

Working Conditions of Academics of a Mexican University

Ana Hirsch-Adler¹; Douglas Izarra-Vielma^{*2}

¹Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4290-4270> anaha007@yahoo.com.mx ²Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador, San Cristóbal, Venezuela <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7629-2244> izarravielma@gmail.com

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Abstract

Introduction: Academics participate in various evaluation processes of their work and receive multiple demands from the universities and from society. This fact impacts the working conditions of postgraduate teachers and researchers. In the context of the Applied Ethics and Education Project, a question was included: What are the main working conditions needed to have an adequate environment for research? **Purpose:** Analyze the answers obtained and compare them with the results of a previous research to identify changes that have occurred in recent years. **Method:** It is a descriptive and interpretative study that used Qualitative Content Analysis, and in which 291 postgraduate educators from a public Mexican university participated. **Results:** They refer to the infrastructure and resources, having adequate and fair working circumstances for the professional group, and the need for a favorable environment of freedom and respect for the members of the community. **Discussion:** The results obtained and their comparison with previous research and other studies show that the difficulties to develop an autonomous professional practice are increasingly evident, especially for the new generations of university professors.

Keywords: Teacher's working conditions; Researchers; University Professors; Values; Performative Culture

Condiciones de Trabajo de Académicos de una Universidad Mexicana

Resumen

Introducción: Los académicos participan en diversos procesos de evaluación de su trabajo y reciben múltiples exigencias de las propias universidades y de la sociedad. Este hecho impacta las condiciones de trabajo de los profesores e investigadores de posgrado. En el contexto del Proyecto Éticas Aplicadas y Educación se incluyó la pregunta ¿Cuáles son las principales condiciones de trabajo que se necesitan para contar con un ambiente adecuado para la investigación? **Objetivo:** analizar las respuestas obtenidas y comparar con los resultados de una investigación previa, con el fin de identificar los cambios ocurridos en años recientes. **Método:** se trata de un estudio descriptivo e interpretativo que empleó el Análisis de Contenido Cualitativo, y en el que participaron 291 educadores de dicho nivel de enseñanza de una universidad mexicana de carácter público. **Resultados:** Hacen referencia a la infraestructura y recursos, contar con circunstancias laborales adecuadas y justas para el colectivo profesional, y a la necesidad de un ambiente favorable de libertad y respeto para los miembros de la comunidad. **Discusión:** Los resultados obtenidos y su comparación con la investigación previa y otros estudios demuestran que las dificultades para desarrollar un ejercicio profesional autónomo son cada vez más evidentes, especialmente para las nuevas generaciones de académicos universitarios. .

Palabras clave: Condiciones de trabajo; Profesores Universitarios; Investigadores; Valores; Cultura Performativa

*Correspondence:

Douglas Izarra-Vielma
izarravielma@gmail.com

Introduction

The university role involves the performance of multiple tasks especially related to its substantial functions. These institutions are intellectual spaces that somehow overlook their dimension as a work environment (Allmer, 2018). Faced with this idea, the interest of the article is to study working conditions in higher education.

It is an interdisciplinary field that is constantly growing, as it has undergone various transformations that permeate all aspects (Romero, 2019). Some of them are the evaluation processes associated with entry and permanence in economic stimulus programs, in which research is fundamentally valued. In relation to this, the pressure to publish has become part of academic life (Van Dalen, 2021), manifested in expressions such as “publish or perish,” which can distort community sense and practices (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales - Foro Latinoamericano sobre Evaluación Científica [CLACSO-FOLEC], 2022). Demands usually fall on professors and researchers (Fuksman et al., 2019).

The interest in studying working conditions in higher education institutions is justified by the implications on training and knowledge generation processes, as well as professional development and personal well-being. For example, Palacios & Montes de Oca (2017) conducted research at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and found a close relationship between the work environment and the stress experienced by academics in a highly competitive context.

This topic was previously studied (Hirsch, 2021) by analyzing the answers to the question *How can the university contribute to improving the academic work of postgraduate professors?*, posed in an interview guide that was applied to 34 postgraduate academics in 2017 and 2018. The results showed bureaucratic-administrative issues, multiple evaluations, procurement system setbacks, organizational problems, poor infrastructure, and difficulties with labor unions.

Other findings were the strong difference between the conditions of institute and

center researchers and those of faculty and school professors, the situation of subject-based professors, the lack of positions, and work overload. Information was provided on the problems involved in merit evaluation in institutions and external funding agencies, and the prevalence of research over teaching.

The circumstances identified in the previous research may have changed in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the occupation of those in charge of postgraduate training in different ways (Peña et al., 2022). Particularly in Mexico, since 2020, the federal government promoted measures guided “by public policies of austerity in public spending, moderation in size and functioning of the government apparatus” (Marúm & Rodríguez, 2020, p. 89), which implied the extinction of public trusts and research project financing.

The foregoing justifies the need to delve into working conditions and, in this sense, the Applied Ethics and Education Project included the question *What are the main working conditions needed to have an adequate environment for research?* The study includes a literature review section to situate the subject from different contexts, a description of the methodology used, the results, and the conclusions.

Specialized Literature Review

We briefly present a synthesis of the eight papers selected on the subject, which are from different countries: Mexico, South Africa, Colombia, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, and Poland.

Arcos Vega et al. (2018) describe the problems at Universidad Autónoma de Baja California Sur, in Mexico, from the professors' perspective. They used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross sectional, and descriptive method. In addition, a Questionnaire created by Kraut (*Organizational Surveys: Tolls for Assessment and Change*, 1996, in Arcos et al., 2018) was applied electronically to 107 academics. The categories analyzed are academic work, work environment, college life, and institutional decisions. The main findings report that restrictions of public policy in higher

education have affected the performance of educators, since economic incentives and job stability are restricted in educational institutions. They report that the several influencing factors include communication structures and induction and involvement practices, and that the limiting elements are communication skills, physical and administrative arrangements, the stress generated by evaluation and control, and the absence of recognition.

Based on a qualitative methodology, [Buenidia et al. \(2019\)](#) analyzed the same issue in Mexican universities with respect to the following questions: What working conditions exist among part-time professors in public and private Mexican universities? How do they perceive the relationship between their experiences (conditions and workload) and their future expectations? Twenty six interviews focused on job insecurity were conducted, and three variables were identified: contract time, economic retribution, and benefits. They pointed out that the study of university professors in Mexico was at least three decades old already, and that the central issues were profession, social traits, career path, academic market, academic career, work dehomologation processes, program effect, work overload, and salary complexity and differentiation for dignified retirement. They found that the unfavorable condition is the result of short contract duration, low hourly pay, lack of benefits, restrictions to aspire to various performance incentives, thesis advising, social service participation, and belonging to research groups.

Through 23 online video interviews, [Naidoo Chetty & Du Plessis \(2021\)](#) conducted a study at a university in South Africa to identify job demands and the resources available to experienced professors. A qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological approach was used, taking ethical considerations into account (approval of an ethics committee, verbal and written consent from all subjects, information about research objectives, and confidentiality). They classified the findings into three categories: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Organizational. Regarding the first, the most frequently mentioned was the pressure to publish. Participants expressed that

the time dedicated to research was seen as a task carried out after teaching and administrative requirements, and that another obstacle was research funding. They expressed being overburdened by having too many students and because they worked long hours and on various tasks. Other aspects are the use of time and bureaucratic problems.

As for the qualitative findings, the issues are focused on skills and the effort needed to fulfill tasks, not only in terms of the volume of what needs to be done but also of the complexity. It is the imbalance between work life and family responsibilities; support for students respecting their diversity, in aspects such as race, sex, religion, age, and language; organizational policies that impacted most of the interviewees, involving bureaucratic tasks and the emotional effort required to perform them; the lack of tutoring; and the lack of consideration for academic staff welfare. The use of technologies for teaching and resource limitation were discussed concerning organizational demands.

[Charria Ortiz et al. \(2022\)](#) analyzed the configuration of academic profession sense in 160 university professors from public and private universities in five Colombian cities. The study was quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, and descriptive. The "Questionnaire on the quality of work life in human service organizations" was applied.

It was composed of 173 items measuring the scales of working conditions and general occupational well-being, the Maslach Burnout Inventory, and another questionnaire on commitment, in addition to a qualitative part with five key words that sought to explore work experience.

The results showed general trends towards the ambivalent configuration of the academic profession sense, emphasizing, on the one hand, fragmented working conditions that denote exhaustion, cynicism, and collateral effects, and, on the other hand, the possible formation of academic professionalism. Furthermore, it is pointed out that the temporary nature of the contractual relationship generates precarious working conditions that may lead to psychosocial risks.

[Reymert & Thune \(2022\)](#), from the University of Oslo in Norway, study whether the tasks performed by professors are really complementary or rather characterized by having to perform multiple activities. They reported that student supervision is positive for research development, as is collaboration with public and private organizations.

Universities are expected to contribute to the “third mission,” which refers to the dissemination and use of knowledge in society and the economy. Professors are asked for more and more effort and must be efficient multitaskers to cope with increasing issues and responsibilities. Based on empirical work review, they found that there was little complementarity between research and the “third mission,” and between research and teaching. They analyzed a database on the academic work of 1,475 university professors from all fields of science. They found that the reorganization of work toward multitasking increased, causing secondary effects on individuals, which are exacerbated when tasks are not complementary. In addition, complementarity exists when the resources, knowledge, and time used in one task can be used in other tasks.

From Sweden, [Griffin \(2022\)](#) defines the term *work-work balance* as the way in which educators seek to balance work demands.

The author conducted semi-structured interviews with Digital Humanities practitioners in Higher Education from Nordic countries in 2017-2018. The topic emerged strongly in the interviews. In her specialized literature review, she found diverse notions, such as intensification and increased workload, time management, work pace acceleration, growing stress among higher education workers, and contract-related precariousness of academic work. In all cases, complex and demanding circumstances were described in terms of effort and time, with consequences for work-life balance. Regarding the empirical information, the author identified several problematic situations, such as working on multiple projects, having several functional roles, and carrying out numerous actions in a single job.

From the United Kingdom, [Jayman et al. \(2022\)](#) referred to the commercialization of

higher education and its consequences. Their literature review indicates that academics are busier and work faster than before, undermining professionalism, academic freedom, and job security. The objective concerns the impact of performativity culture on well-being. Among the findings, the authors considered that higher education was affected by the neoliberal discourse during the last three decades, generating a highly competitive climate within and among institutions. Students are seen as consumers, and the quality of professors is evaluated, including recruitment, retention, progress, and employment information through metrics. Some of the problems found were mental health problems and reduced well-being in both professors and students.

The purpose of the article of [Szromek & Wolniak \(2020\)](#) was to find out the level of satisfaction with scientific work and to identify the influencing factors. The project was conducted in 2017 with 763 academics from Poland, although the specialized literature review considered publications in several European countries. The level of satisfaction was found to depend on employment conditions and the social significance of the research developed.

This level correlates positively with researchers' scientific opportunities and negatively with the need to carry out administrative work. The academic career unfolds in a complex web of rules, norms, and expectations, as well as national, societal, institutional, professional, and disciplinary cultural characteristics. It may be fragmented by status, rank, type of main activity, age, and gender. The numerous results, which were classified as positive, negative, and neutral, include academics' satisfaction regarding the appreciation of their work as the factor with the greatest positive influence. Meanwhile, the excessive burden of teaching and administrative tasks is among negative results. It was noted that the level of satisfaction increases with seniority, as well as with gender, level of remuneration, and years of teaching experience. It was also associated with psychological resources, such as perception of self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience with respect to pressure.

Concluding the Literature Review

Despite the differences among the countries chosen, academics face similar problems, mainly the enormous inequality between those employed on a full-time basis and those with part-time contracts. Other relevant aspects are job stability; economic remuneration and the possibility of improving personal conditions and professional development; multitasking and the use of time and resources required for teaching and research; lack of recognition for their work; lack of participation in decision-making associated with academic work; and administrative problems and difficult relationships with authorities and administrators. With respect to the positive aspects, satisfaction with work and college life, positive identification with the profession, and willingness to develop the substantial functions in adequate conditions were mentioned.

Based on the literature review results, and considering the elements of the context presented in the introduction, the aim of this study is to identify, from the postgraduate academics' perspective, the working conditions necessary to develop research. This will serve to make a comparison with previous research results, seeking to identify the changes that have occurred in recent years.

Method

Design

In the last two decades, the qualitative approach has been strengthened by its paradigmatic positioning, which, based on social criticism, allows addressing the problems of educational systems and their institutional contexts ([Ponce et al., 2022](#)). In this case, a descriptive and interpretative study was conducted using Qualitative Content Analysis, which can be defined as a research technique that, through the systematic identification of specific characteristics within a corpus, allows inferences to be drawn from the data ([Mayring, 2014](#); [Shava et al., 2021](#)). This technique was applied to the answers to one of the questions posed in the

questionnaire designed for the Applied Ethics and Education Project, under the Research Ethics category.

Participants

The answers correspond to 291 UNAM postgraduate academics, characterized as follows:

1. Category and level in the institution: Researchers represent 53.8%. Professors accounted for 41% and include full-time, subject-based, and interim ones, as well as external tutors. Educators from 66 University entities participated: 33 institutes, 12 research centers, and 21 Faculties and Schools, including the high-school-level Colegio de Bachilleres.
2. The years of seniority in the institution per decade are very similar: from 1 to 10, 17.81%; from 11 to 20, 21.92%, from 21 to 30, 18.84%; from 31 to 40, 21.58%; from 41 to 50, 16.44%; and with more than fifty years, 3.08%.
3. Seventy-seven percent (77%) belong to the National System of Researchers (SNI, by its acronym in Spanish) from the National Science and Technology Council, and 86% to the Full-time Academic Staff Performance Incentive Program (PRIDE, by its Spanish acronym) (from the university itself).
4. As for gender, 55.14% were male, 44.18% were female, and 0.68% did not answer.

Instrument

In order to collect the pertinent information on the Applied Ethics and Education project, an open ended questionnaire was prepared, posing following question: What are the main working conditions needed to have an adequate environment for research? Prior to its application, a content validation process was carried out by requesting the opinion of a group of experts, who made observations and suggestions that allowed its optimization.

To administer the questionnaire, a three-section form was prepared on Google Forms. The first section presented the project, its objectives, and the people responsible for it. The confidentiality of the data provided was

guaranteed and informed consent was requested. An e-mail address was also provided to maintain permanent communication with those who raised doubts or asked for clarification.

The second part requested data related to work experience, years of service in the institution, and condition within the institution (researcher or professor). The responses were organized by areas of knowledge.

The third section included the questions and allowed participants to provide any additional information they considered relevant. Questionnaire administration took eight months, from September 2021 to April 2022, and special care was taken (given the guaranteed confidentiality) not to collect data (e-mail or IP address, for example) that could identify the subjects.

Procedure

The study included the 41 programs of the four areas of knowledge in which the institution organizes the postgraduate level: Physical, Mathematical, and Engineering Sciences; Biological, Chemical, and Health Sciences; Social Sciences; and Humanities and Arts. Since a significant number of respondents work in more than one program from different areas, another group identified as Cross Fields was added.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis was used as the information processing technique, specifically through the steps for developing the deductive categories proposed by [Mayring \(2014\)](#). The analysis took the aforementioned question as a starting point. In addition, a table was organized with all the answers classified by areas of knowledge, and a list of possible themes or preliminary categories was established, using other studies related to the problem (included in the literature review section) as reference.

Based on the coding process, the categories were adjusted attempting to obtain a complete view of the participants' opinion, identifying aspects common to all areas of knowledge and specific concerns. In turn, this served as a starting point for comparison with the results obtained in the 2017 and 2018 research.

Results

Coincidences and some particularities were found and organized in four major categories: values, infrastructure, and resources, working conditions, and interaction.

Regarding the first, the importance of values in the functioning of the institution and the actions of academics was consistently highlighted. At the institutional level, the following values were addressed: honesty, transparency, respect, and justice. At the individual level, responsibility, tolerance, autonomy, trust, communication, commitment, integrity, cordiality, empathy, openness, and critical thinking were mentioned. The value that is particularly important is freedom, which is presented in the four UNAM's postgraduate Areas of Knowledge.

The concern for the values associated with research ethics deals with research participants' rights and responsibilities and the development of good practices (such as data management, recognition of authorship and its standards, mentoring with supervision, peer review, certification, implementation, avoidance of conflicts of interest, and accountability). All this is related to academic standards and scientific ethics and integrity. Addressing the UNAM Code of Ethics (2015) is relevant. Another aspect mentioned was the importance of having national and international experts provide examples of cases in which a lack of integrity was evidenced and the reasons that led to such actions. Other aspects included having clear ethical principles and criteria, and Councils and Committees' openness and willingness to upgrade and be informed about ethical trends and regulations worldwide. Some evidence obtained from academics' responses is the following:

Where there is an environment based on responsible science and with good practices (scientific integrity, data management, recognition of authorship and related standards, mentoring with supervision, peer review, intercalibration, certification, implementation, avoidance of conflicts of interest, and accountability), structured around the UNAM Code of Ethics and the 1978 Belmont Report (postgrad-

uate programs: *Marine Sciences and Limnology, and Sustainability Sciences*).

Mainly freedom and respect, especially from authority figures (postgraduate programs: Arts and Design, History, and History of Art).

The second category addresses infrastructure and resources. A common concern in all areas of knowledge involves having sufficient material conditions to carry out research. This refers to the fact that the physical space (offices, meeting rooms, and study rooms) must be adequate in terms of cleanliness, order, equipment, air circulation, good temperature, furnishings, and lightning. Spaces should also be quiet to encourage reflection and the exchange of ideas and opinions, addressing different topics or problems of social or professional interest to the various working groups.

The need for computer equipment with up-to-date software, well-equipped libraries, access to national and international databases, and scientific literature was also mentioned. Furthermore, the importance of having quality Internet connection was emphasized.

The issue of resources is central. The most relevant aspects were economic and financial, the budget and funds for carrying out projects, as well as permanent and timely information on open calls. This was related to the need for trained technical support personnel and support for organizing and participating in seminars and conferences, and publishing.

The following are some testimonies of study participants.

World-class technical infrastructure (laboratories and equipment) is required, as well as access to specialized literature and discussion spaces (postgraduate programs: Physical Sciences and Materials Science and Engineering).

Well, I think that, unlike the institutes and centers, there are no basic research conditions in faculties. Research project meetings are held wherever possible, teamwork is done in our own or improvised spaces, and computer matters are addressed at home (postgraduate programs: Philosophy, Pedagogy, Philosophy of Science, and Higher Secondary Education Teaching).

The third issue refers to working conditions. There is regular concern about work overload, for example, the administrative and bureaucratic procedures related to university operations and the procedures for admission and renewal in the National System of Researchers (SNI) and the Full-time Academic Staff Performance Incentive Program (PRIDE). In general, there is a negative opinion in relation to the operation of evaluation systems.

Emphasis is placed on the value of quality over quantity, not using only the indexes defined the journals to recognize the importance of scientific work, and the implementation of ad hoc evaluations that consider the usefulness and promotion of social welfare. This is related to the need for transparent criteria, clear regulations, and mechanisms for evaluation, defining tasks, and the existence of sanction regulations and mechanisms when rules are broken.

There was agreement on the difficulty of reconciling professional and personal life. Another issue addressed was the time involved in supporting students and developing research projects.

Problems derived from the inequality among academics were clarified, especially in terms of two characteristics: the status of researchers compared to that of professors, and the time of dedication due to the difference between full-time and part-time or subject-based staff. The importance of stability, job security (of professorship and place of work), respect for schedules, decent salaries, and the problem of not having enough job vacancies were pointed out. Some testimonials from academics are as follows:

First, respect for everyone. Having bosses who understand the different situations that each researcher faces. An understanding and empathetic boss is much more helpful than a hateful and selfish one (postgraduate programs: Materials Science and Engineering, Biological Sciences, Chemical Sciences, and Medical, Dental, and Health Sciences).

The oversaturation of both academic and administrative activities hinders these conditions. Since there are not enough vacancies, we have groups with too many students; we must

advise too many students and carry out activities that divert our attention from research. In addition, the number of activities related to promotions, incentives, and reports is such that we spend much of our time on them. (postgraduate programs: Letters and History of Art).

Interaction is the fourth category and refers to the relevance of developing effective communication processes both inside and outside the university. Internally, it is linked to the permanent relationship among colleagues, and with students and authorities. It is also related to the existence of mechanisms for academic participation and the creation of interdisciplinary work teams. Externally, there is contact and feedback with high-level researchers, participation in networks, and professors from other institutions who contribute constructive criticism to work and an effective link with society.

These ideas were identified in all areas of knowledge, since they concern the construction of a favorable workspace, where cooperation must prevail. In addition, in the event of conflicts, they must be resolved within a framework of respect between the parties, fostering the existence of a safe environment. Furthermore, tolerance was also included in relation to diversity, non discrimination, inclusion, and gender equity.

There were also testimonials related to problems of coexistence among university community members and with the authorities, such as attacks and stigmatization, toxic managers, school and sexual harassment, and the need for managers to listen to proposals without animosity and prejudice. Some of the ideas put forward by the study participants are presented as evidence:

An academy closely linked where no one can do what he or she wants independently. All projects are supported by different people from different disciplines and contexts, i.e., not only among researchers, but also with students and even with civil society (postgraduate program: Industrial Design).

A non-endogamous and active academic community, used to interacting with other colleagues who carry out first-class research. A community where there is confidence to express negative situations, and that they are

not interpreted as personal quarrels (postgraduate programs: Philosophy of Science and Biological Sciences).

Discussion and Conclusions

The comparison based on the results obtained in the previous research ([Hirsch, 2021](#)) is presented. During 2017 and 2018, 34 interviews were conducted, which are compared with the product obtained from the application of the previously described questionnaire answered by 291 academics in 2022.

In the first study ([Hirsch, 2021](#)), seven categories were defined: Solutions for the various bureaucratic-administrative problems; Improving working conditions; Taking into account the questioning of merit systems; Promoting support for professors and students; Facilitating communication; Developing evaluation processes; Promoting the maturity of college bodies; and Reviewing general postgraduate policies.

Regarding bureaucratic-administrative problems, emphasis was placed on the setbacks caused by the procurement system and organizational problems. Deficiencies related to infrastructure were identified, as well as the complications resulting from relations with labor unions. Regarding direct work with students, the aspects highlighted were the multiple evaluations to be carried out by professors and the obstacles faced by students in grade exams.

The difference in the working conditions of researchers (linked to research institutes and centers), professors (who depend on faculties and schools), and subject-based teachers was pointed out. Other aspects mentioned were the problems derived from the evaluation of merits both internally and by external organizations, and the preeminence of research over teaching.

When comparing these results with those found in the research conducted in 2022, multiple common elements are evident, revealing the persistence of various problems in the work carried out by academics. It is necessary

to highlight the permanent criticism of the evaluation systems, which also coincides with the findings in other studies carried out in Mexico ([Arcos et al., 2018](#)) and in contexts as diverse as the United Kingdom ([Jayman et al. 2022](#)) and South Africa ([Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis, 2021](#)), which explicitly mentioned the pressure to publish, commonly associated with evaluation processes.

Another persistent element in the two moments in which information was sought corresponds to working conditions, which is in line with the results of other studies. For example, [Griffin \(2022\)](#), who conducted research in Sweden, and [Buendía et al. \(2019\)](#), who conducted research in Mexico, note problems associated with work overload and the obligation to perform multiple, not very complementary tasks, as stated by [Reymert & Thune \(2022\)](#) regarding Norway. All this makes it difficult to reconcile personal and professional life as discussed in the work of [Naidoo-Chetty & Du Plessis \(2021\)](#).

There is also similarity in the existence of bureaucratic problems ([Arcos et al., 2018](#)) concerning the constant report preparation and meeting attendance, which also multiply when project funding is obtained.

It is possible to point out a differentiation within academic bodies. While one group enjoys benefits, such as job stability and good remuneration, others have problems due to contract length and a salary gap between those who hold full-time positions and those who do not, and between researchers (affiliated to centers and institutes) and professors (linked to faculties and schools), especially subject-based teachers. This situation was exposed by study participants, both in 2018 and 2022, and is also mentioned in other research works in Mexico ([Arcos et al., 2018](#); [Buendía et al., 2019](#)); other Latin American countries such as Colombia ([Charria Ortiz et al., 2022](#)); and in contexts as diverse as Sweden, such as the research conducted by [Griffin \(2022\)](#), and in Poland, such as the study of [Szromek & Wolniak \(2022\)](#).

The results of this research (obtained in the 2018 study) and the research consulted confirm a reconfiguration of the work performed by university professors. This is not a new process, as [Ibarra & Rondero \(2008\)](#) locate the beginning of

the academic work dehomologation in the 1980s of the twentieth century. According to these authors, “the formal evaluation of performance, based on the accounting of work products, was established as the norm, changing the nature, content, and organization of academic work” (p. 570). This way, the control of part of the working conditions was gradually transferred to institutions outside universities, moving: “from a mode of academic work regulation based on union and bureaucratic structures to another based on ‘merit recognition’ college structures” (p. 570).

The results show that this is a global process. [Jayman et al. \(2022\)](#) mention the advance of a performativity culture in the United Kingdom, and [Silva \(2019\)](#), from the analysis of postgraduate professors’ work in the area of administration in Brazil, formulates the concept of productivism, understood as “a performative act that institutionalizes a set of actions and behaviors [...] limits a system of beliefs and values oriented towards a performative culture socially incorporated into action, and affects working conditions [...]” (p. 341).

The most relevant difference between the results of this research with that carried out in different contexts, and even with the previous study of 2018, is the recurring reference to the values associated with working conditions. This is linked to having a university environment in which honesty, transparency, respect, and fairness prevail. In addition, academics are expected to act with responsibility, tolerance, autonomy, trust, communication, commitment, integrity, cordiality, empathy, openness, and critical thinking. These responses are particularly interesting because the study of working conditions focuses on material aspects in all the research works consulted, while there is a concern for ethical issues in our study.

As can be seen, academics’ working conditions of academics are so relevant that many authors have studied them. This article addressed that topic directly from the opinions expressed by a group of researchers and postgraduate professors through the “Research Ethics Project Questionnaire.” This way, significant elements revealed the consistency of the information

obtained over time and from the review of other works, in which some differential aspects were also identified. This is a current topic since the transformations in higher education institutions reveal the need to deepen research of this nature, taking into consideration the heterogeneity of situations experienced by postgraduate academics and the way in which this affects their professional development. This information is also essential for developing public policies related to the university environment linked to admission, professional development, and the standardization of working conditions that allow building fairer and more equitable spaces in higher education.

It is also important to point out that fragmented work, resulting from the changes that have been taking place in universities for several decades, is directly related to the problems identified. The establishment of a performative culture that privileges productivity to determine the worth of academics is responsible for the adverse circumstances that most testimonials identify and associate with evaluation processes.

The stability of the results over time and their consistency with what has been found in other Latin American and European countries reveals that the issue of academics' working conditions transcends national contexts. The ideal of academics who perfectly articulate research with teaching and university extension, and who can also reconcile their professional practice with their lives, is vanishing. The difficulties to develop an autonomous practice are becoming more and more evident, especially for the new generations of university professors. This implies a profound change in the professionalism of academics, which is often reduced to the fulfillment of standards and to be evaluated against them.

The results are limited since the number of study participants is small considering the universe of postgraduate academics at the university explored; in this sense, it is not possible to extrapolate the conclusions obtained. However, the consistency of the information gathered over time is a strength, as well as its similarity with the findings of the other research studies carried out in different contexts.

Finally, in the face of this situation, the importance attributed to values as an element that shapes the work dynamics is especially relevant. In fact, in an environment that can be presented as hostile given the imposition of certain ways of acting and producing, ethical discourse is a form of resistance. Revindicating freedom and respect is essential to maintain the ideals that inspire university work. Research and educational processes that serve the interests of society will only be possible if academics can carry out their work with dignity.

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