**Faculty Researching, Writing and Publishing in Mexico: A Comparative Analysis with US Expectations and Practices**

**Background and educational policies/contextual factors**

In 1996, as a result of NAFTA and recognizing that globalization in every field to include higher education was inevitable, Mexico petitioned the World Bank for loans. Prior to granting an financial assistance, the World Bank requested a status of higher education in Mexico. Mexico’s history of higher education, up to this point, had focused on teaching universities and preparing college students to fill professional positions; research and investigation were not a focus for Mexican universities.

Believing enhanced focus on research would help Mexico compete in a world market, the World Bank agreed to provide Mexico with financial assistance provided Mexico adopt the U.S. model for research practiced at research universities. Thus, the federal agency, Secretaria de Educacion Publica (SEP) - Mexico’s Secretariat of Public Education - imposed research and publication requirements on university faculty without any adaptation or consideration for the existing higher education culture and practices and without modifying the existing teaching load requirements for full-time university faculty.

SEP imposed requirements are uniformly applied to all Mexican Universities and full-time university instructors who are roughly analogous to tenured professors at U.S. Universities. The resulting researching, writing and publishing practices thus create fertile ground for analysis of those practices and also offer an opportunity to reflect on the current state of those practices within the U.S. to help guide an examination of culture-sensitive both in the U.S. and in Mexico.

**Draft Research**

This project explores how the PRODEP research and publication requirements have affected Mexican university professors whether or not professors are meeting PRODEP requirements and if so how they are meeting them and if not why not; whether common research and publication practices exist across disciplines; how these practices compare and contrast to practices in the US; how PRODEP tracks publication and what infrastructure changes at Mexican universities could help professors meet PRODEP research, writing and publication requirements.

**Introduction**

This project is a qualitative analysis of the practices University professors at a major university in Northern Mexico have adapted to the requirements imposed by the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in Mexico for increased research and publication productivity. Since the US model of research and publication was adopted by the Mexican federal agency, the authors examine recent scholarship regarding research and publication expectations in the United States noting that not all 4-year universities in the United States are categorized as research institutions. The distinction between *teaching colleges* and *research institutions[[1]](#footnote-1)* affects the expectations for research, presentation and publication in the United States. However, SEP did not make this distinction when it adopted the policies and procedures disseminated throughout Mexico and thus all full-time university professors are expected to comply with various levels of research profiles and categorization to earn both additional academic social capital and salary.

**PRODEP Research and Publication Requirements in Mexico**

**Mexican University Instructors’ Duties**

**before PRODEP Requirements**

**After PRODEP Requirements**

**PRODEP Tracking Practices**

**U.S. University Instructors’ Duties (compare to 4 year University working toward Tier 1 Research University)**

{Discuss differences in teaching colleges and research universities}

Even in US Universities, distinctions between tenure/tenure track (T/TT) and Non-tenure track (NTT) instructors exist. The University of Texas system, for example has begun decentralizing teaching load responsibilities to individual universities and within universities to colleges and department. The rationale behind this move, as indicated in correspondence from the University of Texas System Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs is to achieve “two primary goals: foster greater student success and advance each institution’s unique mission” (Leslie, 2017)

**Methodology**

Following primarily an ethnographic approach, and recognizing that Dr. Esquivel was uniquely situated to attend meetings of *cuerpos academicos* due to her position as a full-time instructor (analogous to tenured professor) and her prior administrative positions, Dr. Esquivel observed Mexican university administrators and faculty, interviewed both administrators and faculty members and analyzed documents guiding the administrators’ and instructors’ activities as well as the interview comments.

Data was collected during the January - May 2012 semester and June - December 2012 semesters. Follow-up conversations have occured to update the data collected during 2012.

Field notes taken during this time were later transcribed for detailed analysis and included documentation regarding customs, informal practices, communication practices, and routine and special activities instructors undertook (Hammersly & Atkinson, 2006). From a writing perspective, these field notes begin to identify how the cuerpos academicos began to coalesce as discourse communities with specific goals and objectives, communication genres, communication practices (Swales).

Observations - *cuerpos academicos* (research groups)

Dr. Esquivel observed 2 of the 4 faculty groups at the Northern Mexican University where the study took place. Each group included 5 instructors and they had a seven month history as a research group. These 2 groups were chosen since they met regularly.

{Based on Esquivel’s observations below, both Discourse Community and Activity Theory may be useful to analyze how the groups work and what writing they produce.}

Dr. Esquivel observed research groups during their regular weekly meetings. Observations centered on the intra-group interactions, the groups’ interactions with University, the members’ formal and informal communication, the means of communication among the group members and the roles each group member assumed. Dr. Esquivel did not participate in the group discussions, but sat apart from the group while taking field notes.

Research group members were also interviewed to glean their perspectives regarding their newly assumed roles as instructor/researcher. The interview protocol relied on Spradley’s (1979) recommendation to include both structured and semistructured questions. Some interview questions allowed the interviewees to describe their experiences to include both extraordinary or new circumstances and routine work they undertook.

Two professors who did not participate in the observed research groups were also interviewed to discover their rationale for not participating in any research groups.

To discover administrators’ perspectives, current and former college deans were interviewed. The goal in these interviews was to glean the administrators’ perspectives regarding the changing processes at the university and thus compare those perspectives with the ones from the professors.

Official university and SEP documents were also analyzed to determine the official stance offered by the regulating agency as well as the impacted institution.

**Results**

Professors in the research expressed:

1. They are unprepared for the rigors of research, writing and publishing;
2. They do not have time to learn how to research and write their findings due to existing teaching, mentoring, and service expectations which were not changed in any way to accommodate the new research and publication expectations.
3. They do not believe they have adequate support from the institution regarding
   1. Appropriate space to work;
   2. A balanced teaching/research workload.
4. They do not believe they have adequate financial support to
   1. Participate in conferences;
   2. Publish

Emerging Themes

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| --- | --- |
| **Administrators’ Perspectives** | **Faculty Perspectives** |
| Educational policy is rigid, vertically imposed, coercive and repressive | A more balanced teaching/research load is necessary |
| Excessive demands on time result in poor time management | Greater financial support is required |
| Training is necessary in various areas including financial support, institutional evaluation, educational evaluation and new technology | Training regarding effective research methods and processes is necessary |
| Greater and more effective communication is required between central administrators and institutional administrators and faculty. | Evaluation process for academic productivity is complex and unnecessarily bureaucratic and should be streamlined |
|  | Academic productivity may not meet PRODEP or SNI requirements |
|  | Peer-reviewed work is forced, artificial and selective. |
|  | Greater and more effective communication is required between central administrators and institutional administrators and faculty. |

{Goal is to focus on how the perceived difficulties affect the researching and writing activities -- one interview indicated that one learns writing by writing and researching by researching, but without adequate time for either, how can these activities be practiced and learned.

Would appreciate comments about group researching and writing.}

**Discussion**

The authors are collaborating on this element now -- while the unexamined adoption of the US research university faculty model has resulted in limited research achievement and frustrated research groups, faculty and administrators, opportunities for training may exist.

The key will be to identify training requirements and more specific obstacles to research and writing that can be addressed. Administrators may be well-advised to consider the faculty’s concerns about time demands and administrative support to allow time for both training in research and writing. Faculty may then have to consider on-going professionalization that in US Universities would be considered an active research agenda.

{Gonzales’ “Framing Faculty Agency Inside Striving Universities” may provide guidance for the recommendations.**}**

**Key Theorists and Frames**

To gather understand and interpret how Mexican university instructors navigate the PRODEP research and productivity requirements, Dr. Esquivel conducted interviews and observed meetings held by *cuerpos academicos* which met on a regular basis. Information gathering and analysis was grounded by qualitative and ethnographic data capture and analysis methods, and further informed by cultural analysis. Theorists and frames that informed the analysis and discussion include Bisquerra (2014) Geertz (1973), Erickson (1986), Hamersley and Atkinson (2006) and Denzin and Lincon (2005).

{Will address the theorists and frames within the methodology section as that is further fleshed out.}

Considering Discourse Communities and Activity Theory to further describe the faculty groups’ functions -- will help in identifying how the work is allocated and the tools used by them to achieve the imposed purposes.

References

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Swales….Discourse communities.

**Glossary**

***Academias -*** faculty.

***Cuerpos academicos/ grupos disciplinares/grupos de profesores de investigacion*** - research groups.

***Cuerpos academicos en formacion -*** SEP designation to research groups based on group participants and their registered status and research achievements with SNI. This is the lowest designation for research groups.

***Cuerpos academicos en consolidacion*** - SEP designation to research groups based on participants and their registered status and research achievements with SNI. This is the second tier of the SEP research group designation hierarchy.

***Cuerpos academicos consolidados -*** SEP designation to research groups based on participants and their registered status and research achievements with SNI. This is the third tier of the SEP research group designation hierarchy. At least one member of this type of research group must have a SNI profile.

***Docencia -*** teaching responsibilities. At Mexican universities, full-time professors are expected to teach for 12 hours of face-to-face contact per week; 20 contact hours are usual. No distinction is made between undergraduate and graduate level courses.

***Facultad -*** academic college

***Gestion academica -*** service to the University and profession. Examples include directing graduate level theses or coordinating events for the department, college or university.

**PROMEP - Programa de Mejoramiento del Profesorado -** Program for Faculty Improvement; precursor to PRODEP.

**PRODEP - Programa para el Desarrollo Profesional Docente -** Program for Faculty Development

**Perfil PROMEP -** registry required for university professors seeking to ….

**Secretaria de Educacion Publica (SEP) -** Secretariat of Public Education, the Mexican federal agency responsible for education policy and regulations at all levels, K- 12 and higher education.

**SNI - Sistema Nacional de Investigadores -** National Researcher Registry. Registration is required for advancement and participation in various research teams (*cuerpos academicos*). Professors seeking registry must hold a doctorate degree to be eligible for the registry.

***Tutorias -*** mentoring responsibilities assigned to full-time Mexican university professors. These responsibilities are in addition to duties typically considered service to the University in the U.S.

**Appendices**

1. For this study’s purposes, *research universities* mean institutions of higher education that meet at least 2 of the three criteria identified by Best College Reviews in ranking the top research institutions in the United States (2017) “The university has at least one research center or institute that functions under the jurisdiction of the university, but as a separate entity. (35%)  
   There are opportunities for undergraduates to participate directly in research. (35%)  
   The university receives federal research funds. (30%)”

   *Teaching colleges* is used to describe 4-year universities focusing primarily on awarding bachelor’s degrees. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)