communication between departments is not mentioned at all, and the common normative framework turns out to be dictated by the management without regard to faculty opinions.

A Look from the Outside: How Colleagues and Administrators Influence the Structure, Forms, and Goals of Teaching

Department colleagues are the nearest professional circle for faculty members, the first to seek advice from and cooperate with in solving work-related issues. However, the interviewees were not inclined to contact their colleagues closely, discussion of shared course plans

⁶ An organized anonymous online feedback survey is conducted in the IT room. Students are asked to rate on a five-point scale some parameters of teachers' practices, such as using active forms of learning, using multimedia technology, punctuality, etc.

being reported as the closest kind of interaction. Two respondents mentioned that some teaching norms were determined by department heads, yet they were unsure whether such norms were binding.

I8: “We don’t give credits automatically, that’s the main rule... Well, at least the head of our department forbids it.”

In rare cases, faculty members regard particular colleagues as holders of valuable professional skills willing to share their experience.

I4: “If there’s anything, I can ask N. for advice on some aspects, because he actually has a teaching degree.”

Reciprocal visits, as a system where each faculty member would have a chance to prove their professional skills and get feedback from their colleagues, are not practiced in the universities surveyed. Teachers who remember doing so in the past speak positively of the practice, even though the feedback criteria were sometimes vague. One interviewee regards reciprocal visiting as a “filtering” practice that allows shaping the department-wide standard of teaching, while another respondent sees it simply as an opportunity to look at oneself with someone else’s eyes. Yet another faculty member, while speaking about reciprocal visits, delves into reflecting on the reputation system. To her mind, it makes sense for university departments to adopt the peer review practices of scientific journals, so that professors could get feedback from colleagues who are experts in related fields, as well as from external experts, wherever possible.

The existing election procedures do not operate as a tool for assessing faculty performance and selecting the best members. Colleagues vote for one another habitually, and academic councils rely on formal criteria when appointing candidates proposed by departments, research performance indicators accounting for the overarching majority of those criteria⁷.

⁷ According to the job descriptions and the collective agreement, teaching is the main type of faculty workload, but the competitive selection system includes research performance requirements such as research productivity (the number of publications in the Higher Attestation Commission’s list of peer-reviewed journals indexed in the *Russian Science Citation Index* (RSCI), *Scopus*, and *Web of Science*), citation index, grant applications, and external funding indicators. Teaching proficiency is assessed using two indicators, availability of a steering document for the specific discipline and at least one study guide or course book published in the last three years (the latter does not apply to teaching assistants and lecturers). Any faculty member will be paid twice the region’s average salary if they achieve the performance indicators stipulated in the Law on Teacher Merit Pay. Teaching effectiveness is assessed using the indicators of performance in curriculum design, service, examination, and research activities, points being as-

Most of the salaried faculty members have no idea of the teaching methods used by their department colleagues. In some cases, professors manifest interest in their colleagues' practices, considering them to be valuable and worth adopting. One of the interviewees expressed confidence that seeing the big picture of faculty's work is what heads of the departments should do. As a result, it appears tricky to identify the evolution mechanisms of teaching and professional reputation standards. At least, peer review is not one of such mechanisms. On the one hand, faculty members doubt that colleagues assess their work (or will ever provide feedback): to the direct question, "Do you think your colleagues care how you teach?", follows an equally direct answer "No" (I2). On the other hand, the respondents take no interest in their colleagues' practices either.

I6: "It's just that many new people have come, and I don't know what kind of teaching they do. Yeah, it's true, I actually don't know it."

Being uninterested in cooperating with colleagues, the interviewees are nevertheless concerned about some interdisciplinary and interdepartmental issues that have to do with the goals of teaching and have to be solved through collective self-management.

All the respondents agree that students' knowledge and skills are the target outcome for a teacher. However, there is no uniform idea about the baseline levels of subject-specific knowledge, the standard course learning requirements, the assessment procedures, or the meta-goals of particular education programs. Teachers of general education disciplines suffer from professional isolation most of all. The metaphor of a train passing by is used by one of the interviewees to emphasize how little impact she has on students' overall learning outcomes.

I6: "Of course, you may be doing your best and so on, but you understand that your role in this project—that particular student—is minimal."

Meanwhile, degree-granting departments want general education disciplines to be taught with a major-specific focus or to foster the skills that are hard to learn within major core courses. The intention of interdisciplinary department lecturers to be a logical part of the big training picture explicitly correlates with the intention of degree-granting departments to make an educational product of higher quality with

signed for achieving the pre-defined target indicators (e. g. publication of a study guide or participation in a conference). Research performance indicators are described in the most meticulous fashion, and cumulative points for them can exceed those obtained in the other three domains combined.

the help of external resources. Yet, no cooperation is established between departments.

I8: "I can't refer to any particular professors right now, because I don't even know who reads what. Even the Business Communication course—it came as a big surprise to me that it's presented by the Department of Philosophy... If departments fostered initiative more actively, maybe we could actually come up with some joint solutions according to the department's ability and students' needs."

External experts invited to deliver specialized courses also observe low faculty cooperation, the main reasons being vague departmental standards of teaching and the lack of continuity throughout the courses. External lecturers expect that the fundamentals of their discipline have been studied at earlier stages, but their expectations are often not lived up to.

I9: "And when the prof starts telling them [students] the material, they are not getting it. They just don't know the terminology. The prof, meanwhile, is all into practice and communication with colleagues, experts like oneself, and used to a certain level of competence."

Interviewer: "So, those basics must have been learned in the lower division?"

I9: "Well, somewhere previously. I mean, the bare bones at least."

I11: As a new faculty member, I'd certainly like to obtain some general information on the department I work with. What kinds of students and courses we have, which courses our department provides and why... So I could choose and improve [the course] to the extent of my knowledge, skills, ability, and competencies. Well, yeah, there are teacher guides... But their content varies. A few teacher guides per course. It is critical that there be only one teacher guide which is reviewed on time, say, once a year. There should be a systems expert who oversees the structure and content of teacher guidelines at the department. That's what is missing."

On the whole, descriptions of cooperation practices provided by the respondents allow for the conclusion that faculty members largely behave as atomized individuals. Peer advice, development of common teaching goals, and compliance to the same standards do not account for a noticeable portion of their work. The interviewees have no significant community within their university to communicate the professional norms.

Faculty members being disconnected, the university management has been gaining more and more control over their activities. Faculty attendance has been monitored for some years; in September 2018, CCTV cameras were installed in the classrooms. Those measures were criticized by the faculty and local mass media. The interviewees' major concern is that administrators declare the need for improving educational quality, while lacking the necessary evaluation and monitoring competencies.

HEI administrators are seen first of all as a branch responsible for discipline enforcement.

I1: "The only thing they care about is timely submission of reports, grade books, and exam records. In fact, someone at my own department filed a complaint against me recently for not submitting exam records on time. In mean, they took the effort. No matter how I deliver my lectures, no matter how good a teacher I am—maybe I'm terrible, or maybe I'm a genius—but it surely does matter that I haven't submitted those records on time. That's what matters: reports, grade books, records. Paperwork."

From the perspective of faculty members, administrators' influence on teaching is restricted to monitoring compliance and availability of guidance documents at the department. The university does not set the goals of education or define the preferred ways of achieving them, as administrators provide no value or curriculum orientations for professors. Even though the interviewees are concerned about the absence of common educational goals, they are not interested in letting the management interfere into the choice of methods and content of teaching.

Conclusion Interview findings reveal the lack of a common language to describe teachers' professional experience, be it at the level of departments or the whole university. The respondents are autonomous in their teaching activities, freely setting the goals for themselves, choosing the methods of teaching, paths and strategies of their own professional development. The idea of academic freedoms is implicitly built into their everyday practices, yet none of them refers to it directly—which is in line with Roman Abramov's inference that academic autonomy is rather part of daily routine than an element of professional rhetoric [Abramov 2011:41].

A paradoxical situation is discovered in this field of research. Findings indicate that professors share similar perceptions of the skills necessary to do their work, the goals of teaching, and the criteria for maintaining educational quality. Meanwhile, there is no platform for building those perceptions, and there never has been any. Faculty members have shaped their internal standards of teaching under the

influence of unique factors, such as their mentors' practices and personal experience, which often involves working for other educational institutions and/or various government and business entities.

The influence of departments on the development of teaching practices appears to be rather conditional. Even if faculty members speak "for everyone", being convinced of their colleagues following the same norms, this conviction is not supported by cooperation, as it becomes clear from the interview data. Management's control over teaching is perceived as an unpleasant, yet inevitable factor. The interviewees see clearly the gap between their own perceptions of teaching and the administrative requirements, which is manifested in the transcripts as a conflict between continuous integrated effort and selective formal requirements. Faculty members have no interest in new ways of regulating the part of their work which is currently under the management's radar, as administrators' competencies and motivations carry little credibility.

Comparison of interview data with the short fragments of professors' talking about their work, cited in studies of the academic profession, allows concluding that modern faculty members share concerns about the increase in effort required to maintain educational quality [Forrat 2009; Abramov 2011; Kurbatova, Kagan 2015; Filonenko, Yakovleva 2019]. In the present study, the respondents contend that faculty members need to demonstrate research outputs in addition to teaching workload in order to retain their positions and increase their earnings—which is consistent with the national trend [Kozmina 2014; Rudakov 2018a].

Amidst shortage of time and administrative pressures, teaching autonomy is the small oasis of academic freedom that is available in the university of today. It is impossible to determine precisely whether this freedom is perceived as debris of the Humboldtian model or as a way of building new educational models by trial and error.

It can be assumed, based on the interview data, that it is universities' academic communities in the first place that can promote professors' intrinsic motivation and give them a greater sense of purpose in their routine practices. The interviewees' demand for jointly developed goals of teaching—unstated yet obvious—correlates with Pyotr Safronov's insight that today, with the status of academic professionals declining in Russian universities, new forms of academic communication must be created [Safronov 2016]. Faculty members are interested in greater transparency of the learning process, coherence of educational goals, and availability of teaching standards within the university. Apparently, the management has essentially discredited itself as a branch capable of providing those conditions. As for students, they can rather inspire professors than articulate their demand for professionalism in the academic community. Departments, therefore, remain the space where the meanings and purposes of education can still be forged.

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Appendix: [Educational and professional background]
Interview Guide

What is your educational background? How did you come to teach at this university? Is this your first employment? Have you worked/ Are you working somewhere else?

What do you teach? Have you always taught this course (these courses)? Have you engaged in professional development? Where? How was it?

Did someone teach you how to teach? Did you have any role models? What or who inspired you when you started teaching? Are you inspired by anyone today?

Does teaching in higher education require any specific teaching skills?

[Teaching practices]

Could you please describe your teaching routine? What do you do on a daily basis? What makes up your teaching activity?

What is your fondest memory associated with teaching? How often do situations like that occur?

How is your classroom organized? How do you monitor the learning process and assess the outcomes? Does your department provide any assessment standards?

What are the major challenges faced by faculty members? Have you had any conflicts you're your students, colleagues, or the dean's office? How were they solved?

Is there something you do that no one else at your department does? What is it? How is workload allocated among the department members?

Do you need to expend any effort to retain your level of proficiency? If yes, what kind of effort?

Does the university support your professional development? What does it look like? Do you have a say in those decisions? Do you consider such support the university's responsibility? If not, then whose?

[External assessment]

Have you ever had your teaching skills assessed by your colleagues? Is election to academic positions a situation like that? Should it be?

What do you think is important in your work to the university administrators? How does the management assess faculty performance? Have you ever had your performance assessed?

Is student assessment of teaching necessary? Is it in place right now? What should it be like?

[Self-assessment/Perceived image of the profession]

Are there any common rules of faculty life? Is there a faculty standard or code of conduct?

Does it matter what position a faculty member holds? Is there any difference between Teaching Assistant and Associate Professor, and should there be?

How would you describe a quality academic course? How should it be designed? What does it take to be a good teacher?