

Rethinking Professors, Students, and Catholic Universities in the Digital Universe

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Resumen

En un contexto glocal marcado por la incertidumbre, el aumento de las desigualdades y la aceleración de la transformación digital, la educación superior se enfrenta al reto de formar ciudadanos globales comprometidos con la paz, la justicia y el bien común. En este sentido, nos vemos obligados a analizar y replantearnos la diáada del aula: profesor-alumno. Naturalmente, ambos se sitúan dentro de una institución universitaria que condiciona las acciones de cada uno.

En el caso de los profesores, partimos de su condición de inmigrantes digitales. A primera vista, esto puede parecer un tema fugaz que se debate con frecuencia, pero aún no hemos comprendido del todo las implicaciones de la nueva dimensión digital en la que ahora se desarrolla todo. A esto se suma la desconexión entre el mundo analógico y el digital. En este contexto, los perfiles docentes surgen como respuestas —más o menos imperfectas— a las necesidades que plantea esta nueva realidad.

Por otro lado, tenemos al estudiante que, bajo el modelo educativo tradicional, es un sujeto pasivo al que se le espera que absorba conocimientos y se someta a la autoridad. Sin embargo, eso ha cambiado y sigue cambiando. Aún no hemos asimilado del todo el hecho de que son nativos digitales, aunque todavía no asumen la responsabilidad que conlleva este estatus. Sí, son nativos, pero no están familiarizados con las normas, los procesos, la convivencia, los derechos y las obligaciones dentro del entorno digital.

En este escenario digital emergente, las iniciativas de internacionalización en casa (IaH) representan una oportunidad clave para comprometerse con la alteridad y desarrollar competencias globales sin necesidad de movilidad física. Estas experiencias también se ajustan a los principios del Pacto de Educación Global, ya que ponen la tecnología al servicio de una educación humanizadora comprometida con la gestión medioambiental.

Por último, las universidades católicas están llamadas a realizar un profundo examen de conciencia. La Iglesia católica se ha convertido en una gran maestra de ceremonias, que preside matrimonios, nacimientos y defunciones. Pero, ¿cómo se relacionan estas estructuras verticales con un mundo interconectado en el que, por ejemplo, la información fluye libremente en lugar de ocultarse? ¿

Palabras clave: glocal, profesores, estudiantes, Internacionalización en casa, universidades católicas, digital.

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Résumé

Dans un contexte glocal marqué par l'incertitude, l'augmentation des inégalités et l'accélération de la transformation numérique, l'enseignement supérieur est confronté au défi de former des citoyens du monde engagés en faveur de la paix, de la justice et du bien commun. Dans cette optique, nous sommes amenés à analyser et à repenser la dyade enseignant-étudiant en classe. Naturellement, les deux acteurs s'inscrivent dans le cadre d'une institution universitaire qui conditionne leurs actions respectives.

Dans le cas des professeurs, nous partons de leur condition d'immigrants numériques. À première vue, cela peut sembler être un sujet éphémère fréquemment discuté, mais nous n'avons pas encore pleinement saisi les implications de la nouvelle dimension numérique dans laquelle tout se déroule désormais. À cela s'ajoute la déconnexion entre les mondes analogique et numérique. Dans ce contexte, les profils d'enseignants apparaissent comme des réponses - plus ou moins imparfaites - aux besoins découlant de cette nouvelle réalité.

D'autre part, nous avons l'étudiant qui, dans le modèle éducatif traditionnel, est un sujet passif censé absorber des connaissances et se soumettre à l'autorité. Cependant, cela a changé et continue de changer. Nous n'avons pas encore pleinement accepté le fait qu'ils sont des natifs du numérique, même s'ils n'assument pas encore la responsabilité qui accompagne ce statut. Oui, ils sont natifs, mais ils ne connaissent pas les règles, les processus, la coexistence, les droits et les obligations dans l'environnement numérique.

Dans ce nouveau scénario numérique, les initiatives d'internationalisation à domicile (IaH) représentent une opportunité clé pour s'engager dans l'altérité et développer des compétences mondiales sans avoir besoin de se déplacer physiquement. Ces expériences sont également conformes aux principes du Pacte mondial pour l'éducation, car elles mettent la technologie au service d'une éducation humanisante engagée dans la gestion de l'environnement.

Enfin, les universités catholiques sont appelées à entreprendre une profonde introspection. L'Église catholique est devenue une grande maîtresse de cérémonie, présidant les mariages, les naissances et les décès. Mais comment ces structures verticales s'engagent-elles dans un monde en réseau où, par exemple, l'information circule librement au lieu d'être dissimulée ?

Mots-clés : glocal, professeurs, étudiants, internationalisation à domicile, universités catholiques numérique.

Abstract

In a glocal context marked by uncertainty, rising inequalities, and accelerated digital transformation, higher education faces the challenge of shaping global citizens committed to peace, justice, and the common good. In this light, we are compelled to analyze and rethink the classroom dyad: teacher-student. Naturally, both are situated within a university institution that conditions the actions of each. In the case of professors, we begin with their condition as digital immigrants. At first glance, this may appear to be a fleeting topic frequently discussed, yet we have not fully grasped the implications of the new digital dimension in which everything is now unfolding. Added to this is the disconnection between the analog and digital worlds. In this context, teaching profiles emerge as responses—more or less imperfect—to the needs arising from this new reality.

On the other hand, we have the student who, under the traditional educational model, is a passive subject expected to absorb knowledge and submit to authority. However, that has changed—and continues to change. We have yet to fully come to terms with the fact that they are digital natives, though they do not yet assume the responsibility that comes with this status. Yes, they are natives, but they are unfamiliar with rules, processes, coexistence, rights, and obligations within the digital environment.

Within this emerging digital scenario, Internationalization at Home (IaH) initiatives represent a key opportunity for engaging with otherness and developing global competencies without the need for physical mobility. These experiences are also aligned with the principles of the Global Education Compact, as they place technology at the service of a humanizing education that is committed to environmental stewardship.

Finally, Catholic Universities are called to undertake a profound self-examination. The Catholic Church has become a grand master of ceremonies—presiding over marriages, births, and deaths. But how do

these vertical structures engage with a networked world where, for example, information flows freely rather than being concealed?

Keywords: glocal, professors, student, Internationalization at Home, Catholic Universities, digital.

Glocal context

In a *glocal* context (Robertson, 1992), characterized by uncertainty, rising inequalities, and accelerated digital transformation, higher education faces the challenge of shaping global citizens committed to peace, justice, and the common good. Thus, we are compelled to analyze and rethink the classroom binomial: teacher–student. Both, of course, are embedded in a university institution that conditions their actions. Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum, defined the Digital Revolution as follows: “Technological developments are fundamentally changing not only business models, but also governance models, the economy, and society at large—even the individual—and all this is happening at a speed that barely allows us to prepare for these massive changes” (FUNIBER, p. 3)³. It is crucial to recognize that we are facing a Revolution, which implies an irreversible structural change that affects everyone, producing both winners and losers. Therefore, are professors, students, and Catholic Universities winners or losers in this new digital era?

The environment in which the Digital Revolution unfolds has been described in various ways. Nevertheless, we may take the acronym *VUCA* (U.S. Army War College, 1987)⁴ as a guiding principle: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. From the outset, we can foresee that certainty ceases to be the rule, giving way to an ecosystem where volatility, speed, abrupt changes, and decision-making in climates of total uncertainty prevail, all intertwined with a complex and ambiguous reality. Now, it remains to be determined whether the organizational verticality of Catholic Universities responds adequately to these new demands. By nature, the Catholic Church is a hierarchical structure, where “rule makers” stand above “rule takers.” Here lies the dissonance between institutions and those who live within them. The same situation applies to Catholic Universities. To this is added the medieval secrecy inherent in vertical structures, where decision-makers set the course for an entire community without truly knowing its needs. In the past, it might have taken longer for the consequences of such uninformed decision-making to become apparent, but today, in times of exponential change, errors are exposed immediately and undeniably.

It is important to recall that universities were originally founded to safeguard and cultivate knowledge—yet today, that goal seems relegated to a secondary role. The Digital Revolution prioritizes business and profit. The problem arises when the university institution serves the interests of those at the top rather than those of its professors and students. That is the moment to pause and reflect. This raises one of the pillars of the Global Education Compact (2019): that the person, not—as Pope Francis puts it—money (“the devil’s dung”), should be

³ FUNIBER. (2024). *Módulo: La cuarta revolución industrial y el imperativo del cambio*. Fundación Universitaria Iberoamericana.

⁴ U.S. Army War College. (1987). *U.S. Army War College Library*.

at the center. Another essential tenet of the Global Education Compact⁵, in conjunction with UNESCO's Futures of Education 2050⁶ (2021) initiative, is the inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalized. It is striking how those aspiring to climb the institutional hierarchy often recall the marginalized only at moments of ambition, soon to forget them afterward. Moreover, many of those aiming for leadership positions often lack an academic profile.

Another premise of the Global Education Compact (2019) is the promotion of women's participation. In the case of the Catholic University of Salta, Argentina—founded in 1963—it has always been directed by men. Thus far, it has never been led by a woman. This fact invites us, once again, to reflect on the asymmetries and inequalities that persist, hindering the construction of a more equitable and inclusive society. Education occurs not only within classrooms but also by example. If, as a Catholic university community, we only ever see men in leadership roles, what lesson are we imparting? Do women receive a clear message about the positions they can aspire to? Can teachers like us ever reach those roles?

Up to this point, the very concept of the Catholic University might seem to be one of the “losers” of the Digital Revolution. Let us now consider what happens with professors.

Professors

The accelerated digitalization of education has placed professors in a challenging position, as they must teach within environments for which they were never trained. In this sense, they are identified as *digital immigrants* (Prensky, 2001)⁷—a category describing their gradual and often forced incorporation into a world foreign to them in terms of codes, languages, and modes of interaction. Marc Prensky observes that digital immigrants speak a language *digital natives* see as outdated. Practices such as teaching slowly, step by step, one thing at a time, seriously, or printing out an article, represent a language digital natives no longer share. Nevertheless, there are competencies that cannot be bypassed with a single click and must inevitably be mastered. This coexistence of natives and immigrants unfolds within a persistent disjunction between analog and digital worlds, profoundly impacting teaching and learning practices. Digital education is not merely an alternative model but a new scenario marked by resistance, attempts at adaptation, and an imperative transformation.

From this context emerge differentiated faculty profiles: *cosmopolitan, local, taxi, digital, global, and innovative* professors.

The *cosmopolitan professor*, for example, has prior international experience, usually masters foreign languages, and maintains an active commitment to global educational agendas. This profile facilitates an early and strategic incorporation into digital and international environments, turning such professors into key actors for the expansion of internationalization at home. Their cultural and symbolic capital allows them to operate as a bridge between the local and the global, contributing a critical and contextualized perspective. The concept of the

⁵ Francis, P. (2019). *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the launch of the Global Compact on Education*. Vatican. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190912_messaggio-patto-educativo.html

⁶ UNESCO. (2021b). *Uniendo futuros 2050*. UNESCO. ISBN 978-92-3-100478-0

⁷ Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital natives, digital immigrants*. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.

cosmopolitan professor, initially developed by Merton (1957)⁸ and later revisited by Birnbaum (1988), constitutes a key category for understanding the dynamics of internationalization in higher education. This profile is characterized by a global orientation that transcends the boundaries of the institution where they work, prioritizing internationally oriented research and publications over strictly local problems. At this point, one must ask: how receptive are Catholic Universities to hiring this type of faculty profile?

Academic inbreeding can be defined as the practice of hiring faculty who are graduates of the same institution or local professors, instead of incorporating professionals trained at other universities or international scholars. In other words, the university feeds upon its own immediate environment. This phenomenon reinforces, to some extent, the hierarchical, vertical, and conservative layers of Catholic Universities. Naturally, this *modus operandi* hinders the recruitment of the best candidate for a teaching position, perpetuating unjust power dynamics, arbitrary appointments of senior professionals, and fostering favoritism and cronyism. Padilla (2008)⁹ and Altbach¹⁰, Yudkevich and Rumbley (2015) highlight that the predominance of local or internally trained professors may negatively impact productivity and academic innovation.

The *local professors*, for their part, tends to be more deeply rooted in the institution and focused on internal activities such as teaching or developing institutional projects. Their career is usually centered around the networks and institutions of the immediate environment. While they may initially resist change, their deep knowledge of the local context and of students' needs represents a strength. Through situated training programs, this profile can be empowered to progressively develop digital competencies, integrating technological tools into their practice from a pedagogical and contextually grounded perspective.

The part-time professor—often referred to as the “*taxis professor*”—is a frequent profile in many countries, particularly in Latin America, where most university professors do not hold full-time appointments (Fernández Lamarra, Marquina and Rebello, 2008)¹¹. They usually show lower institutional commitment, limiting their active participation in internationalization programs and long-term projects within the university. Their workload is distributed among multiple institutions, facing challenges linked to fragmented time and job insecurity. However, this diversity of institutional experiences can also foster adaptive flexibility and a transversal

⁸ Merton, R. K. (1957). *Social theory and social structure*. Free Press.

⁹ Padilla, M. (2008). *Endogamia académica y su impacto en la productividad científica*. En S. Didou Aupetit (Ed.), *La investigación sobre la educación superior en México. Nuevos objetos, nuevos enfoques* (pp. 179–206). ANUIES / Instituto Internacional de la UNESCO para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (IESALC).

¹⁰ Altbach, P. G., Yudkevich, M. and Rumbley, L. E. (2015). Academic inbreeding: local challenge, global problem. *Asia Pacific Education Review*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12564-015-9391-8>

¹¹ Fernández Lamarra, N., Marquina, M. and Rebello, G. (2008). *Gobierno, gestión y participación docente en la universidad pública: un desafío pendiente*. V Jornadas de Sociología de la UNLP. Universidad Nacional de La Plata. Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación. Departamento de Sociología, La Plata. <https://www.aacademica.org/000-096/275.pdf?view>

vision of the educational system, which—if accompanied by adequate training and recognition policies—can translate into functional and transferable digital skills.

These three profiles, far from being mutually exclusive or static, illustrate the complexity of today's teaching ecosystem. All of them, at different levels of progress, can contribute to the development of the fourth profile: the digital professor, thereby strengthening a more global and innovative role.

According to Dorfsman (2012)¹², the incorporation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in education has given rise to a new category: *the digital professor*¹³. This profile is not only capable of adapting to constantly evolving technological environments, but also of meaningfully integrating digital tools into pedagogical practice. This requires the appropriation of both the technical and pedagogical dimensions of ICTs, where digital competence becomes an essential skill to guarantee quality teaching in hybrid and virtual environments (European Commission, 2017).

Nevertheless, digitalization cannot be conceived merely as a technical challenge. The digital professor profile also implies an ethical, human, and social justice dimension that must align with the principles of the Global Education Compact. That is, a professor committed to reducing access gaps, ensuring inclusion, and promoting accessible and culturally relevant learning experiences. In this way, digital competence is intertwined with the responsibility of training citizens capable of navigating globalized societies without losing sight of equity and diversity. Within this framework, Dorfsman (2012) introduces the concept of the *global professor*, which extends the analysis by combining technological competencies with ethical principles, social commitment, and intercultural vision.

Finally, though equally important, the *innovative professor* profile is defined by the ability to transform traditional teaching practices through creative, flexible, and contextually adapted pedagogical approaches. Their focus is not limited to incorporating technological resources but rather on generating meaningful learning environments that are transversal, multidisciplinary, active, and collaborative, where students take on a leading role in constructing knowledge and fostering peaceful coexistence as human beings (Mukhopadhyay, 2023)¹⁴. Thanks to their proactive attitude, the innovative professor becomes an agent of change, capable of articulating digitalization with internationalization processes, and creating globalized learning experiences relevant to current challenges.

However, teaching innovation requires enabling institutional conditions, such as continuous training policies, incentives for pedagogical research, and recognition of good practices. In the absence of these factors, innovation tends to depend on isolated individual

¹² Dorfsman, M. (2012). *La profesión docente en contextos de cambio: El docente global en la Sociedad de la Información. Docencia Universitaria en la Sociedad del Conocimiento*. RED, 6. <http://www.um.es/ead/reddusc/6>

¹³ European Commission. (2017). *European framework for the digital competence of educators: DigCompEdu*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2760/159770>

¹⁴ Mukhopadhyay, A. (2023). Innovative pedagogical approaches for empowering 21st-century learners. *TSS Review*, 24, 1–10.

efforts, thereby reducing its systemic and long-term impact (Ramírez Navarro, Royero Thomas, Gil Villa, Guerra Palacio, M. and Jiménez, 2024)¹⁵.

The development and strengthening of the aforementioned profiles do not depend solely on the individual will of professors. They are largely conditioned by the decisions and orientations of university governance. Institutions bear the responsibility of identifying existing faculty profiles and designing differentiated strategies that promote the development of their digital dimension. When this aspect is not integrated into institutional strategic axes, initiatives remain subject to fragmented and individual efforts, perpetuating the *status quo* and limiting the possibility of structural change. Ultimately, institutional policies can either enable (or block) this transformation toward a *4x4 teaching model*—all-terrain—maximizing the positive aspects of each profile.

Students

Now it is the students' turn. Digital natives, who subjectively perceive themselves as leaders in the digital environment, but when confronted with analyzing and processing a conflictual situation, that expertise vanishes as quickly as the Digital Revolution itself advances. We know they speak a language that does not materialize in the analog world but rather in one entirely expressed in terms of zeros and ones. The problem arises when they must land in reality with their corporeality. It must not be forgotten that both virtual and face-to-face realities are part of human experience; it is not a matter of choosing one over the other. We all, constantly, oscillate between both dimensions.

Matthew Sadiku¹⁶, Adebawale Shadare, Sarhan Musa (2017) and Marc Prensky (2001) agree that the *N-gen* (net generation) finds “traditional” education boring and irrelevant; they are ready for multitasking simultaneously, managing vast amounts of information quickly, all through their cell phones. They draw from hypertextual sources instead of opening a book or dictionary, and they expose their daily lives like a reality show via social networks. In this regard, Teba Fernández¹⁷ (2021), with a critical eye, argues that technological solutionism leads to “stupid humans” who have delegated their intelligence to machines. Many young people can express themselves through a screen, but not when they must take an oral exam or a face-to-face job interview. It is as if one of their personalities shuts down. Therefore, it is necessary to identify that they experience this conflict so they can understand what aspects need to be worked on.

On the other hand, global citizenship—and digital citizenship in particular—calls on young people to become aware of their rights and obligations, which they often do not

¹⁵ Ramírez Navarro, O., Royero Thomas, R. P., Gil Villa, Y. M., Guerra Palacio, D. M. and Jiménez, M. (2024). Innovation in the classroom: The importance of continuous teacher training. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(12), 916–924. <https://doi.org/10.61707/q50gxc69>

¹⁶ Sadiku, M. N. O., Shadare, A. E., & Musa, S. M. (2017). Digital natives. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science and Software Engineering*, 7(7), 12-14. <https://doi.org/10.23956/ijarcsse/V7I7/0120>

¹⁷ Teba Fernández, E. (2021). Educando al homo digitalis: El papel de la educación y del digcomedu para paliar los efectos de los algoritmos, las fake news, la polarización y falta de pensamiento crítico. *Vivat Academia, Revista de Comunicación*, (154), 1378. <https://doi.org/10.15178/va.2021.154.e1378>

recognize. When considering the ideal of the innovative professor, who brings an international dimension into classrooms with students, one must ask whether students are actually willing to interact. Once again, Teba Fernández (2021) claims that digital hyperconnection does not foster encounters with others; instead, it drives young people to find those who think like them, trapping them in a cycle of egocentrism. This occurs due to algorithms that, through repetitive patterns, filter content in one single direction. Here it is important to recall that universities were founded to cultivate critical thinking, to reflect, debate, and nurture the mind, the spirit, and human relationships.

Internationalization at Home (IaH)¹⁸

Internationalization at Home (IaH) emerges as a valid and sustainable path for all the actors previously addressed in order to achieve the objectives proposed in the Global Education Compact. In this way, the foreign, the different, the unfamiliar, takes root in classroom practices among professors, students, and institutional structures. IaH thus promotes a formative, ethical, and transformative approach to education, where the university is not understood as an isolated actor—*ad intra* or *ad extra*—but as part of a global network of shared challenges: climate change, migration, cultural polarization, social justice, crises of democratic systems, among others (Beelen and Jones, 2015).

In this framework, the goal is not to “internationalize for prestige” or to import models, but rather to educate citizens committed to transforming their local realities with glocal awareness.

At the institutional level, IaH demands a transversal commitment that permeates curriculum management, teacher training, assessment policies, technological resources, and models of university governance¹⁹. It is not a matter of isolated classroom projects but of generating structural conditions for internationalization to become a daily, situated, and accessible practice for the entire university community (Universities UK International, 2015)²⁰.

This means prioritizing people, interconnected within their community and with others worldwide, so that they may grow both professionally and personally. At the same time, it involves helping young people escape the trap of their cell phones, while also allowing them to showcase what they know and can do. In this way, the university becomes a meeting point between natives and immigrants, and together they form one community: the University. Let us not forget that the etymology of “catholic” is “universal.” Sometimes the answer lies in what

¹⁸ Beelen, J. and Jones, E. (2015). Redefining internationalization at home. En A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area* (pp. 59–72). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5

¹⁹ Birnbaum, R. (1988). *Problems of governance, management and leadership in academic institutions. In How colleges work* (pp. 3-29). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

²⁰ Universities UK International. (2015). *Internationalisation at Home: A Guide for UK Higher Education Institutions*.

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKi/IaH%20handbook/IAH%20UUKi%20150124%20v2.pdf>

is simple, in what is forgotten because it seems obvious—but acknowledging it as such can significantly change the course of all within the whole.

What Will Be the Differentiating Element of Catholic Universities in the Future?

Catholic Universities have the opportunity to actively participate in change rather than remain as mere losers of an era. While the speed of these processes is dizzying, it is still possible to raise awareness and reaffirm non-negotiable values that safeguard human dignity, human relationships, and humanity's relationship with the environment. Recognizing ourselves as finite and fallible is the starting point for humbly acknowledging the person beside us. Building community in this way will ensure that the Catholic University as an institution remains relevant.

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