

Reforming the University of Prishtina - Mission Possible?

**Top nine challenges and their
remedies**



Democracy for Development
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remedies**

Pristina, November 2015

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Preface

History used to divide people along royal blood, race or other traits. Modern times have rather seen growing poverty among the low-skilled. Predicting the advent of the machines, the Economist predicts that the future will divide people in two camps, those who invent or use technology well and those who will be replaced by it. Nations which fall behind in the race for knowledge will find themselves stuck as low-wage earners or worse.

Previous technological innovation have delivered more long-run employment, but this time it may be different.¹ It is thence of highest strategic priority to take the future head-on before we are rendered redundant by it. This paper is not a roadmap how to catch up with advanced countries, but it is a list of a shock therapy needed to get the patient to walk again.

To avoid the fate of low-skilled nations, tough decisions await education policy-makers and university administrators. Universities often teach yesterday's skills by inertia and their teachers are still compensated generously from the taxpayers' purse. We live in dynamic times where great syllabi may not be relevant by the time the first graduates that come out of the assembly line. As difficult as it seems, universities should strive to imbue graduates with the skills which will serve them for 40 years of their careers.

The global advent of technology means that reforms in higher education should be at the top of the priority pile for the country's top leaders. There are great examples of several Asian countries which used education as the single most important policy to move them from third-world laggards to world-wide leaders in fourty years. Kosovo aims to join the European Union, the largest single market with the highest competition for high-skilled jobs. The EU is in many ways the most exclusive club, but it may turn out the

worst if Kosovo cannot compete with high-skills. The abundance of robotics and information technology will bring cheaper goods and faster and better services but it may also generate higher unemployment in its least educated quarters.

Despite the massive challenge, Kosovo has a chance with the University of Prishtina today. Just when much of the country is descending into chaos, the University of Prishtina has taken a turn for the better. Its difficulties are daunting, but at least it has a leadership that is not willing to compromise.

UP's difficulties and the challenging path to getting out of the mess has started to resemble that of Kosovo. UP is an illustration that (a) hard work and steely principles pay off, (b) public boards composed of non-party professionals can make a change for better, and (c) it is possible to lead politicians of all colours to side with reforms. The UP has given hope to taxpayers that it can scotch the professors' abusive privileges, inflationary promotions. Despite the challenges posed by an anti-quality coalition mounted by the academics, the new rector is trying to enforce high quality academic performance and merit based academic promotion. The UP may turn out to be a powerful moral institution and the very catalyst for renewed trust on ethical professionals.

Kosovo has a long path to traverse, but even the longest path has to start somewhere. Semi-skilled clerks already get paid twice higher in Kosovo than in some EU member states, an indication of skill scarcity. Such skill scarcity is a direct result of various educational policies, including protection of jobs of professors whose skills will hardly be needed in the future. Quality was seen as luxury by several successive government, but the last minister has identified quality as a priority. Hence the timeliness of a report such as this one which identifies the nine most common diseases which

plague the UP and the prescriptions how to treat them.

To make sure the future comes faster, students should be turned into clients on the one hand and citizens of their university as an institution. If they are informed about the teacher-student ratio, the number of students in the classroom, and quality education that makes a difference, they may make more judicious choices as per their future career and ethical orientation. Ultimately, their choice will depend on their perception of the labour market. If they see a value in the shortest route to the diploma, there is little that can be done. But new jobs in Kosovo will be created only in the private sector, which cares for skills. A public institution like the UP has to provide with an ethical orientation which is long overdue and badly needed in Kosovo.

Leon Malazogu and Andreas Poltermann

27 November 2015

Executive Summary

The purpose of this paper is to diagnose the main problems that the University of Prishtina faces and offer remedies to those based on research with stakeholder as: students, teachers, and civil society. The paper addresses top nine problems afflicting the UP and offers practical remedies how to address them.

Kosovo has little academic tradition to turn to and the professors are increasingly seen as a major source of the problem and not the solution. This is an ideal moment to embark on an ambitious reform. Short of a critical mass of academics who uphold high standards, it may only be possible to raise the quality through competition and performance indicators.

Given the current environment, it would be virtually impossible to remedy poor teaching by merely adopting minimum standards and monitoring. The university should further help its academic staff set targets, measure their output, and identify ways to promote the professors who make the fastest progress over time. University management should cease to reward mavericks who pretend to complete four times their regular workload. It should instead reward those who manage to transform their teaching to match the future needs of the market.

University's governance ought to change, to make it more accountable vertically and more agile horizontally. Individual merit (and promotion) cannot be subject to democratic vote. Minimum standards must scotch the reason why informal interest groups exist, paving the way for a dynamic institution where individual hard work pays more than building sinister coalitions. Long seen as a role model, UP's professors have acquired an image of unethical loss of integrity. Meritorious professors should realize there is a new environment and they should abandon clans in

order to build a meritocratic academic environment.

Holding high standards is difficult and the first generations caught by high expectations rightfully feel cheated. The new Rector has demonstrated he is willing to be seen as the villain by his former colleagues, in the interest of us all. He should be supported in setting high standards against cheating and plagiarism, as harsh as these may be seen considering their tolerance for decades. He did not have to wait long to be vindicated, for he has mobilised Kosovars like few have done before.

Students must realize that job openings that asked for no more than a formal diploma and rote learning have largely been filled. Students and their parents today need to understand that there are few options other than hard work. If students at the Senate cease to have voting rights, their political ambitions may subside, paving the way to their deliberation of student issues.

Introduction

The interest to enrol in higher education in Kosovo has increased manifold in the last decade. Between 2004 and 2015, the number of tertiary students has tripled from 40,000 to 120,000. Today, Kosovo is a European leader with 6,669 students in 100,000 inhabitants, well above the EU average of 3,987.²

The oldest and the largest higher education institution in Kosovo, the University of Prishtina³ has also experienced a dramatic increase of enrolment, from 28,832 students enrolled in the academic year 2004/05⁴ to 52,665 in the academic year 2014/15.⁵ While the number of students and the number of study programs have almost doubled in ten years, the number of full-time academic staff in 2014/15 has remained the same, 1,007.⁶

The rapid expansion of the University has severely affected the teaching quality and the relevance of the programs to labour market needs, although these are not the only reasons behind its low reputation. As is the case with all public institutions in the post-war Kosovo, the University of Prishtina was seen by the political elites as a source of recruitment for activists and an efficient machine for acquiring academic degrees, upgrading one's social status, polish credentials of their supporters, secure a life-time pensions after politics, and as a possibility to improve election results. The University was often praised when it should have been harshly criticized, whereas the problems multiplied as a result of deliberate policy. For years, the governing structures at the UP served narrow interests and promoted populist policies rather than improve the position of the University in the European Higher Education Area.

The University of Prishtina struggles to break out of a parochial mind-set. Globalization of higher education has taken place long ago, and institutions of higher education in

Kosovo must undertake giant efforts to narrow the distance. The EU assessed that by 2015, 90% of the labour needs will require some computer skills.⁷ Educating the youth of one of the poorest countries in Europe, which is set to join the European Union, the University of Prishtina needs to think globally and prepare its youth about the jobs of the future. Quality of education, teaching staff, governance, politicization, corruption, enrolments are some of the topics that need a well-planned action to facilitate the reform at the University of Prishtina.

Except the chronic and gradual erosion of quality, in last two years, the University experienced a series of acute crises. A crisis in January and February 2014 resulted in the resignation of the rector because of an academic scandal. After a reform-oriented rector was appointed, he nearly resigned under forceful pressure and threats. The new university management now seems to have the highest chances in the recent history of the university to stabilize the situation at the University and create basic preconditions for substantial structural reform. The new management struggles to garner support within the University, especially among the academic staff although it enjoys popularity among the wider public.

The objective of this paper is to provide an informed insight to nine major challenges the University of Prishtina faces, and offer prescriptions how to address them. Following background data collection and analysis, D4D conducted a survey with students from various academic units of the University.

The survey consisted of 625 randomly selected students from nine different academic units in the University (61.6% female and 38.4% male respondents). Around three quarters of respondents were in their second and third year of studies. Except the interesting findings that it yielded, the survey was also used to design instruments for the

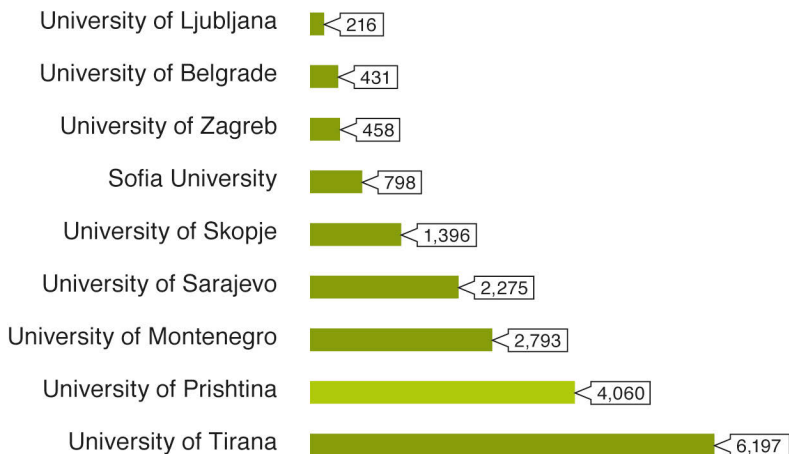
qualitative part of the study. Ten students were interviewed in a focus-group and numerous additional individual interviews were conducted with civil society activists and professors.

In terms of the thematic and visual organization of the paper, we used the medical analogy used before by D4D, identifying the ‘diagnosis’ supported by a clear causal relation, followed by a ‘prescription’ or ‘remedy’. The content of this paper was inevitably affected by the backgrounds of two authors. The first author is affiliated for 30 years with the University of Prishtina and has own opinion about each issue identified in this paper. The second author is a young graduate from a Western university for whom getting to understand the complexity of the University of Prishtina situation has been a somewhat shocking experience.

Problem 1 – The Need to Compete With High-Skilled Labour

The quality of teaching provision is the key ingredient linked to improved student learning and development. There is wide societal consensus in Kosovo that the low quality of provision is the key cause behind low learning outcomes with direct implications on economic and social development.⁸⁹ Policy makers have been usually attributing the low quality to limited resources rather than to the human factor. For the first time since the war, in 2014 the Minister of Education has declared quality as a priority.

Webometrics Ranking of Public Universities by July 2015



The only international ranking which includes the University of Prishtina is Webometrics, operated by a Spanish research institute. It measures the size and visibility of higher education institutions in the web which closely correlates with other internationally recognized rankings focusing on top-level universities. The July 2015 edition of Webometrics placed the University of Prishtina in 4,060th

position in the world, lagging significantly behind major public universities in all capitals of Western Balkans countries, except for the University of Tirana, as shown in the chart above.¹⁰

Diagnosis

Irregular or poor teaching, overcrowded classrooms, irrelevance of curricula to the labour market and virtually non-existing quality assurance systems pose the main challenges related to teaching quality at the University of Prishtina. Students extensively report frequent no-shows by their professors or cases when teaching is delivered by assistant teachers without advance notice. This particularly applies to numerous professors who neglect their teaching duties for they hold public office at the same time. In many cases, professors ask the students to sign attendance sheets for the missed classes, effectively asking students to help them **misreport their real workload**. This is possible because the professors submit their teaching reports on monthly basis, whereas there is virtually no functioning performance monitoring system at the University.

They only learn theory, and when offered a job, they are not ready to take it (Civil society activist).

Students admit that many of them have not acquired basic academic skills from pre-university education, but they usually blame university professors for poor classroom performance. A number of professors have begun to try contemporary tools, such as asking students to deliver presentations on various curriculum topics or write papers. But **novel teaching techniques are done half-heartedly** at best. Presentations and papers do not elicit proper feedback and are not effectively counted towards the

overall grade. The professors clearly do not see the presentations as an important part of the skill set that students need to master. If at all, the evaluation is not based on the quality of the material presented or the presentation skills displayed, but only on whether the student has showed up to deliver the presentation. Even the use of classroom discussion is employed inadequately for most students believe that classroom discussions are unrelated to the topic and/or curriculum.

Overcrowded classrooms severely affect the quality of education at the University of Prishtina. In the academic year 2014/15, teacher-student ratio was 1:52.¹¹ With slightly more than 1,000 full-time academic staff members, the University of Prishtina is unable to cope with over 52,000 students. The trend may be headed for a reversal for in last five years student enrolment has decreased from 19,392 in the academic year 2010/11 to 12,602 in 2014/15¹² which is largely due to the opening of new public universities having seceded from the University of Prishtina.

Employers surveyed by a USAID-funded assessment¹³ were unanimous in asserting that the high school and university curricula is disconnected from the labour market. The curriculum has little relevance to actual (leave alone future) labour market needs. There are no arrangements to link the workplace to the education and training system, including effective dialogue with employers (although a project has created a number of consultative industry boards). Students, teachers and civil society activists agree there is little if any practical work during university studies. Students report that teachers occasionally organize some forms of practical work, but only for selected students, e.g. visit to a court.¹⁴ It is interesting that there is little practical work even in programs not requiring strong links with employers or expensive laboratories. Even in fields where this is easily achievable (e.g. journalism amongst others) they do not

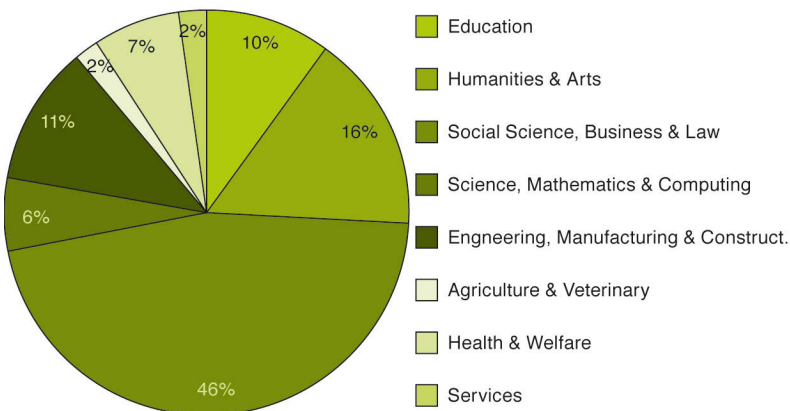
have the needed practical work, which is merely attributed to huge number of students and poor syllabus design. Whereas University of Prishtina has one full-time academic staff in 52 students, this ratio in Albania is 1:24, in Serbia 1:23, in Macedonia 1:17, whereas in Croatia 1:9.

Teacher Student Ratio



Most students surveyed (88%) believe that their **qualifications are needed in the labour market**, which is not shared by professors and civil society activists who think there are no jobs for such a high number of graduates. Around 71% of the student graduates (27,141) from the University of Prishtina in the last five years are from Education, Arts&Humanities and Social Science programs, and less than 20% in Science, Engineering and Agriculture, as shown in the chart below.¹⁵ Official statistics show that the unemployment of higher education graduates in Kosovo has increased from 15.5% in 2013.¹⁶ to 18.9% in 2014.¹⁷

Number of graduates by fields of study for the academic years 2010/11 through 2014/15



The number of academic programs at the University of Prishtina is much higher than its means warrant. The University currently operates 194 study programs accredited by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), 82 programs at the bachelor level, 86 at the masters level and 26 doctoral programs.¹⁸ The KAA is a full member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). However, KAA’s practical performance does not instil confidence that it applies internationally recognized quality standards in its accreditation process. The best example is the external Evaluation Review Report from 2014¹⁹ which commends the University for a series of achievements based on perceptions rather than evidence, and recommends unconditional extension of accreditation. In this context, the report indicates that “course evaluations are conducted, and reported on”, and “actions are taken to improve quality where deficiencies are identified by students”, which is not the case at the University of Prishtina.²⁰ A **dysfunctional internal quality assurance system** is one of the weakest points of the institution and an important cause of its

dissatisfactory quality of provision.

Remedy

Assuring quality should no longer be seen as a luxury which can wait but should be core of the reform processes at the University of Prishtina. Improvement of teaching is also important because of its crucial role in motivating students to learn and preparing them for their future professions.

- 1 The University needs to **revisit procedures for developing new academic programs and updating existing ones**, to ensure their quality, comparability, as well as include employers to be relevant to current and future labour market needs. Once procedures and standards are in place, all study programs should be revisited and those which are not possible to retain, for any reason, should be gradually phased out.
- 2 The University should **adopt minimum standards for its study program to make sure needed resources are available**. With respect to the latter, quality, number and staff motivation are of critical importance - the average number of five full-time teachers per study program is insufficient to ensure acceptable quality of the provision.
- 3 The University of Prishtina should find ways to **help its academic staff improve their teaching performance** by offering training, advice, international exchange, and adequate teaching resources. The new management has already taken first steps to put in function the Centre for Excellence in Teaching, and the initiative should continue by developing training programs for improvement of teaching to meet the needs of staff members.
- 4 **The quality assurance system** should provide information on the quality of teaching to ensure

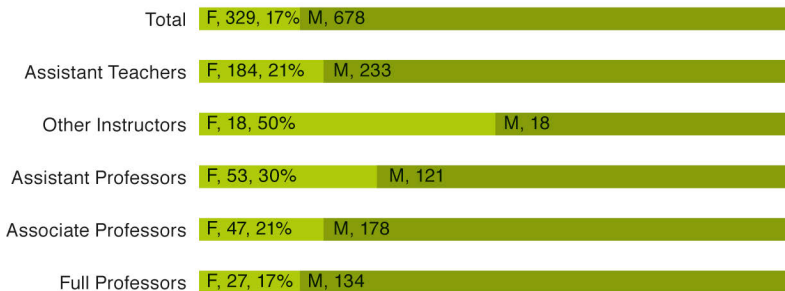
continuous improvement of the academic performance. The University should also introduce procedures to ensure high quality of study programs and relevance to labour market needs when applicable.

- 5 The University has to establish a system to monitor the regularity of teaching to **minimize no shows by professors**. Misreporting by students, professors, and university administrators must be rendered illegal which brings adequate disincentives and fines.
- 6 The University should **recruit more and capable teachers** thus improving teacher-student ratio, which also addresses previous points, minimum standards for study programs. Programs which cannot secure qualified academic staff should be closed. Some extreme cases of teacher-student ratio of 1:80 and worse, as it is the case in some academic units, have to be addressed with high priority.

Problem 2 – Towards Qualitative Teachers

The University of Prishtina has 1,007 full-time academic staff members: 591 teachers and 416 assistant teachers. Every year around 600 part-time instructors including retired teachers are hired by the university, bringing the total to over 1,600. The chart below provides detailed information on full-time academic staff by academic degree and gender.²¹

Full time academic staff at UP by academic degree and gender

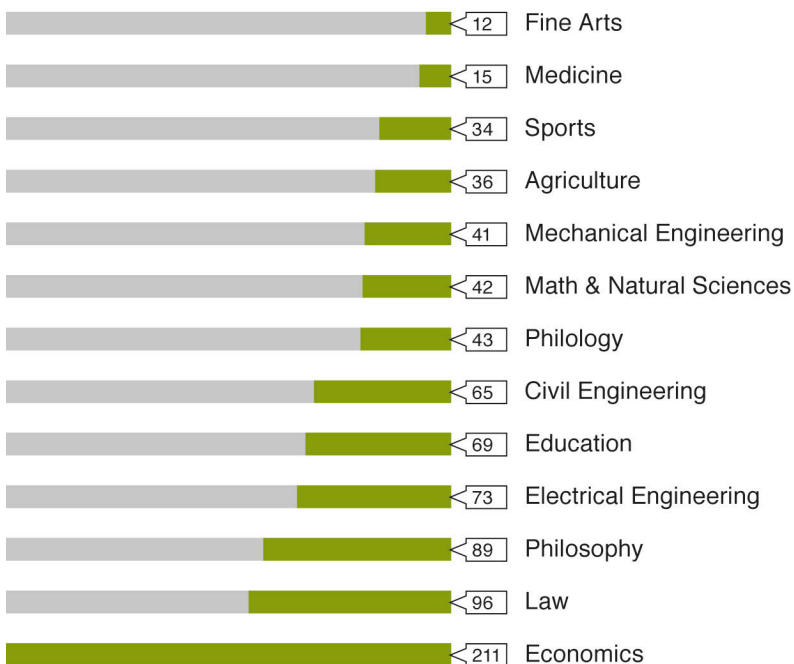


Academic staff contracts are based on teaching load only. With few exceptions, full-time teachers are required to teach six hours a week, whereas full-time assistant teachers are expected to teach ten. Monthly salaries for full-time teaching are among the best in the region, ranging from 700 – 1,430 EUR.²² However, most academic staff members earn significantly more since teaching of additional classes is paid at the rate of 25 EUR/class for professors and 13 EUR/class for assistant teachers. Teachers get paid in addition for proctoring exams and for supervising diploma papers, master theses, dissertations or sitting in various committees. Our analysis of financial data shows that average monthly salary for the period January-April 2015 was 1,351 EUR, which also includes performance of certain management duties by a number of staff members. On

average, a teacher made 2,281 EUR/month, whereas an assistant teacher made 846 EUR/month. These bonuses amount to quadruple salaries for some professors, who clearly do not meet quality obligations.

Diagnosis

Teacher Student Ratio (by department)



The 1:52 teacher-student ratio discussed in the previous section is not evenly distributed by academic units, nor should it necessarily be. **The teacher student ratio varies from 1:12** in the Faculty of Arts, or 1:15 in the Faculty of Medicine to 1:98 in the Faculty of Law or **to 1:211**²³ in the Faculty of Economics (see Figure below). In extreme cases, teachers have a double or even triple

teaching load, which inevitably affects the quality of their performance.

Additionally, many University of Prishtina academic staff members have teaching assignments in other public and private higher education institutions, which effectively prevents them from fulfilling their tasks satisfactorily. "In those countries where the private sector has proliferated the most (Kosovo, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia), the multiple employment of professors has also substantially deteriorated the education process at the public universities."²⁴ Academic staff recruitment was criticised even by professors and civil society activists that we interviewed as they implied that in many cases recruitments are not merit-based but rather through political and/or personal connections.

The University Senate has already reached the decision to permit in justified cases an additional teaching load of no more than 150% within the University of Prishtina, whereas only those who have no additional teaching load at the University of Prishtina may be permitted to teach in one higher education institution, one day a week. However, in Kosovo circumstances the implementation of this decision is a very challenging exercise, and therefore the University should set up internal monitoring mechanisms to ensure that staff members abide the decision.

It is a bit difficult to criticize a teacher, because s/he would be your instructor in 3-4 other courses and may retaliate (UP student).

In December 2014, the new Rector proposed to the Steering Board of the University to **discontinue the previous practice of paying half-salaries to academic staff holding public office** or managerial duties outside the

University of Prishtina. The decision affected 47 staff members including the Prime-Minister, eight members of the Government, two Constitutional Court judges, four members of the Parliament, one mayor, as well as rectors of other public universities and other high officials. They were all offered new contracts linking payment with actual teaching hours, and the possibility to return to full-time academic position upon expiry of their public mandates. Most of the academic staff affected refused to sign the new contracts and took legal action to reverse Rector's decision. As a follow up, the Employment Inspection ordered the Rector to reverse the decision. The Rector has appealed the decision, which has been temporarily suspended by the Court. ²⁵This decision has effectively freed around 600,000 Euros which can be used for more effective purposes.

The University of Prishtina faces a major problem with **unqualified staff**. There is the instance when the Kosovo Accreditation Agency permitted the Nursery department to contract staff that did not fulfil minimum qualification requirements. This happened even though the programs were accredited based on the assumption that there is qualified staff. ²⁶ There are other similar cases across the University of Prishtina where academic units have to hire unqualified staff to meet their needs, a practice that has been discouraged by the new Rector.

**I think the Rector is only trying to abide the Statute.
It seems we have a problem when we need
to observe legislation (UP professor).**

Staff promotion poses one of the main challenges at the University of Prishtina and the cause behind a collective positioning of the Senate against the new reformist Rector. The University Statute sets minimum conditions for the

promotion to teaching degrees requiring, *inter alia*, a certain number of publications in reviewed international journals. The conditions foreseen by the Statute have not been observed for more than a decade since they were legislated. Rector's insistence to follow the criteria set by the Statute has met resistance by the Senate, bringing its work to a halt.

Regardless of conditions set in the University Statutes, in almost all cases assessment committees, established by the university departments, have proposed promotions to a higher academic degree, e.g. an associate professor has been proposed for promotion to full professor. Following the policy of the new Rector to observe the Statutes, the Academic Committee of the Senate has reversed most of those decisions, proposing to the Senate that most teaching staff be re-appointed in their current academic degrees, i.e. not meriting the promotion. This has created tensions between the Rector and the Senate, whereas the Rector's office insisted to follow the criteria foreseen in the Statute strictly. The Senate preferring to address the dispute through voting, which the rector opposed arguing that one's individual promotion cannot be subject to a voting decision, for **given sufficient vote anyone could be promoted, regardless of their merit.** It should be noted that a number of applicants are members of the Senate and other decision-making bodies at the University being in a clear conflict of interest.²⁷

Remedy

1. University should request full commitment of the academic staff to their duties due to the fact that academic staff salaries at the University of Prishtina are quite competitive at national and even regional level. The **teaching load beyond the contractual obligation should be limited** and teaching

- assignments of the full time staff in other higher education institutions should be strictly limited to a maximum of 50% of full work-load.
2. Depending on the Court verdict, the University should develop mechanisms to **limit and remunerate teaching assignments of public office holders**, including high government officials. A solution may come through the new Law on Salaries in the Public Service which is being discussed in the Parliament, and sets limits for salaries paid from the State Budget.
 3. Staff promotion is the matter of University autonomy, but also a motivating factor for young academics to improve their performance in teaching and research. The practice of routine package voting through of individual promotions has to be discontinued, and, by **strictly adhering to promotion criteria**, the University needs to create a critical mass of people who meet the requirements for holding certain academic degrees. Being typical representatives of the mid-aged staff, they are the best guarantee the promotion criteria will be observed in the future.

Problem 3 – From Centralisation to Dynamic Accountability

Similarly to other institutions of higher education in former Yugoslavia, the University of Prishtina used to be a highly decentralized institution until year 2000 (note that it ran in parallel to the Serb-language university since early nineties). In the former structure, university departments enjoyed a full-fledged legal personality, whereas the University had little influence on academic policies. The post-war period after 1999 saw a complete redesign of the system of higher education. From 2000 to 2004, the university was fully centralised, which resulted with a new statute of the university in 2004, paving the way for a new governance structure.

UP's governance is divided between the (a) University Board consisting of five representatives of the academic staff and four reputable individuals appointed by the Minister of Education, (b) Rector and (c) the academic senate, composed of professors and student leaders. The Board is the principal governing body which develops policies which the Rector implements in his/her day-to-day management of the University.

The Senate is responsible for academic policies and most of the academic decisions at the University. The Senate appoints five members of the Board from the ranks of the academic staff. The members of the Board from the ranks of the Senate are not formally required to act on its behalf, but decide in their personal capacity. On the other hand, the Board appoints the Rector who chairs the Senate. The next level of organization are academic departments led by deans who are proposed by councils of each department, but appointed by the Senate. Deans are voting members of the Senate, just as the Rector and the Vice Rectors.

Diagnosis

Although the University's governing structure follows the model of European universities, it has facilitated political influence and strengthened **informal interest groups** within the University. Typically, elections for academic unit councils and Senate take place first, and are characterized by intensive lobbying at the level of each department. In addition to one Senate member, each newly elected council of a department appoints one provisional member of the Senate, and proposes one candidate for dean's position. In parallel, the Student Parliament appoints seven student members of the Senate for a non-renewable one year term.

In last couple of years the University has developed a bad reputation in the eyes of public, and I believe that our university could have done better. All the time we have had a bad management, and this resulted in bad solutions. However, we are like a bunch of cherries with a lot of good cherries (University of Prishtina professor).

The quest to elect deans and senators translates into a **coalition-building battle within the Senate**, to secure the votes for the proposed Deans who are voted by the Senate. Once the deans are elected, they take the seats of provisional members appointed by the respective academic departments.

Another step in **“coalition-building”** takes place when Senate elects five members of the University Board. Typically, the Senate members would propose candidates from among University staff and voting would take place by secret ballot in several rounds. Since the stakes are high, there are reports of influencing voters' decision on spot by text messages coming from people in high political

positions.²⁸ Following the appointment of four Board members by the Minister of Education, the Board elects the Rector. Again, in several cases there were credible reports of influencing decision of Board members by politicians.²⁹

Once the governing bodies are elected there is a lot of room for arbitrary decisions, wield excessive power with little accountability over UP's performance. **Members of the academic staff who got elected by the Senate to serve at the Steering Board top the list of UP salaries.** Besides the fact that the University of Prishtina Board usually meets once a month, the members of the Board are entitled to the salary of a Full Professor, irrespective to their academic rank (1,430 Euros), a special compensation just because they are members of the UP Board (700 Euros), bonus salary in the name of teaching hours (500-1,000) and compensation for other duties as overseeing MA theses and proctoring of exams. During the period from January-April 2015, members of the UP Board members received an average salary of 3,500 Euros. The previous members of the UP Board voted to lower the salaries and other privileges (allowances for mobile top-ups, representation costs and fuel). The Minister of Education reached the decision for payment of compensation on the basis of participation in Council meetings.

The current structure has two of the worst features: **too much centralized management and too little accountability.** Departments have very little if any autonomy to act in addressing their needs, even in urgent cases. Due to lengthy and bureaucratic procedures, sometimes they face shortage of basic supplies like paper and are unable to commission minor repairs needed to ensure basic working conditions. At the same time, the same powerless Dean is virtually impossible to dislodge even if there is ample proof of wrongdoing.

Remedy

There are critical voices that the University organizational structure should be reviewed to minimize possibilities for any misuse of power. The optimal choice, in Kosovo's circumstances, is **more decentralization**. National legislation does not prevent the University for devolving responsibilities to academic units, but, in practice, the University of Prishtina does not seem keen to do that. The pending new draft law for higher education should be utilised to improve the governing structure of public universities. Financially and academically, university departments should enjoy greater independence. University departments and deans should be empowered with more competences, but lines of accountability should be clarified to make them more accountable towards the rector. The rector and deans should no longer serve as members of the academic senate, which would address the current conflict of interest. It is a dilemma what to recommend for the rector's election. Given that the professoriate is seen as a major source of wrongdoing at the university, the accountability towards the taxpayer should improve making the university more responsive to the needs of the labour market. The Government and the Parliament as the main trustees of the public purse should introduce more dynamic policies to instigate competitive meritocracy and to link pay with performance at all levels. The Steering Council should not have managerial competencies, and its role should be restricted to setting major policies.

Problem 4 – Student Organizations: From Clan-like Party Structures to Student Representation

Student organizations play a key role in decision making at the University of Prishtina. Every two years they run in elections for student councils at the departmental level and for the Student Parliament encompassing the whole university. Student organizations represent a variety of different interests, but many of them are affiliated to Kosovo's main political parties. The Student Parliament operates based on coalitions among organizations represented in that body, and exercises its influence through the seven student members of the Senate (16% of total) who have the right to vote. In the last elections 15 student organizations participated out of which only eight managed to pass the 5% threshold.³⁰

In fact, 99% of those organizations do not work for students. You never see them staging a protest for poor quality of education they receive. But, you see them staging protests to, allegedly, defend the values of the liberation war (Civil Society activist).

Student representatives have always been an important factor in reaching key decisions, including elections for the University Board, Rector and deans of university departments. Some student representatives act on behalf of political parties or as part of clans within the University, representing interests other than student needs.³¹ Three quarters (74%) of our respondents believe that student organizations are politicized and do not care about students, which is also confirmed by numerous interviews with students, professors and civil society activists.

Students derive financial incentives to be part of these organizations as long as possible. They operate on a budget that is given by the University and the money they make from the activities they conduct. Their activities consist of, inter alia, the arrangement of yearbooks where the students share the opinion that these are overpriced in order for the organizations to make profit. Except last year, the Steering Board continuously granted the Student Parliament a project to monitor classes, which basically meant salaries for 12 months to most members of this body.

Diagnosis

Clan-like political structures of the Student Parliament is a key challenge preventing the representation of real student needs and interests. There are numerous reports of **favours made to student leaders** by professors and university management, who often tolerate their involvement in academic business, including unlawful mediation for exams and enrolment of new student. Three quarters (75%) of respondents in our survey believe that student leaders enjoy special privileges at the University, whereas 54% of them believe they unlawfully mediate for exams and exchange of favours.

Student representatives had open conflicts with teachers who would not tolerate their involvement in academic business (UP student).

Student representatives routinely **forge links with professorial clans** and join coalitions within academic unit councils and the University Senate conniving the election of deans and Board members. A sound example of their unprincipled position against the student interests has been their unconditional support to increasing enrolment at

the University at the expense of current students given the immediate result of overcrowded classrooms.

The low interest of students for the election of their representatives may be one the reasons for the lack of accountability and the representation of their interests. Representatives get elected with a low turn-out (last time it was 27%)³². Student leaders do not feel accountable to the majority of students, but to small militant groups who mobilize to their support. As a result, their engagement owes to a small clientelistic network neglecting general student needs.

Remedy

Providing the needed tools and **encouraging reporting** of favours that are given to student leaders by professors would make this less plausible to happen. The reporting could also serve to open the debate in regards to the powers and the misuse of them by student organizations.

Raising awareness among students about the loss they incur due to **inadequate representation** in decision-making is key to initiate a debate how to stand for the interest of students. Civil society, media & student activists who believe student representatives should maintain critical position against situation at the University should put pressure on both the University and Student Organizations to address student needs rather than pursue their own agendas.

Accountability of student representatives towards the electoral body should be improved. Student representatives should hold regular meetings with students and raise all issues of concern relevant to students in respective University bodies.

Problem 5 – From Majority Promotion Towards Individual Meritocracy

The University of Prishtina was originally founded to meet the need for higher education of Albanian speaking population of former Yugoslavia. As such, from its very inception, it was seen as a major vehicle to integrate Albanians in the Yugoslav Federation. All political movements engaged in Kosovo's struggle for secession became increasingly interested for the University. The interest of the former Yugoslav authorities and of emerging political groups increased in 1980s following student protests demanding a more advanced status for Kosovo within the Federation. The UP had to leave its premises in early nineties under pressure by the Serbian authorities. In private housing, the UP acquired even greater political importance as one of the main pillars of resistance. Political competition has continued after the war whereby political parties made efforts to accommodate their activists across university structures – in management, academic, administration and student organizations. For illustration, three of six recent university rectors came directly from party or government functions. Although there is no evidence that teachers act based on their political affiliation, 70% of students surveyed believe that politics is involved in academic matters, whereas 65% of them say that the Government and politicians use the University for their own interests.

Yes, it was and it is still politicized. I can notice some trends of moving from politicization to academic values, but I don't see it happen. Politicization remains a huge challenge for the University (UP professor).

Most respondents (72%) also believe that clans are pervasive within the University of Prishtina. Clans consist of individuals with strong common interest, driven by the self-interest and rapid enrichment, and not necessarily sponsored by political structures. In most cases, they consist of professors in managerial positions and student representatives who try to strengthen their position within the University.

Diagnosis

Clans and party lines have turned the University of Prishtina into a vehicle for social mobility and rapid enrichment of particular groups who control most of the governance layers. Thousands of illegally enrolled students, hundreds of fake degrees, corruption have left little room for competitive meritocratic promotion.

Perception from outside is that professors, simply, belong to clans. They are not by chance in those positions, but someone appointed them there for a certain interest ... and they do nothing else except for serving people who brought them in those positions (Civil Society activist).

A clan typically mobilises around the period of elections to influence the appointments in the faculty councils, University Senate, University Board, as well as appointment of the Rector and his/her team. While there is no concrete evidence, there is widespread opinion that clans are sponsored by leading politicians.

Exchange of favours is a regular phenomenon whereby Degrees are awarded to friends and relatives of friends (or clans) who also receive preferential treatment in recruitment, or positive review of one's publications..

Occasionally, groups get mobilized to prevent or delay graduation of students who may apply for positions at the University, or interfere in the recruitment process to prevent someone's employment at the University.

Clans are by nature secretive and are difficult to be tackled and to be critical towards. They rarely come under the scrutiny of civil society or media who seemed to have ignored the interplay of power inside the university structures. While the university leadership received public support, it has struggled to reduce the privileges and the shackles of the powerful interest groups.

Clan-like interest groups driven by their self-interest have penetrated all aspects of the university life. **Tens of undeserving clan members have made to academic and administrative positions** at the University and tend to enlarge clientelistic networks in a pyramidal scheme by recruiting more supporters at the bottom. Belonging to a group or serving one has become a prevailing culture at the University of Prishtina, making it difficult to get promoted for any faculty who chooses to rely on hard-work. If one cannot rely on meritocratic competition, the incentive structures have evolved to promote only those who adapt to this environment and join the groups. This may be one of the reasons why all members of the Senate almost in unison refuted the efforts of the reformist Rector to introduce meritocratic order at the university.

Remedy

The university management should adopt a **fully transparent approach**, to ensure that fair recruitment procedures are applied within the university at all levels, help investigative journalists with full disclosure of information, and publish all documents related to employment and staff promotion, which do not come under the protection of privacy. Scrutiny should make it difficult

for various groups to help each other helping dismantle them gradually. Whistle-blowers should be encouraged, gradually helping meritorious individuals believe that hard work can pay better than lining behind informal powerful leaders.

Problem 6 – How to Ditch Fake Degrees if so Many Have Them?

A major scandal broke at the beginning of 2014 when UP's former Rector was caught having co-authored three papers unrelated to his field of expertise (history) and published them in a journal considered predatory by an infamous Beall's List.³³ The then Rector came under fire because the three papers were used one year earlier for his academic promotion. Following a series of student protests, he had to resign from his position.

The following text is an excerpt from the conclusion of the former Rector's paper, used for his promotion.

Considering the value of minerals to our daily life and geological wealth as well, then we come up to a conclusion that managing of minerals or simply; managing of mines it is an important issue to a life and economy of a country. This because it has been estimated, that one of biggest wealth of a country are geographical position and geological wealth. Thus, it's managing, commencing at research stage up to extraction, its processing or import, is essential and requires a lot of efforts by different groups of experts. But, whole this should be supported by programs or different local Government projects, and this could play a special role on managing of minerals and their price control on import-export.³⁴

This would be considered an isolated case if the University of Prishtina academic bodies and professors would clearly distance themselves from this act. Unfortunately, the Head of the Department of History stood for the Rector, arguing that "his scientific work is to be admired by all and not to be criticized".³⁵ The academic Senate and the University Board also failed to take any action to remedy the problem.

Diagnosis

The case of the former Rector triggered a major public debate on the value of academic degrees at the University of Prishtina. Investigations by the media revealed **tens of publications of questionable value by university professors in open access journals** labelled as “predatory” or “fake”. In one case, the paper submitted by a team of UP researchers was published in a draft version, with visible track changes, whereas payment instructions were mistakenly inserted in the article. In another case, three researchers managed to publish a paper which was 100% plagiarized from a previously published paper. Most of these papers were used by authors for promotion to higher academic degrees.

The former Chair of the University Board stated the following:

Nearly 80 per cent of professors are involved in the pyramid of valueless degrees and publications at the University of Prishtina, and this explains tough reaction. The front line of those who don't want to air their dirty linen in public is so strong, but one day the truth will be revealed.³⁶

In January 2014, few weeks before the resignation of the Rector, the University of Prishtina Senate set up a committee “to review journals where academic staff have published their papers”.³⁷ Unfortunately, this Committee never submitted a report. Instead, the **Senate and the Board took defensive position** blaming the media and those who were critical in relation to the phenomenon. The Chair of the University Board at the time, admitted the scale of the problem arguing that the resistance is high because up to 80% of the professors may have degrees of questionable value.³⁸

Although expected, no debate on the topic was opened at the

University. In contrary, **the debate was deliberately avoided**, although there was some improvement in transparency by publishing academic CVs of the staff. In June 2014, the Senate set up seven expert committees to determine acceptable journals by fields of study³⁹, but the committees never convened.

The new University management which took over in September 2014 but introduced a policy indicating which publications are acceptable for promotion at the University. However, **this policy created a lot of tensions between the Rector and the Senate**, since it happened for the first time, that the University of Prishtina Academic Committee rejected promotion proposals made by academic units based on that policy. All PhD dissertations produced after the war have been in the University library where they were effectively kept away from the public eyes. The new management initiated their publication online, to enable better scrutiny by a wider audience.

Remedy

As proposed by Prof. Qëndrim Gashi⁴⁰ the academic community in Kosovo should start an open, thorough, and substantive **debate on academic integrity and ethics** at universities, which should include students, staff, civil society, and the media. Being the oldest higher education institution in the country, the University of Prishtina should initiate that debate, and assume responsibility to facilitate it.

University of Prishtina has to develop clear policies on academic promotion, indicating journals acceptable for appointments. Also, the University should create all conditions for its Ethics Committee to work in transparent manner. In extreme cases of academic misconduct, the University should take all necessary measures to protect its integrity, including revocation of academic degrees.

Problem 7 – Reporting Corruption May Get One into Greater Trouble

In December 2013, a group of 11 former student leaders, four of them assistant teachers, were arrested and charged with corruption. They were accused of facilitating enrolment of new students and grades at the University.⁴¹ A series of text messages exchanged among suspects and leaked to the media implies involvement of a number of professors in this affair, but no legal action was taken against any of them. Six months later, all arrested persons were released from custody, whereas the indictment confirmation is still pending. At least two of them returned to their teaching duties awaiting trial. In June 2015, one of the suspects was proposed by the respective academic unit to be hired as a part-time assistant teacher.⁴²

Although there is a strong perception of wide-spread corruption across the University of Prishtina, this is the only case known to the authors of this paper where legal action has been initiated. The incentives are twisted for most students see no reason to report corruption. If most students see it in their self-interest to obtain in the shortest possible route, they have no interest to report corruption.

Diagnosis

Enrolment and exams are most prone to corruption at the University. Our research shows that 61% of students believe that the exams can be passed against bribe, whereas 64% that the same can be achieved appealing to family or friendship ties. Four fifths of students surveyed report there are teachers who force them to purchase their textbooks and treat them unfairly if they do not.⁴³ Very often the textbooks are sold by professors themselves, and the students are requested to write their name on the book, so that the same copy cannot be used by another student.

One may wonder why students do not report corruption. Remember a case who was caught with messages on his phone, proving he sold grades. He was detained once but is back in campus now. So where is the problem here? (UP student)

Although 60% of students believe that most teachers are not involved in corruption, there is a general mistrust that reporting corruption does not change anything. Students fear they would not get any support for reporting corruption – quite the contrary, **they fear harassment if they report it**. Several civil society respondents blamed the media for not standing openly against corruption in higher education.⁴⁴ Civil society activists and professors believe that monetary corruption in form of bribes may not be the most widespread form, particularly when it comes to mediating for grades, whereas they see exchange of favours as a more sophisticated form of corruption at the University.⁴⁵

Remedy

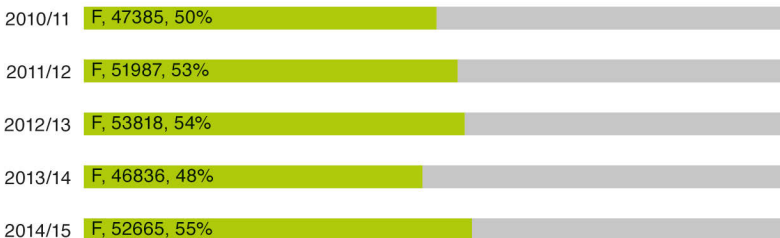
Addressing issues of monetary corruption in higher education requires systemic improvements and internal reporting mechanisms to encourage reporting. Non-monetary corruption is more difficult to combat and requires greater awareness of professional ethics and integrity which creates a critical mass of individuals who frown upon such behaviour even in private. No matter what type of corruption is reported, the University should take all necessary measures to protect students who decide to report and prevent any harassment against them.

Regular student evaluations of teaching should be conducted to frequently measure perception on corruption

as on the involvement of professors. It is crucial that evaluations are anonymous and filled out when the professor is not present. Arranging for an electronic evaluation of teachers once per semester would be an effective way to achieve this. Civil society, media, student organizations should be more involved in reporting relevant information to the public prosecutor.

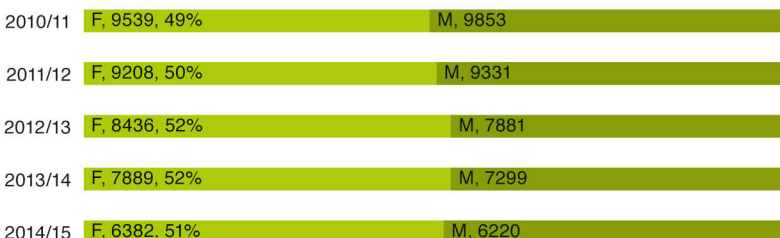
Problem 8 – From Universal Enrolment to Meeting Future Labour Market Needs

Female students as share of total enrollment at UP



From 2004 to 2015 the number of students at the University of Prishtina has almost doubled, from 28,832⁴⁶ to 52,665.⁴⁷ The total number of students enrolled in higher education increased even more, for between 2008-2013, five new public universities were founded, taking a portion of the student body from the University of Prishtina.

Fresh Enrolment (by gender)



The figure above shows enrolment trends at the University of Prishtina. The drop in the enrolments during 2013/14 is a result of the creation of three new public universities that were spun-off from the University of Prishtina. The proportion of female students has gradually increased, reaching 55% in 2014/15.⁴⁸

The number of freshmen enrolling at the UP has gradually declined as shown on the below.⁴⁹

Diagnosis

Rapid increase of enrolment in the past ten years has inevitably affected the quality of teaching. The university has continuously increased the numbers without adequately improving the conditions for such an increase. Moreover, with exception of the academic year 2014/15, the **UP always admitted even more students than the increase it originally envisaged.** Without adequate conditions, the university resulted in overcrowded classrooms and additional teaching load.

A range of social categories were admitted regardless of their performance in admission exams. Three major categories which used to enjoy quotas were (a) family members of the war veterans and victims of the war, (b) minority students and (c) Albanian-speaking students from neighbouring countries. The Association of War Veterans insisted to register over 1000 candidates in 2014.⁵⁰ During the 2014/2015 period of enrolment, 326 students were enrolled in the University from abroad (Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro etc.), 40 from diaspora, and more than 450 from minority groups: Bosnians, Turks, Egyptians and others.⁵¹ There are allegations that **the recruitment system has been misused especially with regard to some of the aforementioned categories.** Numerous students who did not belong to these categories falsified their documents in order to obtain a spot at the university. No legal action was taken towards this. During the first semester of the academic year 2014/15, the problem of unlawful enrolment was addressed by the new management of the University and, to a large extent, such enrolments were prevented. This process was accompanied by a struggle between the University Rector and the associations

representing war veterans. The University ultimately reached the decision to discontinue earlier practices of preferential treatment although it faced huge pressure and public protests.

The national assessment system at secondary level presents a key challenge which affects enrolment at the Bachelor level. The Matura exam (as it is known) accounts for half of the points towards university admission. Twenty points are accrued from grades in high school. Overall, 60% of the score comes from high school which is uneven and grants unfair advantage to those who got inflated grades in high school, or those who could cheat on the Matura exam. An inadequate system of enrolment contributes to the alienation of new graduates, who lose faith in the very institution which should give them enthusiasm for the future. The most reliable criterion is the remaining 40% which depends on one's completion of entrance exam organized by University of Prishtina.

The demand for enrolment in graduate studies also outstrips supply. Currently, 22.5% of the University of Prishtina students attend master-level programs, whereas only 0.5% attend doctoral programs. Interestingly, for the three levels there are **continuous demands from academic units to increase the number of new students, although most of them can hardly cope with existing numbers**, which is easily proved by inadequate teacher-student ratios.

The budget of the University of Prishtina is generally stable. It risked a budgetary shortfall when **the government reduced student fees by 50% during the electoral campaign** in 2014. It should be noted that the fee was reduced from 50 euros to 25, whilst the scholarships were also reduced by 25% (854 students received 700 Euros for living expenses).⁵² On average, student per-capita funding in 2014 was 553 EUR which constitutes 17.8% of the GDP per

capita.⁵³ In OECD countries the student-per-capita funding reaches 41% of the GDP per capita.⁵⁴ Serbia during 2011 had 51% of student-per-capita spending and ranks as one of the top five countries for spending relative to GDP per capita.⁵⁵ From that perspective, the Government has, with small variations, maintained the same level of spending from previous years. Wages at the university has also kept the pace as they constitute nearly three quarters of the total budget (73.7%).⁵⁶

Remedy

The University of Prishtina and the Ministry of Education should jointly **carefully review the capacity for additional enrolment**. The Ministry should remain true to its commitment to focus on the quality and help the UP improve teacher-student ratios across departments and programs. The ratio can be improved by reducing the number of programs and the number of students who enrol each year. If there are budgetary constraints to recruit additional academic staff, the University should consider increasing teaching loads to make room for hiring new teachers.

Preferential treatment of new students should be reduced to a minimum, and maintained only when deemed absolutely necessary. The **University should increase the weight of the entrance exams** at the expense of the flawed national assessment system and imbalanced grading in secondary education. The process of enrolment process has to be very transparent to avoid all possible situations that may lead to questioning its credibility.

Problem 9 – Diploma Now, Skills Later

There is a widespread perception that the main priority for students in Kosovo is to get a degree as quickly as they can. The quality is less important for it is perceived as a secondary criteria towards employment. Despite limited employment opportunities, every fourth student (26%) chooses to study Economics and Business Administration, followed by Law (12%), whereas only less than 3% study Agriculture and Veterinary.⁵⁷ The credibility of university diplomas is widely questioned based on reports from employers, student feedback and given the widespread phenomenon of cheating.

Diagnosis

The system that is currently being applied at the University of Prishtina is giving high grades to students. I can tell you names of professors who give only the highest grades (9 and 10). In this way they create confusion among students, making them to believe that everything is in order
(Civil society activist).

Assessment methods used at the University of Prishtina drive **students to focus on memorization and rote learning**. The large numbers of students in many programs makes it impossible to follow them throughout the academic year and assess them through assignments that require creativity. Instead, the students are mainly assessed through final exams, often multiple-choice tests requiring memorization and lower order thinking. Such assessment methods require less time to check the exams hence preferred by most professors. There are also reports of professors being excessively generous with grades in order

to gain popularity among students. Being generous helps professors compensate their absence from classes and the fact that they have not been able to deliver the full course curriculum.

Cheating is a major problem in Kosovo's educational system. From among 625 students surveyed, 79% confirm that cheating is largely present at the University of Prishtina, whereas 73% agree that students put special efforts in preparing for cheating. Numerous copy shops located around the campus acquire test samples and examination questions for courses taught in certain programs and put them in formats suitable for cheating. Those shops are reported to be frequently visited during the examination terms. On the other hand, students widely use technology for cheating, including smartphones and specially designed earphones. Such technology is even rented out to students through social media at a rather affordable price.

Current testing practices is preferred by most students, because they can obtain a degree with minimum efforts. They would rather take exam with a teacher who requires them to take a test, than the one who requires them to write an essay
(University of Prishtina student).

Students report they are systemically “incentivized” to cheat. **Many teachers require rote memorization and use tests from previous examination terms** that are easy to obtain. Whenever possible to choose the examiner, as is the case in some departments, most students pick a professor who administers a multiple-choice test instead of one who requires them to write an essay. Cheating is widely tolerated and no serious action was taken to combat this

phenomenon at the University. The vast majority of our student respondents (87%) believe that cheaters should face tough disciplinary measures, which indicates that should the UP introduce them, it would not face major resistance.

Plagiarism is another form of cheating at the University and is particularly present when it comes to writing dissertations. Very often, **student dissertations are plagiarized** from books or dissertations submitted in earlier years, and sometimes, they are not even written by students themselves. Papers are written for a fee by individuals who offer their services through the social media, and, in some cases, through posters on the walls of university buildings.

Remedy

University of Prishtina should require that **teachers use a variety of assessment methods encouraging diverse skills**, and should help them in this regard. Teachers must commit more time toward assessment, throughout the semester and during final exams. Assessment instruments should be designed to measure creative and analytical knowledge. Since all grades are registered online, university departments should carry out regular analyses of grades for each course, teacher and program, as the first step towards approximating assessment criteria to the extent possible. In the short-term, asking them to pay more attention towards a better assessment process should be realistic especially since they get paid in addition for administering exams, although this practice should be discontinued.

Exams should be different each year and there should be **less autonomy for teachers to choose their setup of exams**. Although very controversial, the UP should reduce the administration of multiple-choice exams, which present the easiest form to cheat on (even if they do not use the same questions from the previous exams).

University needs to launch a wide discussion on the phenomenon of cheating. By corollary, the UP should review the Code of Conduct for students, anticipating **severe disciplinary measures for those caught cheating or plagiarizing**, including dismissal from university. Efficient mechanisms should be introduced to implement the Code of Conduct in practice, e.g. disciplinary committees at the level of academic units.

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