

Quality of Academics: A Perspective from Professional Competencies

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...all we need is want to learn and growth.

Introduction

The quality in higher education is no more a utopia because it's a basic condition to make a good work with human resources shaping, knowledge development and service to society. It is true that in latest years this concept of **educative quality** has been a point of doubts, even a 'enigma' between the experts and academics, nevertheless, quality it has become a educative policy to every serious institution and actually it is time to contribute with clear ideas and proposals to make this target a reality from where the whole academic community take force, enthusiasm and strong determination to live the university as an always learning community. The challenge to all who work in education research and evaluation it is situate a quality approach, research about its implementation and progress and communicate the finding's to higher education community. In this sense this work sets the basic ideas of our pedagogic vision based in **competencies as the units of effective learning–performance** in students and, of course, in the professoriate.

1. The Education Demands and the world of work

The society is the basic source of education demand but not in intuitive way only (the natural desire to educate the young generation) but under influence of what happen in the world of work. So then, the sources of job are a key factor in education new demands and the university has to see carefully in society the role of employers, government, and new conditions/characteristics of the present generation deeply influenced by technology development in information and communication (TIC). Many employ experts in decade of nineties have developed different models of **professional competencies** based in the changes in philosophy of today's work and production nature. The services sector and technology increasing make the job a defying experience, as much as, uncertain opportunity because of changes in market, short contracts and permanent learning necessity in employees not only to answer this demand, but also, to be in contact with knowledge new tendencies, refresh and open the perspective to new ways of thought and make. Nowadays the minds products are the essence of the added value in the professional's contribution and make the person **the key productive unit** in institutions. We are in the era of intelligence and its continuing development. Let's see now the basic demands for today's professional (See: Munduate, 1997; Figuera, 2000; Valverde, 2001).

Permanent learning Teaching to his/her partners Research, sharing knowledge and information	Anticipating to the facts and movements of market Make productive use of resources (efficiency–efficacy) Manages his/her own personal development, improves their group and institution
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From this view we will expose a summary of the principal competencies developed for work field experts like **Le Foterf** (1991) and **Bunk** (1994) (cited by Figuera, 2000 and Echeverría, 2001); **SCANS Report** (1991) (cited by Figuera, 2000; Corominas, 2001 and Valverde, 2001); **Echeverría** (2001; 2002), **Corominas** (2001).

Professional Competencies demanded in job

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TECHNICAL/SPECIFIC COMPETENCE: Disciplinary knowledge (concepts-arguments-theories). ▪ METHODOLOGICAL COMPETENCE: Procedures knowledge rightly structured for doing specific tasks. ▪ SOCIAL COMPETENCE (participative attitude): Constructive/collaborative behavior with partners, team work disposition, communication, cooperation, leadership, negotiation abilities. ▪ PERSONNEL COMPETENCE: take responsibilities, realistic self-esteem, self-management, integrity, honesty. ▪ TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCE: resources management, technological knowledge, systemic understanding, information management. ▪ BASIC COMPETENCE: reading, writing, arithmetic and mathematics, listening, speaking, creative thinking, abstraction capacity, know how to learn, rational thinking.

This synthesis shows implicitly that world of work have change significantly and its absolutely necessary to improve all the time to make our job better than before, looking to improve the quality of our contribution to others, institution and society as a whole. For this reasons we must consider that the professional background it's more complex and wide now, we **need fields of qualities** be possible to estimate not only with curriculum vitae but with **performance** (demonstration in the right context). So then, the basic ideas we have to establish based on this demand are:

1. **The educative demand have the key influence of Work's Today's Reality**
2. **Professional background must be Wide and Dynamic because of context and time**
3. **Competencies are Internal Structures developed since university education and able to be developed permanently**
4. **The competencies must be related with Discipline Field, Methods and Procedures related with discipline field, Personal Qualities to growing up, Social Qualities to productive interaction.**
5. **The need of permanent attention to university context changes, technology development, and research about key fields of society changes and development.**
6. **Teacher Researching to improve the quality of university education oriented to competencies development (Professional Competencies Oriented Education).**
7. **Strategic Alliance between academics and administrative to *Research, Evaluate and Innovate* in university activities (R+E+I).**
8. **Institutional and Personal implication with permanent academic development, creating a *Permanent Learning-Improvement Culture* in university.**

All this key aspects implies a **deep change** in academics, mission of education, structures and procedures, normative, internal-external relations (strategic alliances), definitively, in the spirit and nature of higher education. To make possible the growth of institution in *a very uncertain external context, wide development of knowledge and information technologies (learning society)* and *a very hard world of work*, we need the

solid convincement and determination to change to new ways of thinking understanding that growing up with knowledge and science is the most essential meaning of academic profession. The teacher must change because it's just the nature of human evolution.

2. Transition to a new concept of academic role

Now the logical consequence from previous argumentation it is to analyse the concept of academic profession to see forward the role of teacher in this century of tremendous challenge for university education. It is no unknown that the definition of academia –and correlatively the meaning of teacher– it has been widely discussed but, finally without a general consensus, there is no a basic universal characteristics of academic profession. Like any other field (i.e. laws, architecture, medicine, etc.). We accept that the disciplinary field of the teacher, the university context and political-social-cultural factors in countries has incidence in the meaning of academic profession and its practice; but it is as well truth that every who work in higher education has something in common, which is, the **work with the knowledge**: researching-learning, analysing, reconstructing, applying, communicating, evaluating and start all over again; definitively growing with the truth of science and make others growth (colleagues, students, society). Let's see some strong points of view about the academic profession meaning.

Delors, (1996)	LEARN HOW TO KNOW: general culture, specifics knowledge LEARN HOW TO DO: competencies to face successfully a big number of situations LEARN HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER: Comprehension of others and interdependence in the community of work (networking). LEARN HOW TO BE: autonomy, rationality, personal responsibility.
De Miguel, (2003 b)	An Excellent Teacher, besides the right classroom management must be competent should demonstrate the capacity and abilities in many other functions and tasks: Course organization Curriculum design Didactic innovation Pedagogic research Elaboration of materials Development of Tutorial function Contributions to didactic of discipline, self-evaluation procedures, etc.
Rodriguez, (2003 a)	The good teacher has to show competence in: Doming his/her disciplinary knowledge field Be reflexive, research and seek about his own teaching practice Doming tools of curriculum design and management Be motivated for teacher innovation Facilitate learning to generate a motivation environment to seek the quality of learning Team work (teacher teams) Tutoring the learning process Ethics and professionalism (compromise with institution and society and be fair in other valuation)
Smith & Simpson (1995)	Scholastic Skills (Doming of course content and motivate to students) Planning Skills (Make students implicate in active participation and consider individual background to select the contents and materials) Management Skills (propose and manages adequate expectations for the course and generates an environment for learning) Presentation and Communication Skills (its clear in speaking and writing and promotes the cooperation-collaboration in students) Evaluation and Feedback Skills (use different ways of learning feedback and make a permanent evaluation of his work) Interpersonal Skills (demonstrates that believes in the students learning potential, respect and comprehend)
Boyer (1990)	Scholarship of discover (study and reflection for learning and scientific creation-development) Scholarship of integration (coherent proposals of new theoretic and operative constructs) Scholarship of application (incorporates original contributions in the comprehension of reality) Scholarship of teaching (communication y socialization of own learning and production)
Arreola (2000)	Content expertise (doming of course content) Instructional delivery skills (abilities for communication and presentation of contents) Instructional design skills (abilities for design and generation of activities-opportunities of learning) Course management skills (abilities for management of course)

I think it is clear the lack of enough agree about the concept of academic profession, nevertheless, some basic ideas go in the same direction, I mean: the functions of academic are teaching, research and service to university and society. This is what I call the **Functionalism Approach** to academic role. Understanding the teacher through his/her functions in university, but the key problem lies unsolved, the **need of a deep and wide conceptualization of academic profession**, only then, we can open formative ways and evaluative process¹ that can be solidly based and coherently linked toward the quality of academic role. If the reader look the previous table easily can note that the different approaches it is not so close to agreement, but express undoubtedly the teacher routine. So we can agree that could be possible establish some approach to this problem from some wider construct that could involve this characteristics and take us to a solid **theory reference about academic profession**, this contribution is absent in the literature. Our three year doctoral work has research and developed a competencies model for teacher coherently related with social and demand changes.

Other key question related to new role of teacher is the change in educative process traditionally understood as two concept relationship **teaching-learning**, that has to transit from teacher oriented process (instruction) or, the more recent student oriented vision, to the **Interactive Approach** where teacher and student have to **learn together**. *Sharing information, working with it (analyzing), make application and reviewing all the process*. This means to break the Truth Property Myth of academics and the Ivory Tower Myth of the University, because the information is everywhere and always increasing, so we could not pretend to live-survive academically only with our basic-postgraduate formation, **what we really learn now and tomorrow it is how to keep learning along life (life long learning)**. In universities we are not in a teaching-research community but essentially in an Always Learning Community. So we have to create a **Permanent Learning Institutional Culture**, what supposes to teacher a really deep change (chip-change) rethinking his own-personal position about the knowledge to open 'again' the door to new knowledge and **increase the disposition to learn**. Accepting that the truth is property of no one, that all culture is property of humanity and history really, then, we are only workers and users of information and knowledge. From this critic realism (thinker humility) we can really go into the new era in academic role and education that makes the educative process be based in a three concept relation: **Teaching-Research-Learning**.

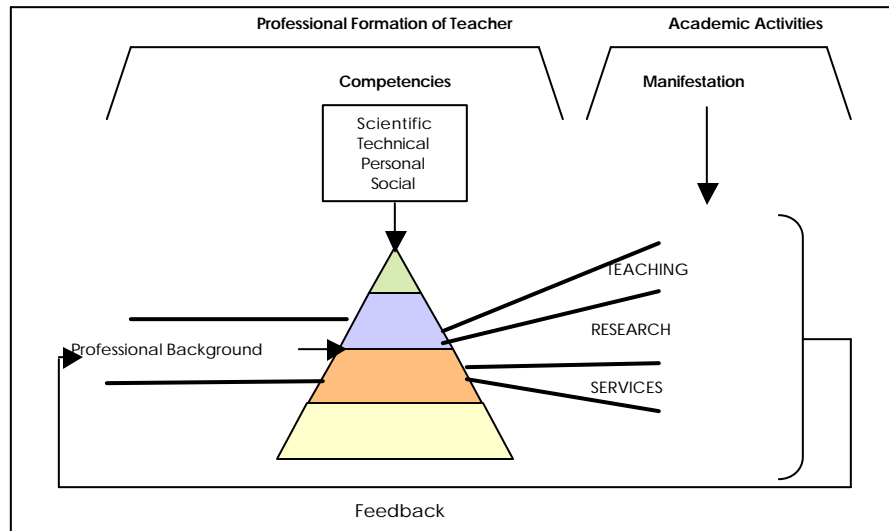
3. A Structural Competencies Model for University Teacher (SCMUT)

Contributions in many ways-formats are crucial in higher education present crisis always thinking in deep-structural solutions and development. The university not only has to improve their academic quality but all other aspects like curriculum planning and administrative processes-support. In this sense a **full-wide academic profile** may be helpful to begin the change until affect the institutional level. Competencies are

¹ As well of course we can define the 'functions' of the teacher in one or another institution, but those functions understood as the different manifestations of his Professional Background (PB). This PB seen so it is **structural** and common to all professoriate, the differences between them could be in aspects like: disciplinary fields, university context, specific assumed roles, period on academic career, etc.

demand and competencies are suggested by higher education experts, so the **professional competencies profile** seems to be the logical way to develop the professoriate, students and institution finally. We define the teacher academic competence as **the internal qualities conjunct that permits him/her hold and apply a scientific discourse from where generates the permanent learning in personal and group sense, with innovative vision through a proactive and global development of his/her professionally.** We understand this competence as the structural background derived from the basic-postgraduate education and professional experience that, as a whole, supports the typical academic activities (teaching, research, services) this approach is structural basically for this. So the academic background it is the **professional potential** which can hold different academic activities or functions mentioned before and can be done productively in specific contexts. Figure 1 tries to show this relationship based on prism metaphor.

Figure 1: Structural Model of Competencies of University Teacher



The concepts of the four competencies are exposed following:

SCIENTIFIC COMPETENCE

Implies the effective demonstration of the specific knowledge of discipline field derived from his basic formation and cumulated experience during his professional development that permits him the comprehension, interpretation and actualisation of topics and problems of the area. Scientific Competence has three dimensions: **The knowing of the area of knowledge, Research integrated as engine of learning and Contribution to generate–communicate of new disciplinary knowledge.**

TECHNICAL COMPETENCE

Represents the conjunct of knowledge and procedures—instrumentals criteria that permits to teacher develop rightly his academic activities (teaching, research, services) in base of rationalized actions oriented to increase his professional production. It has two dimensions: **Relation of knowing with reality** and **Dinamization of interactive process of research**.

PERSONAL COMPETENCE

It refers to subjective position of teacher about the knowing accepting that his not the owner of absolute truth about some disciplinary field, but a not enough knower of it. So conduct his energy to the permanent learning trough the development of academic activity along his professional career (life-long learning). The dimensions are: **Disposition for learning**, **Disposition to comprehend the other one**.

SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Represents the quality that permits teacher establish interpersonal relations socially adequate and technically productive with colleagues, partners and students. Because he is involved in a work community and he interact based on respect, tolerance and the recognizing of technical potential of all members of academic community. The key dimensions here are: **Disposition to promote the social learning**, **Leadership for learning based on research projects with students**.

All this structure is detailed trough 50 indicators and can be reviewed -in spanish- in appendix 1, as well as, the relation between **model—and academic activities** very useful for formative and evaluative processes. It is important also comprehend that the model it is wide and very complete, for that reason, it is almost impossible evaluate all indicators in one teacher at the same time. The intention of this model it is **to represent the academic profession that it is developed along the professional life**, so then, when we try to open ways of formation and evaluation we have to consider only some dimensions and indicators depending on: **context of university**, **disciplinary field** and **moment in teacher career**. Those variables are basic and make the model to be adapted (with wide consensus) into the institution wants to use it.

4. The challenge of the permanent learning culture

Finally I want to remark that we –as academics– have to sincerely **accept the world of knowledge have changed** and now it is no more enough doming disciplinary classic big books–theories as all our academic tools, it is not enough for make research neither to teach. Nowadays the majority of ideas pass away so fast that we need not only the classic theories –in big way made to understand and solve classic-old problems of science– but also, the disciplinary tools to understand the present reality changes, solve new problems-demands and most of all: **know how to learn with autonomy**. We are in the age of learning and relearning in parallel with the **knowledge and information growing**.

This is our deepest and biggest challenge that, nevertheless, isn't strange to men of academy, because we know that our nature as academics is the **permanent evolution**, construction–deconstruction–reconstruction of ideas, methods, strategies and techniques in agreement with the time we live and reality we serve. The change starts in persons and the environment for growing has to be generated by institution leadership, understanding university as a cultural unit in society (which produces values and knowledge) by this essential reason, the institution has to be central and a key actor in its context; researching, sharing, anticipating and proposing new knowledge references to improve the development of society. In this sense, it's not the speed of responses, but, over all, the necessity of a productive contribution from the university both, to the present and future of society.

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APENNDIX: 1

MODELO ESTRUCTURAL DE COMPETENCIAS DEL PROFESOR UNIVERSITARIO (MECPU)
Relación operativa entre el *constructo* y la *realidad académica*

Todo el análisis y construcción realizada en estos capítulos (1, 2 y 3) permite conseguir una estructura consistente, operativa y de utilidad para la evaluación y formación del profesorado y, para seguir detalladamente la siguiente exposición, el lector puede situarse en la **teoría/constructo** (izquierda) para llegar hasta la realidad, o bien, situarse en las **actividades académicas** (derecha) y llegar entonces a la teoría que le da su fundamento y significación. Recorriendo así, en uno u otro sentido, este marco de referencia sobre el *ser profesor* universitario que da cuenta de una manera integral de entender la profesión académica.

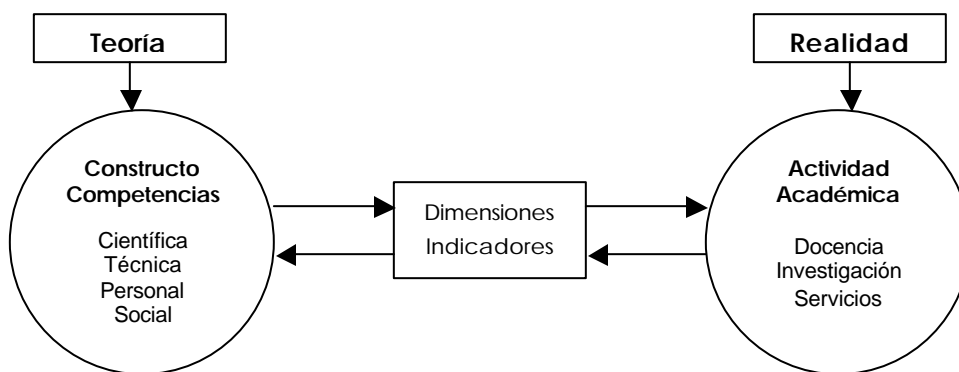


Tabla 1

Constructo	Categoría	Dimensión	Indicador	El indicador se manifiesta en:			El indicador es evaluable en:
				D	I	S	
Competencia Profesional del Profesor	Competencia Científica	El saber del área de conocimiento	Reproduce con exactitud el origen y los antecedentes históricos de su disciplina	X	X		F y S
			Reproduce la evolución temporal de la disciplina	X	X		F y S
			Explica las corrientes y escuelas teóricas correspondientes	X	X		F y S
			Explica el estado actual de la disciplina y sus alcances en la comprensión de la realidad	X	X		F y S
			Establece proyecciones del desarrollo futuro de la disciplina	X	X		F y S
		La investigación integrada como motor del aprendizaje	Reproduce los criterios técnicos de la investigación científica	X	X		F y S
			Organiza e identifica áreas temáticas para investigación y desarrollo	X	X		F y S
			Establece la relación entre la investigación y el proyecto investigativo de estudio (PIE)	X	X		F y S
			Define los procedimientos para la elaboración del PIE	X			F y S
			Explica el proceso de desarrollo del PIE	X			F y S
		Contribución a la generación y difusión de nuevo conocimiento disciplinar	Elabora proyectos de investigación basados en el rigor y sistematicidad de la metodología científica		X		S
			Promueve y participa en un equipo de colegas investigadores		X		F y S
			Produce documentos orientados a la publicación		X		S
			Se plantea un programa de difusión múltiple de la actividad investigadora		X		S
			Procura que sus actividades investigadoras se enmarquen en programas o proyectos a nivel de departamento o universidad		X	X	S
			Publica en revistas científicas nacionales y/o internacionales		X		S
			Publica con editoriales nacionales y/o internacionales		X		S

Legenda: D: docencia; I: investigación; S: servicios. F: evaluación formativa; S: evaluación sumativa; F y S: evaluación formativa y sumativa

Tabla 2

Constructo	Categoría	Dimensión	Indicador	El indicador se manifiesta en:			El indicador es evaluable en:	
				D	I	S		
Competencia profesional del profesor	Competencia Técnica	Vinculación del saber con la realidad	Explica con claridad la relación entre la teoría y el objeto de estudio de la disciplina	X	X		F y S	
			Utiliza en sus presentaciones los recursos tecnológicos actuales	X	X	X	F y S	
			Genera espacios de reflexión y discusión compartida	X	X	X	F y S	
			Se asegura que la audiencia entiende sus presentaciones y explicaciones	X	X	X	F y S	
			Representa teóricamente situaciones concretas de la realidad (si el campo disciplinar lo permite)	X	X		F y S	
			Produce materiales para facilitar el desarrollo del conocimiento	X	X		S	
	Dinamización de procesos interactivos de investigación			Contribuye al establecimiento de las directrices orientadoras de los procesos de investigación	X	X		F y S
				Contribuye en la generación de las condiciones básicas para el buen desarrollo de las actividades de investigación	X	X		F y S
				Promueve la planificación compartida de los temas de investigación	X	X		F y S
				Potencia la funcionalidad de los grupos de investigación	X	X		F y S
				Comparte y asesora el desarrollo de las actividades de investigación	X	X		F y S
				Coordina y comparte la producción de documentos e informes	X	X		F y S

Leyenda: D: docencia; I: investigación; S: servicios. F: evaluación formativa; S: evaluación sumativa; F y S: evaluación formativa y sumativa

Tabla 3

Constructo	Categoría	Dimensión	Indicador	El indicador se manifiesta en:			El indicador es evaluable en:	
				D	I	S		
Competencia profesional del profesor	Competencia Personal	Disposición para aprender	Reflexiona y define temas sujetos a actualización-refrescamiento	X	X		F y S	
			Establece y desarrolla un plan estratégico de explotación de bases de datos	X	X		F y S	
			Estudia y analiza críticamente documentos y materiales técnicos	X	X	X	F	
			Produce reportes y escritos técnicos que documentan su aprendizaje	X	X	X	S	
			Participa en cursos o eventos técnicos sobre temas de su interés	X	X	X	F y S	
	Disposición para la comprensión del otro			Pide opiniones, criterios y propuestas a aquellos con quienes trabaja	X	X	X	F
				Integra en su trabajo los aportes de otras personas	X	X	X	F
				Busca el consejo y asesoramiento de colegas con mayor experiencia	X	X	X	F
				Modifica y adecua sus ideas a favor del desarrollo grupal	X	X	X	F
				Modifica y adecua su discurso de acuerdo con el tipo de audiencia	X	X	X	F

Leyenda: D: docencia; I: investigación; S: servicios. F: evaluación formativa; S: evaluación sumativa; F y S: evaluación formativa y sumativa

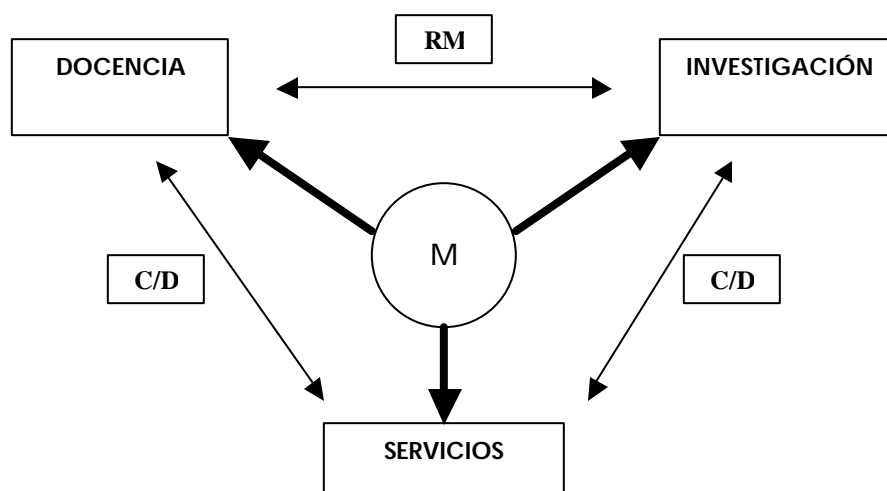
Tabla 4

Construceto	Categoría	Dimensión	Indicador	El indicador se manifiesta en:			El indicador es evaluable en:
				D	I	S	
Competencia profesional del profesor	Competencia Social	Disposición para la promoción del aprendizaje social	Participa en la gestión de cursos, congresos, seminarios	X	X	X	F y S
			Promueve y participa en grupos de estudio sobre temas académicos	X	X	X	F y S
			Establece redes virtuales para el intercambio de documentación	X	X	X	F
			Gestiona su participación en grupos interinstitucionales de trabajo académico			X	F y S
			Participa en grupos multidisciplinarios de interconsulta técnica			X	F y S
		Liderazgo para el aprendizaje por proyectos de investigación con los estudiantes	Explica claramente la misión y visión del proyecto investigativo de estudio (PIE)	X			F y S
			Estimula la reflexión compartida con los estudiantes sobre los contenidos de investigación	X			F y S
			Considera los intereses e iniciativas de los estudiantes	X			F
			Orienta y atiende las necesidades emergentes en el desarrollo del PIE	X			F
			Promueve la evaluación y mejora permanente del proceso	X			F y S
			Genera oportunidades para el intercambio de experiencias entre los estudiantes	X			F y S

Leyenda: D: docencia; I: investigación; S: servicios. F: evaluación formativa; S: evaluación sumativa; F y S: evaluación formativa y sumativa

El modelo (**M**) concibe a las tres actividades académicas investigación, docencia y servicios como interrelacionadas estrechamente pues dan cuenta de la **integralidad** de la profesión académica. El profesor, considerado desde su potencial profesional de competencias, realiza a lo largo de su carrera las tres actividades en base de una racional compatibilización del tiempo, otorgando diferentes grados de esfuerzo de acuerdo con las inquietudes, posibilidades y oportunidades. De este modo llega a su pleno desarrollo profesional. En la figura siguiente, el modelo intenta mostrar que la docencia y la investigación guardan entre sí una relación de **Retroalimentación Mutua (RM)**; en tanto que la docencia constituye para los servicios una **Contribución a la toma de decisiones (C)** y, en cambio, desde los servicios se intenta **Dinamizar (D)** la docencia. Es decir la relación bidireccional *Docencia-Servicios* es de Contribución a la toma de decisiones y Dinamización (**C/D**). En el otro frente, la Investigación contribuye (**C**) como tal a la toma de decisiones que se producen desde los Servicios y, de manera similar, la actividad de servicios busca Dinamizar (**D**) la Investigación. Es decir, la relación bidireccional *Investigación-Servicios* es, igualmente, de Contribución a la toma de decisiones y Dinamización (**C/D**).

Figura 3.2



Desde esta visión, en la realización de la actividad que corresponda (docencia, investigación, servicios) es importante siempre tener en cuenta esta relación básica que se debe establecer con las demás actividades para conservar ese cuerpo coherente y consistente que da sentido al trabajo académico.

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