



"Those who know, do.  
Those that understand, teach."

– Aristotle

## Dear colleagues,

The Oxford Dictionary Online defines a university as "a high-level educational institution in which students study for degrees and academic research is done". "A research university" implies extensive research activity but nonetheless teaching remains central and principal activity of the institution. We have already outlined some major aspects of teaching in one of our previous issues, but this was more of a survival minimum and very theoretical. So we have decided to explore the culture of teaching at the HSE a little bit further, and focus on several topics not mentioned before. We hope it will be of distinct interest as several international research professors kindly shared their experience of the teaching endeavors they have been up to this year.

We are also proud to let you know that the HSE hosted the second conference of The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) International Consortium. The conference aimed at discussing the major challenges in undergraduate and graduate education and research driven initiatives to improve student experience at the leading research universities all over the world.

**Yulia Grinkevich**  
Director of Internationalization

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## Teaching Matters

In one of our earlier issues we wrote about the basics of the teaching process at the HSE, touching upon the questions of the academic year structure, knowledge assessment and grading systems, exams and other things every professor at the HSE should know. If you would like to find out about the top 10 features of teaching at our university, then check out Issue 4 from September 2013 at: [ifaculty.hse.ru/the\\_hse\\_look](http://ifaculty.hse.ru/the_hse_look). Here we will focus on several issues concerning teaching that we did not previously mention, but that deserve your attention.

### Course Syllabus

Being a state educational institution our university has to always make sure that all educational activities taking place at the HSE are in line with official standards that measure the quality of teaching practices. These educational standards need to be taken into account when describing your course. A standard course syllabus as it exists in Russian universities is a substantial and elaborate document that must be produced in Russian. However, the HSE has simplified the requirements for courses taught in English by international professors. A course syllabus should be structured as follows:

- **Outline.** A short description of your course including name and position of the professor.
- **Syllabus core.** Topics, schedule, and the list of literature and other resources used during the course.

- **Prerequisites.** The level and skills that students need to have obtained prior to attending your course.
- **Examination and grading.** Examination type and the explanation of how the final grade is calculated for the course.

Although the demands for course descriptions taught in English have been simplified, there are still some details that could be difficult to handle independently. A person experienced in designing syllabi will certainly be of great help, so we recommend asking at the department for help with certain parts of the syllabus. Some assistance will probably be needed for writing a short description of the course in Russian, as it is still a requirement to have an outline in Russian.

When the syllabus is completed, it needs to be discussed and approved by colleagues at the department. The procedure of approval is shorter for elective courses, and it usually takes a little more time to get a mandatory course approved. The general requirement is to submit the syllabus to the commission before the beginning of the module the course will be scheduled. However, for courses in English it is recommended to prepare and discuss the plan several months in advance, the earlier the better. There is a good reason for this as the choice of courses in English needs to be publicised for foreign full-time and exchange students as far in advance as possible, as this is what they base their decision on when choosing a university to attend. As soon as the syllabus is approved, the course gets included in the study plan and it automatically appears in the database of all HSE courses.

The description will be attached to the discipline's profile by the website editor at department sponsoring the course. All courses professors teach appear on their personal profile on the HSE website. Visit our page to find links to several course syllabi that can be used as examples: [ifaculty.hse.ru/the\\_hse\\_look](http://ifaculty.hse.ru/the_hse_look).

### E-Support

The Learning Management System, or LMS for short, our internal online platform for professors and students, was launched in 2010 with the aim of making the study process more user friendly for all involved. The system contains all curricula available at the HSE and all students are registered in the system automatically. Using this educational intranet professors can create profiles for their courses, upload study materials in different formats including videos, trace students' progress and collect their works, discuss issues connected to their courses on forums, conduct tests and quizzes, and send course updates and messages, among other possibilities, to support the study process. Every year the LMS acquires more functions to be used by professors and students. To gain access to the LMS a professor needs to register by sending their name, email address, department and list of courses to: [lms@hse.ru](mailto:lms@hse.ru). The LMS team organises group training sessions for using the system. If you are interested, please send a note to [ifaculty.support@hse.ru](mailto:ifaculty.support@hse.ru) and we will advise you further on what to do.

What is more, we are happy to present a new web project started by the LMS team – the university's own platform for open online courses. The platform is built on the basis of the open source initiative, OpenEdX, so that all materials uploaded by our professors will be freely available and accessible to a wide audience. A volunteer group of HSE professors is currently being trained in creating video lessons and their results will be available at [mooc.hse.ru](http://mooc.hse.ru) in a few months. If interested in participating in this project, first discuss the idea at your department (online courses can be counted as part of one's teaching load) and send an application to [lms@hse.ru](mailto:lms@hse.ru).

### Students Help Their Professors

We wrote about teaching assistants in Issue 2 from May 2013. Since that time the procedure has changed. It is now easier for a professor giving lectures to acquire a teaching assistant. One can submit an application for one or more assistants from the graduate or undergraduate student population at the HSE, with the requirement being that a teaching assistant cannot be a student enrolled in the course. The need for more than one assistant should be clearly explained in the application form. These students will gain valuable experience while participating in the process and are compensated by the university. It is important to note that our teaching assistants cannot carry out teaching activities on their own. These assistants are allowed to help with preparational work for a lecture or seminar, participate in the conducting of lessons, and engage in the preliminary evaluation of students' work. The teaching assistants are to always operate under their mentor's supervision and final grades are to be determined by professors. The procedure for obtaining an assistant goes as follows: the announcement is being placed on the HSE website and sent via email; HSE faculty fill out the application form and submit it before the deadline stated in the announcement. Please check your HSE email accounts for announcements in order to stay informed of the next application deadline. To apply for teaching assistants ask your coordinator for help or contact Anastasia Didenko at: [andidenko@hse.ru](mailto:andidenko@hse.ru).

### Students Rate Their Professors

For more than 10 years HSE students have been taking part in anonymous surveys conducted at the end of each semester. The purpose of these surveys is for students to evaluate their professors' performance. The questionnaire consists of two parts. First students evaluate their professors according to the following criteria: logic and structure of the presented content, how well the classes were structured, teachers' communication with the students and opportunities students had to discuss subject matter with the teacher after class. In the second part students have the chance to express their impressions in a free format. The questionnaires are collected and analysed. Professors can request the results of these regular evaluations at their department.

A more informal way for students to express their positive impressions is by voting for the best professors. The first teachers' elections were held three years ago and have become a solid university tradition since then. In 2011 students were first invited to vote for their favorites. Initially votes were counted manually, but the procedure has changed over the past three years and today the voting is conducted online with the assistance of a programme developed by the Centre for Institutional Research. Another innovation is that professors' popularity is rated by taking into account how many students go to candidates' courses. 41 percent of HSE students took part in the voting in 2012 and 386 teachers and scientific supervisors were mentioned. This year elections will take place between May 26 and June 7. Students need to check when and where they need to register with their IDs or library cards at <http://www.hse.ru/best/> to participate in the voting.

## Sharing Teaching Experiences

**Dr. Stefan Heßbrüggen-Walter, an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, believes that teaching is a very healthy thing for a philosopher to do.**

### What are your general impressions of teaching at the HSE?

I just returned from a conference in Vienna and people there asked this question, too. In these discussions, I realised that the main obstacle to teaching philosophy in Russia for a western professor is a cultural one. I always have the feeling that every new group of students that I meet is very skeptical at the beginning. This is understandable, because they have to study in English and they are not accustomed to that. They tend to wait and see how things will play out. As I understand it most English courses taught by the faculty are electives, whereas both courses that I taught in the academic year were compulsory, so students have no choice other than to overcome their qualms. For a philosopher, this is really complicated because teaching philosophy requires a measure of trust on the part of the student. Things are unbelievably complex and difficult and therefore students must bring some good will to the course so that the teacher can push them forward. In both courses that I taught I was under the impression that I must first earn this good will. At the end of the course things were okay, students actually were surprised that I was quite easy going during the exam.

**Have you seen any progress in their knowledge of English?**

In one course, a student came to me at the very beginning and was worried because of their knowledge of English. There was a quite widespread fear among students that they would not know enough English to successfully participate in the course. I told my students that they must be patient, come to class and practice, and that with time things will get better. By the end, the exam went very well for all of them mainly because I am interested in their philosophical competencies rather than their fluency in English. So, students have some problems but they can overcome them if they have trust in the teacher and believe in themselves.

**Do you see your teaching tasks as something positive or something that distracts you from writing?**

Research in philosophy is a very solitary activity. So, it's healthy to meet other people to talk about philosophy, otherwise you will go crazy. Teaching lets you get a grip of what you yourself really think. Only by trying to communicate with students can you find out where there are still problems with what you believe to be true. So, teaching is essential for philosophers. I would not believe any philosopher who says that he or she doesn't like to teach. The real challenge is to balance teaching with the requirements of publishing. The thing about teaching is that you can always do more. There is no limit to how much work you can put into a course. I have been fairly straight with the students saying that I love this part of my job but there is a limit to what I can do for them.

**Dr. Sarah Busse Spencer, an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Sociology, enjoys working with her motivated students.****What courses have you taught at the HSE?**

I started with a course on research methods that I taught with Dr. Ben Lind, a seminar in English for the honours group in the Faculty of Sociology. We had a very short time to prepare and to divide the topics. Some of the themes that I saw as essential the students were already learning in parallel in the Russian language, because it's their "methods year" when they learn quantitative research methods. At first I was concerned because it seemed like learning the same thing twice, but now I think it was very helpful for them because they could focus on the new terms when they already knew what the idea was. Next time I would want more time to prepare, so that we could either go directly in parallel with the Russian course or do different subjects completely. We could plan it in some new ways to get new ideas. I don't want the students to think that everything is just a repetition of what they have already learned. When that course was finished I also gave lectures on the principles of sociology for our first-year students. I enjoyed that very much, giving them background on some important authors that they will be reading.

**Was it easy for you to figure out the requirements for making a syllabus?**

Every university has its own rules on what a syllabus should look like and what it should contain. The rules are different here. So, yes, it was difficult for the first couple of weeks. Dr. Lind has been here for some time and he understood the rules better. At the same time I have taught this research methods course for almost seven years, so I brought a lot of experience in terms of the subject matter.

**Did you enjoy working with your students?**

I really enjoyed teaching them, they are very good students. I had only one student who didn't receive an excellent mark. I was very impressed with their research, with their topics and their level of preparation already by the second year. Students in the honours group have excellent English skills.

**Was it easy for the students to study in English?**

I did not know at the beginning what their level of English would be, but I found that their reading comprehension was very high. I discovered later that it was difficult for some of the students to give presentations in class. So, perhaps spoken English is more of a challenge. But that's why we have the course, for them to practice. In the future I will ask them to present more at the beginning, so that I understand their level in spoken and written English more quickly and see where they need help. I wish I had time to help my students with their English writing and grammar. This is something I hope that the academic writing centre can handle so that I can focus mainly on the content. This is important because it will be the key to these students' future success. By their final year they should be able to write English with accurate grammar. I have to admit I said the same things to my American students when I taught there, that grammar is important!

**Do you think teaching is an important part of your work?**

I do. I spent several years in teaching positions and I decided that I didn't want to teach only. But on the other hand I can't imagine just sitting in a laboratory and doing research. It's very important to share knowledge and see how students develop their knowledge and their understanding. It's also very helpful for me to see the kinds of questions the students ask. Why is this theory important? How does this theory apply today? If we read something from 100 years ago and I say, "Look, you need to read this important scholar from the 19th century", they might ask "Why is it important?" That's a very helpful question for me. So, I cannot imagine my job without a teaching component.

## Designing a Coursera Online Course

Last year the HSE joined Coursera.org, the world's largest international educational website. Today the HSE offers a number of open online courses in economics as well as courses in applied mathematics, psychology, and courses at the intersection of these disciplines designed by our leading professors. There are plans to add more courses in the near future and offer more choices in English. Dr. Sergey Stepanov, an Assistant Professor at ICEF and the Faculty of Economics, is currently working on a new online course that will appear on Coursera soon.

**What courses have you been teaching at the HSE?**

I am teaching a course on corporate finance in a joint Bachelor programme between the HSE and the New Economic School (NES). Another course, Private Equity and Venture Capital I taught with two alumni at the Masters programme in ICEF. I focused on the theoretical parts while my colleagues talked mostly about practical aspects.

I taught another course on corporate finance for ICEF Masters students together with my colleagues, Dr. Carsten Sprenger and Dr. Stanimir Morfov. This time they taught the theory parts while I focused on practical things. I gave students case studies to think through at home and then we discussed their solutions in class. And now I am also working on an online course for Coursera.

#### **What do you do to prepare for this course?**

The course is called the Basics of Corporate Finance and I work on it with Dr. Irina Ivashkovskaya, a Professor at the Department of Finance. This is a course in Russian, so it is meant for the Russian-speaking public. We had no constraints whatsoever in terms of the syllabus. So, we wrote a standard syllabus for a Bachelors level course. Of course, this class will be much shorter than a normal one because we are limited to 11 lectures.

One lecture lasts for one to two hours and is being split into short sections, because it would be hard for online students to concentrate on a video for hours at a time. So, students have one week to go through one lecture divided into smaller parts. Also there are short multiple-choice quizzes during lecture. Students don't get grades for these tests, but it helps accentuate their attention on some essential things they have just learned about and checks if they understood what the professor was teaching. Also, there is homework. At Coursera there are two types of tasks to be done at home – essays checked by fellow students and multiple-choice questions. We didn't use essays because it didn't fit our course, so we used only the second option. The questions are developed by our assistants and the results are counted automatically. Of course, this is one of the limits of online learning. I don't think you can give students interesting and involved tasks because the resources don't exist to check the assignments of one thousand students.

There are other limits too. The biggest challenge is the lack of contact with students during the lectures. There is an opportunity for them to ask questions at an online forum later. But there is zero contact during the lecture, so professors have no opportunity to explain anything additionally or put things differently. So, it's hard to know if the audience isn't following you. Everything you offer your students is here and now, in your words and on your slides. So, you must prepare carefully what you are saying, because every word is important. Another difficulty is that I don't know the level of my online students. Next year (if we do it next year) when we get some feedback we will be able to better adapt the course to the audience based on the evaluation. At the moment it is hard to predict who will be attending the course.

#### **What does the university get from this cooperation with Coursera?**

We get publicity and prestige. Besides, if a person attended an online course created by the HSE and they liked it, they may think of coming to study here. Anyway, it's a good way for more people to learn about our university.

#### **How do you find balance between teaching and research?**

I would love to only do research. I grew up professionally in an environment where research was everything. This was the case while I was getting my PhD in Belgium and later when I worked. On the other hand, I understand that if you teach, you have to treat this part of your job with responsibility. It's a very unpleasant thing to get negative feedback from your students and this is a big motivator for me. Plus teaching can be very useful for generating new research ideas. You learn new things, and you get ideas while preparing classes as well as from discussions with students.

To see HSE courses available at Coursera go to: <http://coursera.hse.ru/>

## The HSE Welcomes the SERU Consortium

The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) International Consortium held its second conference in May 15-17, 2014 at the Moscow HSE campus. The consortium was founded by UC Berkeley's Centre for Studies in Higher Education and currently includes over 15 major top ranked US research-intensive universities (all members of the American Association of Universities) and 10 international research universities located in China, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Japan, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The participants of this year's roundtable sessions focused on major challenges in undergraduate and graduate education and research

driven initiatives to improve student experience at the leading research universities all over the world. Special challenges facing BRICS countries in reforming and improving undergraduate and graduate education, emerging international models for general education and the liberal arts, the important role of research engagement for undergraduate and first degree students, and other issues were among the topics discussed this year.

**For more information about the SERU Consortium visit:**  
<http://seru.hse.ru/en/>