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## Expectations of Lecturers and Assistants at the Universidad Nacional del Sur in Terms of Educational Counselling

**ABSTRACT:** In this article, we present the results of research carried out within the framework of the Research Network on Educational Counseling (RIASEDU). In this case, from the UNS nucleus, we set out to describe, from a mixed research design, the expectations of professors and assistants about the function of pedagogical counseling (PC) of the National University of the South (UNS); to establish a relationship with the views that are held on teaching and learning; and, finally, to reflect on the relationship between expectations and possible training proposals of PC. This research reveals that it is essential to denaturalize teaching practices and problematize their development, in order to build pedagogical didactic knowledge that improves the training of students.

**KEYWORDS:** educational counseling, lecturers' expectations, teaching, higher education

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## PRESENTATION

The concern for university teachers' pedagogical-didactic training led in the sixties, and with greater influence following the reestablishment of democracy in our country in 1983, to the establishment of the role of pedagogical counsellor in Argentine universities. It is expected that whoever assumes this task will support the authorities, faculty and students in different aspects of the educational process.

For several years, we have been part of the Research Network on Educational Counseling (RIASEDU),<sup>2</sup> whose research theme is educational counselling in secondary and university education. In this context, we present the results of the research carried out by the National University of the South (UNS) nucleus on the demands placed on its educational counselling office (ECO) during the 2020–2021 biennium.

In the initial phase of the inquiry, the concept of expectation was defined as a component of demand (Monetti et al., in press). Therefore, the objectives of this study are threefold: first, to describe the expectations of professors and teaching assistants<sup>3</sup> regarding the ECO's functions at an Argentine university, forming the first phase of the demand to be established; second, to explore the relationship between these stated expectations and the views held by professors and assistants about teaching and learning; and finally, to reflect on how expectations may inform potential ECO training proposals.

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1 In Argentina, we refer to the word “teacher” for the professors and teaching assistants who work at a university.

2 The network is made up of research teams from different Latin American universities in Argentina (UNLPam, UNS, UNJU), Uruguay (UDELAR) and Guatemala (USAC).

3 Professors (P) and teaching assistants (TA) constitute two categories of teaching positions within the UNS. The former are those who are in charge of teaching. The teaching assistants may be senior (STA), graduate (GTA) or undergraduate teaching assistants (UTA).

## THE RESEARCH AND ITS CONTEXT

University teacher training is one of the fundamental axes, although not the only one, that promotes academic quality and responds to the challenges faced by higher education institutions. The multiple current demands on university teachers require, among other aspects, a profound revision of their teaching practices. These teachers face a double demand: on the one hand, those of academia, linked to disciplinary updating, research and extension; and on the other, those arising from social transformations, the demands of the work world and the new cognitive and attitudinal profiles of the students entering university. This complex network of tensions directly challenges pedagogical training, as traditional strategies are insufficient to address the diversity and complexity of the current scenario.

In this context, universities, academia and society as a whole are beginning to recognise the need for and importance of specific preparation focused on teaching, understood as a professional practice that requires didactic knowledge, critical reflection and continuous updating (Mancovsky & Monetti, 2012; Donnelly, 2016).

In this framework, UNS has consolidated a Teacher Training Programme under the ECO since 2005, which is dependent on the General Academic Secretariat. This programme arose in response to the recommendations of institutional evaluations and the need to strengthen the didactic-pedagogical dimension of the teaching staff (Saenz, 2024). Over the years, the Teacher Training Programme has established itself as a stable institutional policy, open to professors and teaching assistants from all academic units. According to Saenz (2024), UNS is undergoing a process of increasing institutionalisation of teacher training, expressed in the incorporation of pedagogical training as a criterion in the evaluation of performance (Res. CSU-1009/22) and in the creation of the Directorate of Distance Education and Continuing Education (Res. CSU-601/23), which integrates and strengthens training and support actions for university teaching.

## ON EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS

University pedagogical counselling refers to the set of specific practices and tasks that are deployed in the performance of the counsellor role (Monetti & Mancovsky, 2012; Lucarelli, Finkelstein & Solberg, 2015). It is defined as an intervention and accompaniment practice in education, situated in a workplace (Nicastro & Andreozzi, 2006) within an educational institution: the university. Thus, we understand that pedagogical advising responds to the teaching function that – together with research and outreach – is characteristic of the university and makes it an educational institution. It includes topics ranging from teaching and learning in the classroom, university faculty training and curriculum, among others, also incorporating the relationship between research and teaching (Centra, 1993; Clegg, 2009; Gibbs, 2013).

In the counselling process, the demand occupies a central place, as it involves the progressive definition of the problem that the counsellor and the advisee are interest-

ed in solving. From its use and etymology, the demand alludes to the idea of a request that is sustained by the needs of the person who enunciates it (Monetti et al., in press).

It is possible to enrich this connotation with the meanings attributed to it from counselling and psychology, which suggest the idea of construction; that is, the demand to the advisor does not emerge as an immovable request but consists of co-construction (Nicastro & Andreozzi, 2003; Fernández, 2012), for which collective and sustained work over time is essential.

In this research, demand is defined as the request made by a teacher or group of teachers for the modification of an educational situation, situated within the institution (Monetti, Molina, Saenz, Cundari, Boquin & Rivoir, in press). Demand is both a process and a product that is developed through analysis, reflection and problematisation between counsellor and counselee (Souto & Tenaglia, 2016).

Accordingly, the articulation of what teachers expect from counselling is analysed in terms of expectations, understood as what counselling is believed and expected to accomplish. From this perspective, the notion of expectation developed in the specialised literature (Héndez Puerto, 2023) acquires a new dimension.

The expectations will serve as an input for the co-construction of demand and, therefore, constitute a phase of it (Monetti, Molina, Saenz, Cundari, Boquin & Rivoir, in press).

Expectations are aspirations (Corica, 2010) that do not arise in a vacuum but are anchored in the contexts and experiences of the subjects who carry them. They are related to the confidence that a new situation or solution is possible (James, 2009); they imply a teacher's view of what is expected to change or modify. In this sense, they can be characterised as normative – that is, the subject focuses on what should happen rather than what could happen (predictive perspective) (Muth, 1961; Lovell, 1986; Santos and Boote, 2003).<sup>4</sup>

#### ABOUT THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research project within which this article is framed is defined as exploratory and descriptive. Its aim is to characterise the demands associated with the ECO, based on the meanings attributed to it by teachers and authorities at UNS during the 2020–2021 biennium.

The research design is mixed, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell et al., 2011; Johnson et al., 2014). Data was collected through surveys administered to both professors and teaching assistants. For this purpose, a self-administered questionnaire was designed and applied in digital format. The survey was distributed via the institutional email accounts of all teaching staff, resulting in a non-probabilistic self-selected sample.

From a qualitative perspective, the study is situated within a case study design. The analytical strategy employed was analytical induction, which involves examining

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<sup>4</sup> Even though the literature cited on expectations belongs to the field of marketing and macroeconomics, we believe it is relevant to revisit some of its definitions and classifications in our work.

the data in search of emerging categories and relationships among them. The ultimate goal of this process is the development of working hypotheses, which are progressively modified or retained throughout the analysis (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

From the quantitative approach, a descriptive analysis of responses was first conducted, calculating absolute and relative frequencies. Subsequently, to examine potential differences in knowledge and expectations between professors and teaching assistants, the Mann-Whitney U test was used.

The analysis and interpretation of the collected data, presented in the following section, aims to describe professors' and teaching assistants' expectations regarding the ECO's role as an initial phase in the construction of demand, as well as to explore the relationship between these expectations and their views on teaching and learning.

### **PROFESSORS' AND TEACHING ASSISTANTS' KNOWLEDGE AND EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE ECO'S FUNCTIONS**

The research we conducted seeks to characterise the expectations and demands of professors and teaching assistants regarding the tasks performed by the ECO. Specifically, we seek to identify what changes or revisions are anticipated in the field of university education, with a particular focus on teaching and learning.

In this respect, it is necessary to observe that a university teacher is a subject who carries out professional practices, in a broad sense, linked to their disciplinary knowledge in field research, extension and teaching. Disciplinary knowledge is forged from undergraduate training, while pedagogical-didactic knowledge – that related to the teaching and learning of their discipline – has an experiential character and is built as the teacher exercises their practice (Monetti, 2023). Thus, in the university environment, knowledge about the didactic-pedagogical issue is built on the basis of disciplinary suitability as a guarantee to be in front of students (Monetti, 2015; Souto, 2019; Itzcovich, 2004).

The following section presents the results of the empirical study conducted. Firstly, the sample of participating teachers and their main characteristics are described to contextualise the perceptions surveyed. Subsequently, the main analysis findings are presented, articulating quantitative and qualitative analyses to characterise the knowledge and expectations that professors and assistants have regarding the ECO.

#### *Sample characterisation*

A total of 122 valid responses were obtained, distributed in a practically symmetrical way between professors (52%) and teaching assistants (48%). The latter group was composed mainly of graduate teaching assistants (33.7%), followed by senior teaching assistants (10.2%) and undergraduate teaching assistants (4.1%) (Figure 1).

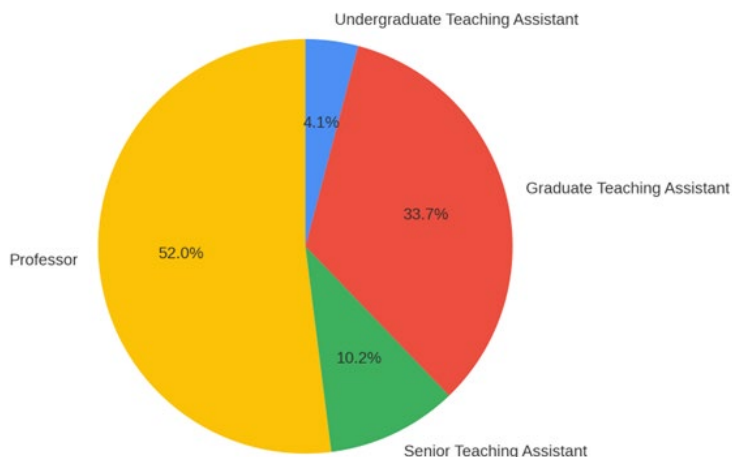


Figure 1. Distribution of the sample according to teaching position (author-generated)

Participants belonged to 14 of the 17 academic departments of the Universidad Nacional del Sur, allowing for representation across most institutional units. The sample reflects a heterogeneous but relatively balanced distribution among the different disciplinary areas, ensuring a diversity of perspectives regarding the ECO (Figure 2).

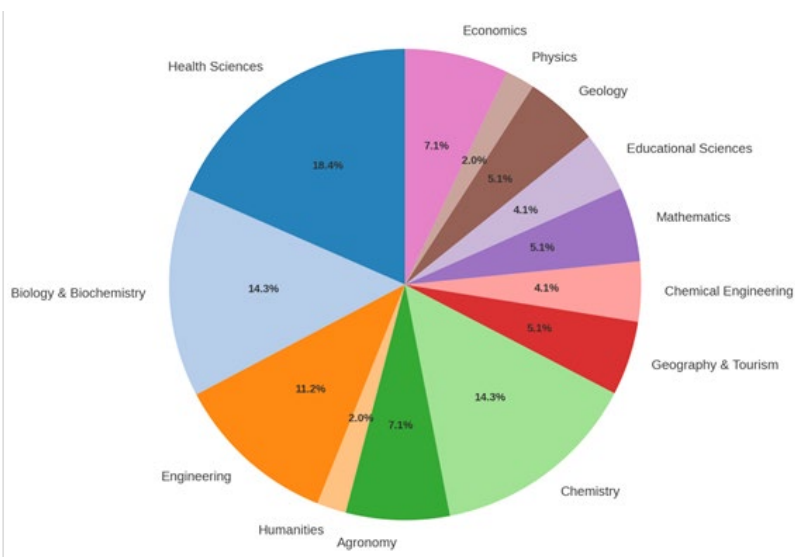


Figure 2. Distribution of the sample according to the department of belonging (author-generated)

Although participation followed a non-probabilistic self-selection sampling strategy and three academic departments were not represented, the sample size and its distribution across teaching positions and departments were deemed adequate for the exploratory and descriptive purposes of the study. Nevertheless, these conditions may have influenced the statistical representativeness of the results and the sensitivity of inferential analyses; therefore, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

### *Knowledge regarding the ECO*

One of the central axes for investigating teachers' expectations towards the ECO was to inquire whether the respondents knew what their functions were. It was observed that a significant proportion of teachers responded negatively. Among the professors, 61% indicated that they did not know the functions, while 39% said they did know them. Among the teaching assistants, the lack of knowledge was even more pronounced: 78% responded negatively and only 22% said they did know about the ECO's functions (Figure 3).

From the qualitative approach, the open questions of the surveys were categorised using content analysis, managing to identify four dimensions linked to the teachers' knowledge of the functions and demands of the ECO:

1. **Teacher training** (including teaching pedagogy courses and updates in didactics).
2. **Institutional counselling and management** (referring to study plans, tutorials and other organisational aspects).
3. **Student counselling and accompaniment** (covering educational trajectories, vocational guidance, learning strategies and more).
4. **Teacher advice** (including support in planning, teaching students with disabilities, evaluation and delivery of classes).

When analysing the relative frequency of the functions that teachers attribute to the ECO, teacher training (59.1% of professors and 65% of teaching assistants) and teacher advice (68.2% and 60%, respectively) stand out. Student counselling and accompaniment (31.8% and 35%) and institutional counselling and management (18.2% and 20%) were mentioned less frequently (Figure 4).

From a discursive perspective (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1997), the terms used to describe the functions are accompaniment, training, guidance and, to a lesser extent, help, support and assistance. The analysis of these meanings would reveal, at least, the existence of a relationship between someone who advises and "another" (teachers, students and tutors) who is advised. This relationship would imply the recognition of a competence – that is, of expert knowledge, which, in the ECO's case, is pedagogical or educational knowledge that the mentee does not yet possess and seeks to elucidate (Monetti & Mancovsky, 2012).

From the theoretical point of view, the work of counselling maintains the features present in the meaning found, as we consider that counselling is an act of interven-

tion. The term intervention refers to “coming between”, “interposing” and, as such, points to the action of a third party who has the ability to distinguish aspects in a situation that were not considered by the direct actors (Monetti, Cundari & Schmid; 2024). In this way, they collaborate and accompany the production of knowledge and the development of personal, group or organisational changes in contexts of uncertainty (Andreozzi & Nicastro; 2003). This task is not easy, as it requires the pedagogical counsellor to go from being “a stranger who claims to know something about what I teach” to being “a colleague who deserves my trust and is worth listening to” (Monetti & Mancovsky, 2012: p. 5).

Inferential analysis using the Mann-Whitney U test did not show statistically significant differences between the professors’ and teaching assistants’ responses in any of the dimensions considered (Table 1). Although no statistically significant differences were observed between professors and teaching assistants, this result suggests a shared and relatively homogeneous level of knowledge regarding the ECO’s functions across teaching positions, pointing to a common institutional framework rather than role-specific distinctions.

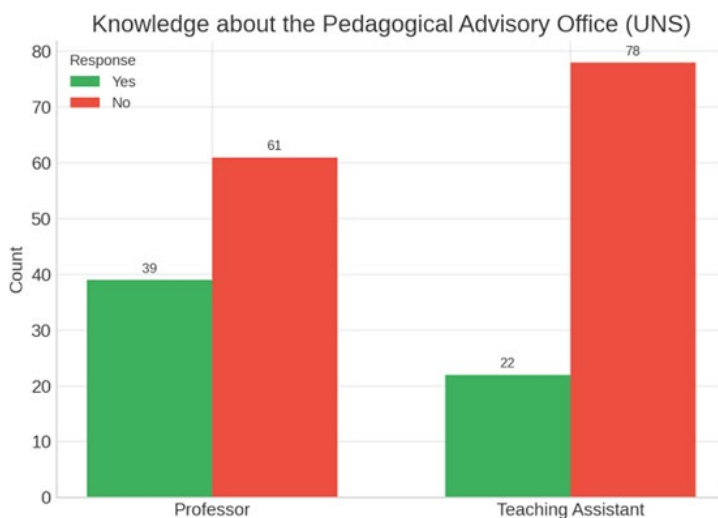


Figure 3. Knowledge of the Pedagogical Advisory’s functions according to teaching position (author-generated)

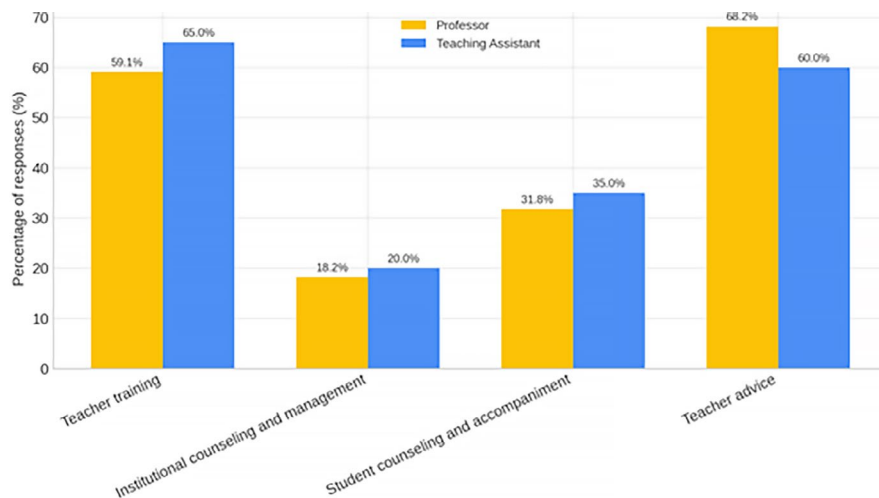


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of the functions attributed to the Consultancy, by dimension and teaching position (author-generated)

Table 1. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test for Question 3.1

Dimension	Statistic U	P-Value	Significant (p < 0.05)
Teaching advice	227.0	0.858679	No
Student counselling and accompaniment	215.0	0.878656	No
Institutional counselling and management	192.0	0.396450	No
Teacher training	229.0	0.631400	No

### Expectations regarding the ECO

Question 4 inquired about what issues or topics the teachers considered that the Advisory could accompany their activities. Unlike the previous block, these answers do not refer to the current level of knowledge, but to the expectations that teachers project about the ECO's role (i.e. to a phase linked to potential demand).

The results show that the most mentioned dimension was teacher counselling, with similar proportions between professors (64.3%) and teaching assistants (63.0%). In second place was teacher training, with a greater presence among professors (35.7%) than among teaching assistants (22.2%). Finally, the dimensions of student counselling and accompaniment and institutional advice and management were noted less frequently, although with slight differences between the two groups: 21.4% and 7.1% among professors, compared to 25.9% and 11.1% among assistant staff, respectively (Figure 5).

Inferential analysis using the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 2) did not yield statistically significant differences between professors and teaching assistants in any of the dimensions. The absence of statistically significant differences indicates that ex-

pectations regarding pedagogical counselling are structured in a similar way among professors and teaching assistants, regardless of differences in academic trajectories or contractual positions.

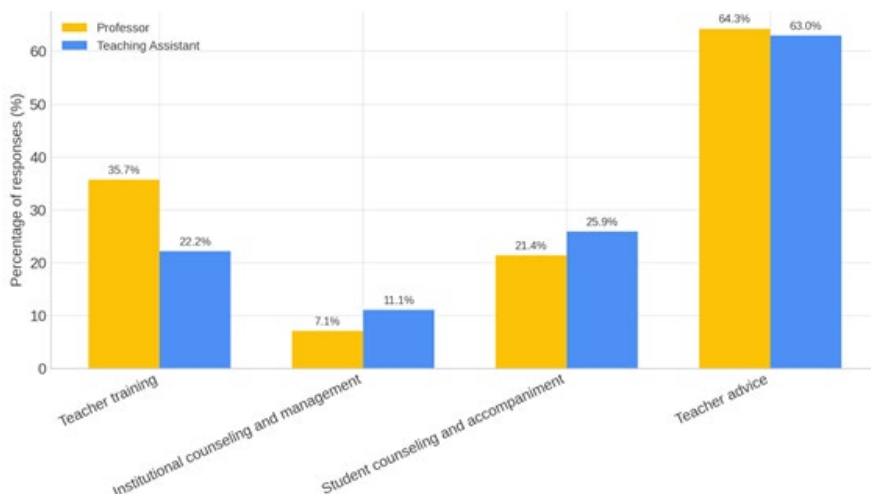


Figure 5. Percentage of responses by position and dimension for Question 4: *In which questions/topics do you think the ECO could accompany the teacher's activities?* (author-generated)

Table 2. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test for Question 4.

Dimension	Statistic U	P-Value	Significant (p < 0.05)
Teaching advice	707.5	0.306427	No
Student counselling and support	599.0	0.730352	No
Institutional advice and management	602.5	0.622986	No
Teacher training	652.5	0.250352	No

One of the aspects that characterises the expectations regarding the professors' and teaching assistants' pedagogical advice is related to their participation in activities organised by the ECO and the topics on teaching and learning on which they consult.

From the qualitative analysis of the open questions, it emerges that more than half of the professors and, to a greater extent, teaching assistants state that they never participated in these activities. With respect to professors, some do not consult on teaching and learning issues in general. It would seem that these subjects do not constitute problems to be solved within their teaching practice. The remaining profes-

sors do consult on didactic issues such as evaluation, teaching methods, articulation between subjects and also curricular aspects such as current regulations. Most of these consultations are made to teaching peers. In this regard, “lecturers learn by doing, reading and reflecting, collaborating with other lecturers” (Donnelly, 2016; p. 5).

This aspect may be related to the idea of university teacher education as artisanal (Ickowicz, 2004), in the sense that university teachers are constituted as such through their work within the academic career. This process typically involves beginning to teach as a student assistant and then progressing to higher positions, in contrast to their training in the discipline they teach, which takes place within a formalised academic programme. In this sense, the artisanal dimension refers to the way in which teachers’ learning about teaching occurs by replicating what a colleague or the instructor in charge of a course does. This mode of learning entails a lack of reflection and revision of practice and emphasises its repetitive, rather than creative, character.

However, this situation does not apply to all teachers. Although they represent a smaller proportion, there are professors and teaching assistants who have participated in activities organised by the ECO related to teaching, assessment, group work, competencies and other topics. Within this group of professors who have had contact with the ECO, only a minority report never consulting on issues related to teaching and learning. Those who do consult on such matters also turn to their colleagues, but the ECO emerges as a relevant actor who is consulted and relied upon alongside the course bibliographies from the training activities they have attended.

This suggests that the demands on the ECO are in a recursive relationship (Morin, 1994) with the participation in activities that it provides, in the sense that there would be a demand to know more about the didactic pedagogy that leads the teacher to attend the activities proposed by the ECO – which causes it to be resorted to again when problems related to teaching are raised. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is possible to think that these professors, who are mobilised to participate in the activities and to continue asking about the same topics, have a motive (Charlot, 1997), a search related to desire that, as such, is never completed (Monetti & Aiello, 2009).

When teaching assistants’ expectations are examined in relation to the topics on which they seek consultation, a difference emerges between those who participated in activities proposed by the ECO and those who did not. In the latter group, a large proportion do not consult on pedagogical-didactic issues and, when they do, their concerns tend to revolve around matters related to the disciplinary content in which they are involved, such as the bibliography to be used, the transition from theory to practice, modes of learning within their specific field and the content to be taught. Such dynamics highlight the need to promote and strengthen pedagogical training among professors who are at the beginning of their professional careers in the university context (Toledo, Cosculluela, Bandres, & Orus, 2022).

It could be inferred that these differences with respect to professors are due to the fact that, as stated above, it is in the teaching spaces that they learn to teach in an artisanal manner. This means that the problems they have to solve are located in here-and-now teaching scenarios. This situation would be absent in professors be-

cause due to the access conditions to these positions, they must have been working at university as teachers for a period of at least three years,<sup>5</sup> which leads them to build knowledge about teaching and learning from their subject in the same practical space.

The research on the teachers' expectations-demands of the ECO reveals an absence of concerns and problematisation about the pedagogical-didactic aspects of their teaching practice. Reflection on teaching (Zabalza, 2003, 2006; Souto, 2017; Perrenoud, 2007; Davini, 2008) is one of the skills that enables teachers to denaturalise their practices and take a step towards the construction of knowledge that strengthens their teaching. However, for this to occur, it is necessary for a concern to arise, a problem to be solved that mobilises it (Charlot, 1997). From an epistemological perspective, this implies accepting the complexity (Morin, 1994) of the teaching situation, avoiding a single view and a simplified answer. Problematisation facilitates the understanding of a diversity of perspectives and makes the thought process itself more flexible (Davini, 2008), denaturalising established practices.

From an institutional point of view, further research is needed to examine how institutional culture, as well as working conditions, influences the difficulties teachers face in problematising the teaching processes they develop.

#### WHAT THIS RESEARCH SHOWS US AND POSSIBLE FUTURE PATHS

In light of the academic, social and working world demands that the educational university field faces, the need for and importance of specific preparation focused on teaching and learning emerges as one of the central themes. In this context, the general objective of the research we developed here sought to characterise the teachers' expectations concerning the ECO's role.

As analysed throughout the work, the demand in the counselling process occupies a central place, as it involves the progressive definition of the problem that the counselee and the counsellor would be interested in solving. The teachers articulate their beliefs and expectations regarding the role of counselling. These situations prompt us to recognise the concept of expectation as a phase that precedes demand, as the co-construction between the advisor and the advised would be lacking.

One of the first results of the research revolves around observing that only a minority of the surveyed teachers claim to know the ECO's functions, with a lack of knowledge being more pronounced in the case of teaching assistants.

A second conclusion of this work reveals that when the subject knows the ECO's functions and participates in the activities it organises, the expectations relate to issues concerning teaching and learning. It is also noted that there is a search for solutions to situations related to the educational field, for which peers are consulted, as well as the ECO.

On the other hand, when the functions of the ECO are unknown, expectations about their tasks are not articulated, and at the same time, there is an absence of

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<sup>5</sup> Article 8. Resolution CSU-359/2020 Universidad Nacional del Sur.

a search for solutions to problems related to teaching. However, when the problems arise, the knowledge necessary to solve them pertains to the teaching of specific issues.

From a discursive perspective, it was possible to identify that the terms used to describe the ECO's functions imply the recognition of competence, of expert knowledge, which, in the case of the ECO, is knowledge about education that the counselee does not yet possess but could acquire. Thus, the ECO would be positioned as the only one that possesses knowledge about education and, therefore, its function is to solve teachers' problems. In this sense, previous research has shown that pedagogical counselling has a stronger impact on teaching practice when it is conceived as a systematic, reflective and collaborative process focused on problematisation and metacognition, rather than as a merely instrumental intervention (Parra Acosta et al., 2022).

Another aspect to consider is that more than half of the professors and, in greater numbers, teaching assistants surveyed never participated in the activities proposed by the ECO. These results could indicate a lack of concerns and problematisation regarding the pedagogical-didactic aspects of their teaching practice. Reflection on teaching enables teachers to denaturalise their practices and advance in the construction of knowledge that strengthens their teaching. At the same time, this process is only possible if a specific concern or problem arises that mobilises teachers to question their own work. This process would imply recognising the complexity of teaching situations, avoiding both univocal views and simplified answers. In this framework, problematisation is established as a key strategy to integrate diverse perspectives and make educators' thinking more flexible, thus promoting the transformation of established practices (Davini, 2008).

The lack of engagement and problematisation on the part of teachers may also be related to working conditions, workload, the place occupied by pedagogical research within university culture and the institutional relevance attributed to the ECO.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the absence of statistically significant differences between professors and teaching assistants in the Mann-Whitney U tests suggests that expectations towards the ECO are structured around shared institutional meanings rather than differentiated according to teaching positions. This result should be interpreted with caution, considering the exploratory nature of the study and the characteristics of the sample.

On the other hand, although it might appear that participation in ECO activities would result in increased expectations regarding its role, the opposite interpretation is also plausible: teachers who are already motivated and who actively reflect on their teaching may be more inclined to participate in the ECO's initiatives.

Finally, we consider that this research reveals that it is essential to instil in all university life spheres the need to denaturalise teaching practices and problematise their development in order to build pedagogical didactic knowledge that improves students' learning. The ECO can contribute to this task, but it cannot do it alone.

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#### OCZEKIWANIA WYKŁADOWCÓW I ASYSTENTÓW NA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DEL SUR W ZAKRESIE DORADZTWA PEDAGOGICZNEGO

**ABSTRAKT:** W niniejszym artykule przedstawiamy wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w ramach Sieci Badawczej ds. Doradztwa Edukacyjnego (RIASEDU). W tym przypadku, wychodząc od ośrodka UNS, postanowiliśmy opisać, w oparciu o mieszany projekt badawczy, oczekiwania profesorów i asystentów dotyczące funkcji doradztwa pedagogicznego (PA) Narodowego Uniwersytetu Południowego (UNS); ustalić związek z poglądami na temat nauczania i uczenia się; i wreszcie, zastanowić się nad związkiem między oczekiwaniami a możliwymi propozycjami szkoleniowymi PA. Badania te pokazują, że niezbędne jest denaturalizowanie praktyk nauczania i problematyzowanie ich rozwoju w celu budowania wiedzy pedagogiczno-dydaktycznej, która poprawia jakość kształcenia studentów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** doradztwo pedagogiczne, nauczanie, uczelnia wyższa, oczekiwania wykładowców