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French Academia in a Prosopographic Perspective

A Collaborative Joint Project

Emmanuelle Picard

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The history of French universities remains largely unwritten. The national structure of the teaching corps partly explains this phenomenon, as it has played a part in orienting the historiography towards an examination of the disciplines, as opposed to institutions. Only Parisian academics, the profession's elite, have been the subject of profound studies. The lack of work on the academic corps as a whole hinders our ability to fully understand French academia as an institution. In an effort to remedy this, a prosopographic project dealing with the French academic corps in sciences, humanities, and law between 1800–1940, started in 2011. Like all large-scale prosopographic projects undertaken by a sizeable team of collaborators, it required serious preliminary reflection on the kind of data to be collected in order to foster a genuine social history of the academic profession. This article defines the conceptual framework and practices of the study in progress, thereby endorsing it as an alternative way of writing university history in contrast to the traditional jubilee history.

Seen by the Revolutionaries as agents of the Church, the universities in France were suppressed in 1793. Initiatives led by Napoleon I resurrected them in a reduced form fifteen years later¹. In contrast to what can be observed in French secondary education during the same period², the university's brief disappearance profoundly transformed the nature of the academic professions in France³. Although its full development would actually span several decades, we can consequently date the birth of the modern French university to the First Empire. This slow process, which by the 1880s had transformed the professoriate of the Imperial *facultés* into academics in the modern sense of the term, is a rewarding object of study for those interested in the development of professions. Yet in contrast to the historiographies of other Western European countries, relatively little research has been done on the history of the French academic corps in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christophe Charle⁴ and Victor Karady's work⁵ (mostly dealing with the Parisian *facultés*) and several regional monographs aside⁶. Moreover, due to the methodological and evidentiary diversity of publications on the subject, this work does not easily lend itself to comparison

¹ Decree of 17 March 1808 creating the Imperial University.

² See the work of Dominique Julia and Marie-Madeleine Compère on the continuity between the *collèges* of the Ancien Régime and the *lycées* created by Napoleon. Also Dominique Julia, "La naissance du corps professoral", *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 39 (1981): 71–86.

³ The term 'profession' will be used here as 'professional category' or 'group' to describe a population whose central characteristic is exercising its trade in a strict regulative framework and in institutions that form a coherent whole.

⁴ Christophe Charle, *La République des Universitaires, 1870–1914* (Paris: Seuil 1994) and Christophe Charle and Régine Ferré (eds.), *Le personnel de l'enseignement supérieur en France aux XIXe et XXe siècles* (Paris: Editions du CNRS-INRP 1985).

⁵ To cite just one article: Victor Karady, "L'expansion universitaire et l'évolution des inégalités devant la carrière d'enseignant au début de la IIIe République", *Revue française de sociologie* 14 (1973): 443–470.

⁶ Among several recent studies: Jean-François Condette, *Les lettrés de la République. Les enseignants de la Faculté des Lettres de Douai puis Lille sous la Troisième République (1870–1940)*. *Dictionnaire biographique* (Lille: Université de Lille 3 2006); Laurent Rollet and Marie-Jeanne Choffel-Mailfert (eds.), *Aux origines d'un pôle scientifique: faculté des sciences et écoles ingénieurs à Nancy du Second Empire aux années 1960* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy 2007); Bernard Lachaise, "Les professeurs de la faculté des Lettres de Bordeaux de 1914 à 1968: esquisse de portrait de groupe", in: Jean-François Dunyach and François-Joseph Ruggiu (eds.), *Les Passions d'un historien. Mélanges en l'honneur de Jean-Pierre Poussou* (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne 2010): 223–235; see also the online ongoing bibliography of the History of Education Service at www.inrp.fr/she/picard_biblio_etablissements_enseignement_superieur.htm (date accessed 19/06/2014).

and at present a synthetic historical vision of the French academic profession remains out of reach.

Given that French academics constitute a centrally managed corps of civil servants, the lack of an overarching narrative seems somewhat paradoxical. Instead of enjoying the kind of autonomy that characterizes the status of their international counterparts, assent to Parisian authority has long typified the position of French academics. Today, the organizing principles of the academic milieu still draw more on vertical (disciplinary), rather than horizontal (establishment based) consideration⁷. The existence of a rich, centralized source – the individual retirement files of public education personnel at the National Archives in Paris – ought to have made possible, if not a systematic study of the entire population, at least a series of comparative monographs drawing on comparable data⁸. However, the underdeveloped nature of the history of universities as a subfield in France and a general undervaluation of comparative work has stifled this sort of effort. While many biographies and monographs deal with small groups within the overall profession (particular laboratories or schools of thought), their narrow focus impedes an understanding of the field as a whole⁹.

These sorts of case studies do not represent the totality of the system and therefore fail to address more general questions about the profession. Additionally, Christophe Charle and others have reminded us that the French centralist tradition, present in the organizational logic of higher education, has reinforced the economic and symbolic place of Paris at the summit of the academic hierarchy. Without disputing this claim, it does not suffice to simply focus on the elite segment of the French academic world, which remains far removed from the average experience by definition. To explore the profession – and not just its privileged members – and its development as

⁷ Christine Musselin, *La longue marche des universités françaises* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 2001).

⁸ The individual retirement files of National Education employees are preserved in collection F17 of the National Archives. Those files of individuals born at least 100 years ago can be freely consulted. Files on those born later require special authorization.

⁹ Emmanuelle Picard, “L’histoire de l’enseignement supérieur français: pour une approche globale”, *Histoire de l’éducation* (2009), no. 122: 11–34, <http://histoire-education.revues.org/index1938.html> (date accessed 19/06/2014).

a whole, it is precisely the average experience that needs examination. This necessitates a large-scale, long-term study that takes all of its members into account.

Such an undertaking would allow us to tackle historical questions that deal with universities as institutions, notably in terms of the commemorative celebrations that have become increasingly common in the last several years. During more than a century, successive reforms have fragmented the history of French universities, complicating an institutional approach to their individual histories¹⁰. Against this background, the use of a large-scale analysis of the teaching corps provides us with a useful tool to explore the specific fortunes of different establishments. Through it, dialectics between a national academic corps and particular universities can be brought to light, permitting a study of career paths and choices: individual instructors remaining at one institution throughout their career, or conversely, employing strategies meant to earn them a position in Paris.

Our observations led us to invite the French scholarly community to join in a collaborative effort to assemble a systematic, standardized set of data to encourage the study of the academic profession as a whole in addition to its statutory, disciplinary, local and temporal sub-groups. The first push grew out of an effort led by Claire Lemerrier (*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*, CNRS), to resume Christophe Charle's line of inquiry in his analysis of the Parisian faculty of sciences. A group of legal historians, organized by Jean-Louis Halpérin (*École normale supérieure*, ENS), Catherine Fillon (*Université Lyon III*) and Frédéric Audren (CNRS), soon joined in. While the Napoleonic (re)foundation of the universities beginning in 1802 may have been the natural starting point for the study, the end-date was less obvious. At this stage, it seemed pre- sumptuous to treat the French university after 1960, following the massive numeric expansion of its staff. Likewise a lack of source material makes the post-War period particularly tricky to tackle. Consequently, 1940 became, less by choice than by circumstance, the end-date for our work. Before discussing the practical methods of our prosopography of the French academic corps, we will present

¹⁰ Emmanuelle Picard, "Recovering the History of the French University", *Studium. Tijdschrift voor Wetenschappen Universiteitsgeschiedenis/Revue d'Histoire des Sciences et des Universités* 5 (2012), no. 3: 156–169.

its theoretical framework.

Studying the Construction of a Profession

A major lacuna in existing monographs on the subject stems from their inability to conceive of the academic milieu in all of its dimensions. Often, they choose to study the easily identifiable category of chair-holding professors out of convenience. This category, however, is too narrow to result in a proper investigation of what is in fact a vast and diverse professional group. The tendency to concentrate on individuals with dominant positions in the field, moreover, risks furthering the bias that they represent and constitute a norm.

Yet every scholar working on the history of higher education has come across a wide range of ranks and titles – ‘substitute professor’, ‘adjunct professor’, ‘lecturer’, ‘assistant’, to name a few – corresponding to a variety of situations that sometimes (but not always) lead to the sought-after title of chaired professor. Although bylaws regulate each of these ranks¹¹, these texts have never been compiled in an exhaustive reference document, limiting our knowledge of them, and by extension our general understanding of career paths¹². Unable to compare the relative positions of the individual or individuals under study (where does an adjunct professor stand compared to a substitute professor, for instance), most scholars tracing individual careers find themselves at pains to describe its stages. Nevertheless, a purely administrative account of a given career path remains insufficient. In fact, an over-reliance on regulatory documents ignores the disparity between administrative standards and the reality on the ground, leading to

¹¹ For the nineteenth century, these texts have been compiled and indexed by the Ministry of Public Education in a collection of seven volumes: Arthur Marais de Beauchamp (ed.), *Recueil des Lois et Réglements sur l'enseignement supérieur, 1789–1915*, 7 vols. (Paris: Delalain Frères 1915); available online in the digital collection of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/> (date accessed 19/06/2014).

¹² Today, the key reference remains a precious, yet brief article by Françoise Mayeur, “L’évolution des corps universitaires (1877–1968)”, in: Charle and Ferré (eds.), *Le personnel de l'enseignement supérieur en France* (1985): 11–28.

homogenized interpretations¹³. An analysis of a professional group that fails to examine its modes for entry and advancement lacks authority when discussing their implementation¹⁴. By the same token, an approach that neglects to investigating the degree to which practices respected procedures and norms is an empty theoretical exercise. A study that considers the mutual construction of careers and institutions is thus called for.

Given this, we opted to take a twofold approach. First, we initiated an extensive survey of legislative and regulatory documents to reconstruct the legal framework of ranks and promotion practices from the nineteenth century through the 1960s¹⁵. This endeavour will result in the gradual publication of an online database with an in-depth discussion of how each position evolved over time¹⁶. Second, a large-scale prosopographic study will shed light on how careers actually developed in daily practice.

The disparity between regulations and reality is all the more problematical given that it arose in tandem with the development of the profession. As the teaching corps expanded, new ranks emerged and

¹³ For example, since 1808, faculty professors must hold a doctoral diploma. However, before the creation of the faculties of arts and sciences under Napoleon, neither the *docteur ès sciences* nor *docteur ès lettres* existed. Initially, the *Grand maître de l'Université* (the Minister of Public Education's original title) conferred the title of doctor on an individual he sought to employ in one of the new faculties, often a high school teacher. This practice continued for a number of decades, even as doctoral programmes grew. It links up to a tradition that goes back until the seventeenth century and constitutes one of the origins of conferring honorary degrees, see Pieter Dhondt, "Pomp and Circumstance at the University. The Origin of the Honorary Degree", *European Review of History* 20 (2013), no. 1: 117–136.

¹⁴ Which can be expressed in Bourdieusian terms (see the interpretation of the prosopographic approach by Donald Broady, "French Prosopography: Definition and Suggested Readings", *Poetics* 30 (2002), no. 5–6: 381–385) and can also be found in Andrew Abbott's sociology of professions, for example. See Andrew Abbott and Alexandra Hrycak, "Measuring Resemblance in Sequence Data: An Optimal Matching Analysis of Musicians' Careers", *American Journal of Sociology* 96 (1990), no. 1: 144–185. We cannot effectively think about career paths without reference to the space in which they are inserted and the strategies available within that space. The rules that govern such a space, therefore, need to be examined as closely as possible as do its codes and procedures.

¹⁵ The 1960s saw important changes in the administration of universities, linked to the abrupt rise in the employment of teachers and the reexamination of traditional positions that no longer conformed to new professional practices.

¹⁶ This preliminary work will be made available gradually in the form of an annotated data-base, accessible through the History of Education Service. The first of these, on doctoral degrees in arts, can be found online at www.inrp.fr/she/theses/scripts/index.php (date accessed 19/06/2014).

regulations governing older ones were altered. Through a continual back and forth between the reality on the ground and the profession's organizing principals, a group gradually structured itself around both standards and internal systems of arbitration and negotiation. Careers became organizational in a sociological sense¹⁷, and as new positions gradually appeared, they reflected a demand for the corps' numeric growth. Consequently, we need a solid understanding of not only each position, but also the credentials of those who obtained it, and its relative place in the hierarchy.

Prosopography has often focussed on questions of networks, families, and social origins. Yet while it is important to bear these factors in mind, they are not the central focus of our project. Rather than study the social position of individuals, we seek to examine the construction of a profession through its specific modalities and its ties to a broader social, economic, political and professional context. Career trajectories are thus our basic unit of study – in particular, how one enters and advances in the profession – its rhythms and the succession or accumulation of positions. Our aim is to reconstruct a typical career path and its evolution in order to analyze each individual's place in the sphere, making it possible to identify and study exceptional cases and reveal implicit constraints on others: we can thus more easily glean particular strategies that resulted in positions at the Sorbonne, for instance, as well as those that impeded them. In this respect, teaching seems like an especially fruitful focal point, since it reveals how academics interacted with the contemporary elite. In addition to providing a source of information on individuals and their social status, this study will demonstrate how French elites functioned more generally from 1800 to 1940¹⁸.

Delineating a target population for the study was at once the simplest and most challenging task. Having elected to consider the entire teaching corps –

¹⁷ The term 'organizational career' refers to a sociological model of a linear progression through a single organization's hierarchy.

¹⁸ This project was also presented in the framework of a collective examination of the prosopographic method, see Claire Lemerrier and Emmanuelle Picard, "Quelle approche prosopographique?", in: Laurent Rollet and Philippe Nabonnand (eds.), *Les uns et les autres... Biographies et prosopographies en histoire des sciences* (Nancy: Presses universitaires de Lorraine 2012): 605–630. An online version with annexes is available at Hal-SHS, halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00521512/fr/ (date accessed 19/06/2014).

defined as all individuals who regularly taught at *facultés*¹⁹ – our first step entailed constructing a list of their employees. Neither the universities themselves, nor the Ministry of National Education possess such a comprehensive roll. A number of sources had to be consulted: instructor registries at the National Archives and the departmental archives tied to specific *facultés* (often incomplete or chronologically limited), published administrative bulletins, course catalogues and flyers, minutes from faculty meetings, etc. Though not definitive, the current list of individuals selected for this study includes over 3500 instructors at the faculties of arts and sciences and approximately 1500 at the faculty of law²⁰. Although the list attempts to represent a population, those who only taught occasionally have not been systematically included. Nonetheless, exhaustiveness does not constitute a precondition for a rigorous study. A sample of nearly 5000 subjects remains statistically relevant and the inability of the survey to include *every* case does not call its central findings into question. Moreover, subjects identified later can be added to the database.

To a certain extent, the sources themselves guided how we defined the population. The group is united through employment at the Public Instruction/National Education administration (in 1932, the Ministry of *Instruction publique* changed its name to *Éducation nationale*) and the archives of this body are thus our largest resource. For two reasons, however, the materials found there do not suffice: first, individuals only briefly affiliated with the university often left no trace in these records; second, we believe that in order to fully understand the process of professionalization we have to consider activities that fell outside of the purview of the National Education administration – and so do not figure in its collection. The existing

¹⁹ The length of instructors' tenure raises problems. By concentrating on regular instructors, meaning those with relatively stable positions, we neglect part-time lecturers, which results in the risk of eliminating alternative career paths from our study. Despite the fact that during the nineteenth century individuals who did not pursue a full-time academic career taught many courses and often had important intellectual roles, we decided to limit our data collection to instructors who taught for at least a year.

²⁰ The study does not deal with the faculties of medicine for two reasons: firstly, the absence of a team of researchers in the field, and secondly, and more fundamentally, the bylaws governing medical faculties were vastly different from those of the other faculties because of the ties of the former to public hospitals. However, a dictionary of members of the medical faculty in Paris does exist: Françoise Huguet, *Les Professeurs de la faculté de médecine de Paris: Dictionnaire biographique, 1794–1939* (Paris: Editions du CNRS-INRP 1991).

literature on the French professoriate in the nineteenth century shows that many individuals engaged in multiple professional activities linked to their academic identity²¹. These undertakings require special attention. By studying them, we learn about when and how professional academia distanced itself from related fields (such as industry, journalism, and literature).

Yet, as our sources are serial, numerous and often verbose, we had to justify and limit what we consulted. We had to avoid creating an overly heterogeneous database that would make it difficult to compare individuals. But simultaneously, in order to permit a statistical analysis, we had to find comparable data. Thus, we employed materials from archives concerning academic activity and a more limited set of sources dealing with extra-curricular activities. In the end we opted to orient our research largely towards specific materials (notably, the retirement and staff files at the National Archives²²), but required their systematic examination. At the same time we took advantage of other documents related to education activities, including the alumni yearbooks of the *grandes écoles* and *aggrégation* registries. Both constitute precious resources that complete the information to be found in the staff files²³. In order to reconstruct activities that took place outside of regular instruction (in industry, legal affairs, journalism, etc.), we turned to sources on groups where at least one instructor in the survey took part in (philanthropic and/or industrial associations, terms served in the government and/or administration, scholarly or professional societies, etc.). We then drafted a list of those that multiple subjects participated in, which will expand as work progresses.

Once we had framed our general hypothesis and targeted a population and a core set of sources, the technical aspects of the project had to be laid out so that multiple research teams could participate in the work. We created a simple, specific set of instructions in order to limit the potential pitfalls

²¹ See Charle, *La République des Universitaires* (1994).

²² Despite their a priori systematic character, career files are far from uniform, ranging from volumes to a few sheets of paper.

²³ Immediately following the French Revolution, an examination for high school teachers was created, which today functions as an unofficial, though generally necessary, step in an academic career. See Emmanuelle Picard and Marte Mangset, “La communauté des historiens académiques français à l’aube du XXI^e siècle”, in: Christophe Granger (ed.), *À quoi pensent les historiens. Science et insouciance de l’histoire au XXI^e siècle* (Paris: Autrement 2013): 31–47.

typically associated with a large collaborative effort piloted by a small team. By providing contributors with clear directions on what information to mine on extra- university activities, we structured the inquiry in such a way as to avoid amassing exceedingly disparate and incomparable data. Essentially, we set up a simple method for gathering information that could be adapted as the project progressed. Next, given that our aim was to make the data (and not simply the study's findings) as widely available as possible, publishing it online seemed self-evident, so that others were allowed to make use of our findings. Lyon's Lahrha history laboratory offered to integrate our work in its more general historical database: SyMoGIH (*Système Modulaire de Gestion de l'Information Historique*) created in 2012²⁴. To get the project off the ground as quickly as possible, we provisionally used a non-dynamic data entry form that allowed for regular updates (Excel spreadsheets). Finally, as the scale of the project required the assistance of a large number of scholars, we established clear guidelines for research, selection and entry to maintain a high degree of consistency and ensure accurate quantitative processing. Consistency is a central problem in the design and creation of any database and therefore, a number of methodological handbooks deal with the subject²⁵.

The Questionnaire: Rubrics and Overall Philosophy

Having examined the scholarly foundations of the project, we can now address some of the practical aspects mentioned above. The initial data entry uses Excel spreadsheets²⁶. The spreadsheets, containing a dozen columns, are divided into five rough categories: identity, education, teaching employment, non-teaching employment and networks/memberships.

– The 'identity' rubric contains basic information of the individual from personal records, including name or names (given name, pseudonym, stage name, etc.)²⁷, date and place of birth, nationality, social background, marriage

²⁴ See larhra.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/Pole_Methodes/SyMoGIH_fr.php (date accessed 19/06/2014).

²⁵ An example of this can be found at the History of Education Service's website. On instructors at the Paris faculty of sciences, see [www.inrp.fr/she/dictionnaire_faculte_sciences _paris_dossier_complet.htm](http://www.inrp.fr/she/dictionnaire_faculte_sciences_paris_dossier_complet.htm) (date accessed 19/06/2014).

²⁶ The presentation format of this file does not authorize reproduction in this chapter. Any scholar who wishes to consult it, may request it by email (emmanuelle.picard@ens-lyon.fr).

²⁷ This dimension is particularly important in regard to academic careers, given that names have a value themselves both in validating statements and assigning them to an author; see David

status and descendants. Moreover, subjects are assigned a unique identification number that is associated with each item connected to them. Identification numbers, more reliable than proper names that may change over time, make detecting links between individuals easier.

- The ‘education’ rubric begins when possible with their secondary education, but more often with the higher education that they received, specifying institution(s) attended and diplomas or titles earned (see table 9.1).

- ‘Teaching career’ distinguishes between teaching in and outside of the *facultés*. It contains all activities and positions held, with precise notes on rank, area(s) taught, and duration of engagement (see table 9.2).

- Due to the suppositions made in the study, ‘the individual’s non-teaching professional career’ is the most difficult to document. It is constructed, like the preceding rubrics, with information on the rank, period, and place of employment.

- The ‘networks/memberships’ rubric surveys all extra-professional activity: scholarly journals, professional associations, political/trade union and religious activities²⁸.

Pontille, “La signature scientifique. Authentification et valeur marchande”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 141–142 (2002): 72–78. The legal name may differ from a professional or penname used by an academic to sign publications. Therefore this method ensures that all documents will be linked to the individual in question, regardless of the name cited in a particular source.

²⁸ In this way we hope to circumvent the tendency that can be found in the ‘professional’ prosopographic approach to overlook a population’s activity outside of their central field. For instance, in his study of nineteenth-century Bologna academics, François Gasnault remarks on his inability to take into account the “innumerable connections that unite [the group] to other institutional networks”; see François Gasnault, “Le milieu universitaire à Bologne au XIXe siècle. Les aléas de l’enquête documentaire prosopographique”, *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 100 (1988), no. 1: 155–173.

TABLE 9.1 *Fields in the 'education' rubric.*

Doctorate, discipline	Source language
Doctorate, year received	Digital
Doctorate, dissertation title	Source language
Doctorate, number of pages in dissertation	Digital
Doctorate, committee	Free text that indicates the identification numbers of committee members present in the database
Doctorate, honorary (if any)	Source language
Dissertation chair, name	Source language
Dissertation chair, identification	Digital
Doctorate, where defended	Source language
Remarks	

TABLE 9.2 *Fields in the 'teaching career' rubric.*

Starting date of episode 1	Day-month-year
End date of episode 1	Day-month-year
Post title for episode 1	Source language
Instructor title for episode 1	Pull-down menu
Identification number of post of attachment	Digital
If substitute, name of instructor being substituted	Source language
Identification number	Digital
Remarks	

A major problem in creating a prosopographic database for quantitative data processing rapidly became apparent: for at least part of the data to be consistent and systematic it was not enough to direct researchers towards particular sources, a universal approach had to be used for each subject. This left us with a decision: either restrain data collection to a largely serial list of pre-defined sources (potentially significantly limiting the richness of the survey), or use a dual-format to construct the survey, by supplementing data from a required list of sources with other materials. A missing entry for a given variable thus indicates that despite being sought out, information could not be found. In addition to the obligatory fields, contributors to the database can freely introduce additional material in the 'remarks' rubric (see the tables above). By doing so, we ensured that a significant part of the data comes from a systematic search of the target population without losing important complementary information. To round out the system, we decided not to code

or pre-categorize the data, asking participants to enter information in the source language (i.e. in full text). This step was intended to prevent anachronistic or ahistorical readings, such as attributing a given rank to the social value it holds today, when during the nineteenth century, for instance, it had a far different status. This precaution seemed especially important for a database that tracks a population over a 150-year span that saw profound changes in professional identity. Our approach also illuminates structural transformations in which the subjects' careers evolved (for example, the development of chairs and disciplines). By taking the operative effects of filiation and appropriation into account, instead of imposing anachronistic twentieth-century categories, it becomes possible to create a genealogy of the organization of academic knowledge²⁹.

Similar factors led us to employ the notion of 'episode' as our data entry mode. The prosopographic approach risks flattening out specific trajectories; by reconstructing an individual's sequential accumulation of positions and credentials (such as membership in several groups or the accrual of recognition), it becomes difficult to recognize the effects and significance of simultaneity. However, in order to analyze a trajectory, we have to be able to show the cumulative or competitive effects that may have impacted it³⁰. Identifying when an individual entered a specialist association or received a distinction reveals both how this came about and the ramifications of new credentials. Since a number of synchronic variables often shape academic careers, the concept of 'multi-positioning' through various forms of association and engagement, lends itself to an analysis of how subjects capitalized on their credentials. We can then think about how individuals inserted themselves in networks and furthered their academic careers through (power) positions. Thus the database needed a format where we could reconstruct entire careers as completely as possible, including the accumulation of teaching posts, administrative functions, and work in other

²⁹ For an example of such critiques, as well as a proposal for overcoming them, see Steven Shapin and Arnold Thackray, "Prosopography as a Research Tool in History of Science: The British Scientific Community, 1700–1900", *History of Science* 12 (1974): 1–28.

³⁰ See Luc Boltanski, "L'espace positionnel: multiplicité des positions institutionnelles et habitus de classe", *Revue française de sociologie* 14 (1973), no. 1: 3–26. While this article demonstrates how an approach that encompasses multiple positions can be used to measure an individual's social surface, it does not take time into account, in other words the transformations or sequence of surfaces.

spheres. Understood as performing a specific function in a particular place over a period of time, the use of ‘episodes’ permits the emergence of a detailed reconstruction. Therefore, rather than relying on a catch all rubric like ‘teaching experience’, each episodic entry contains not only chronological information, but also qualitative content. This underlines a trajectory’s synchronic (the existence of simultaneous episodes) and diachronic (career development considerations) dimensions³¹. This practice applies to every rubric from life events such as a second marriage (thus a second episode in the matrimonial rubric) to diplomas (in the educational rubric). Bearing in mind the totality of position-functions over a lifetime, we can view individuals as the products of a complex series of changing relations over time, offsetting the tendency to anachronistically reduce a complex career to a prestigious post occupied late in a career.

This data should allow for the following types of quantitative processing:

- factorial analysis of correspondences (possibly with automatic classification) to uncover what contributes to diversity and the existence of disparate profiles in a group, and to statistically identify individuals that typify specific profiles, permitting a rational, targeted return to biography from prosopography³²;
- multivariate regression and event-based historical analysis to evaluate the impact of various factors on an individual’s ‘success’ (defined according to criteria specific to the group under investigation)³³;
- network analysis to understand how various types of relationships (familial, economic, etc.) and interactions (citation,

³¹ On the significance of using smaller units than individuals to structure information, see the methodological work underway at the Lahrha, in particular Sylvain Brunier and Nicolas Krautberger, “Les trajectoires archivées des experts de la modernisation rurale alpine (XIXe–XXe siècles)”, *Temporalités* 11 (2010), temporalites.revues.org/index1251.html (date accessed 19/06/2014).

³² See for example Frédéric Lebaron, “La dénégation du pouvoir. Le champ des économistes français au milieu des années 1990”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* (1997), no. 119: 3–26 and Björn-Olav Dozo, “Données biographiques et données relationnelles”, *ConTEXTES* 3 (2008), contextes.revues.org/index1933.html (date accessed 19/06/2014).

³³ See for example Jérôme Krop, Claire Lemerrier and Pierre Schermutzki, “Relations sociales et désignation d’une génération de directeurs d’écoles dans le champ de l’enseignement primaire de la Seine, 1870–1914”, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 57 (2010), no. 2: 79–114.

collaboration, etc.) structured a group and contributed to the creation of favourable positions and divisions in it³⁴;

– sequential analysis, which can produce typologies based on the sequence of posts held, places of residence or any other temporal series as opposed to more static ‘profiles’³⁵.

Conclusion: A Step-by-Step Project

The extent of the survey undertaken – nearly 5000 subjects in all – entailed a collective effort and led us to conceive of a simultaneously rigorous and broad questionnaire to accommodate jurists and physicians alike. Our decision to use an enlargeable online database from the outset increased the project’s flexibility and facilitated the long-term recruitment of collaborators. It also gave us the chance to demonstrate the system’s effectiveness and reliability by testing it on a sample of the target population: the Paris faculty of sciences. Limiting ourselves to a specific rank would have prevented an analysis of professional dynamics and the structuring of the field. Consistency, along with the opportunity to fill in a gap in the current literature, motivates our choice as Christophe Charle’s collection of dictionaries on the Parisian faculties lacked a volume on this institution during the nineteenth century³⁶.

Created after the establishment of the Imperial University on 17 March 1808, the Paris faculty of sciences gradually developed over the next decade. Initially its activities were limited to public lectures and overseeing the

³⁴ See for example Douglas R. White and H. Gilman McCann, “Cities and Fights: Material Entailment Analysis of the Eighteenth-Century Chemical Revolution”, in: Barry Wellman and Steven Berkowitz, *Social Structures: A Network Approach* (Cambridge: University Press 1988): 380–399, eclectic.ss.uci.edu/~drwhite/pub/Chemical.pdf (date accessed 19/06/2014).

³⁵ See for example Fabien Accominotti, “Creativity from Interaction: Artistic Movements and the Creativity careers of Modern Painters”, *Poetics* 37 (2009): 267–294.

³⁶ Christophe Charle and Eva Telkès, *Les Professeurs du Collège de France, 1901–1939. Dictionnaire biographique* (Paris: Editions du CNRS-INRP 1988); Christophe Charle and Eva Telkès, *Les Professeurs de la faculté des sciences de Paris, 1901–1939. Dictionnaire biographique* (Paris: Editions du CNRS-INRP 1989) and Christophe Charle, *Les Professeurs de la faculté des lettres de Paris, 1809–1939. Dictionnaire biographique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions du CNRS-INRP 1985–1986).

distribution of university diplomas. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, it slowly became a leading institution for both teaching and research. Its growth, already noteworthy under the Second Empire, was particularly spectacular during the early years of the Third Republic. Between 1900 and 1939, the Paris faculty of sciences was a centre of French scientific life. Its faculty included well-known professors (including Augustin Louis Cauchy, Marie Curie and Jean Perrin), a large number of French and foreign students attended courses, and the staff of its research and teaching laboratories trained countless graduate students and participated in major scientific debates. A number of more or less well-researched biographies and analyses have been written on leading personalities at the faculty and their place in the scientific fields. By contrast, other long-forgotten instructors have left little trace behind. The earlier remarks on the development of the academic community and the trajectories and interactions within it force us to think about the teaching staff as a whole and to attempt to compile consistent and, more importantly, comparable data on each of them.

The first difficulty that we faced was to limit our undertaking. As noted above, no single source would have allowed us to survey all individuals who occupied a teaching position for at least a year. By comparing various lists – appointment notices, faculty registers and the like – we identified 318 individuals for the period 1808–1914. We then offered all interested scholars an opportunity to participate in the project by ‘adopting’ instructors. This approach gave historians and historians of science, whether specialists of a discipline or of a particular figure, responsibility for their area of expertise. To ensure that the serial data would be systematically entered, we began by examining a number of lists (former students of the *École normale supérieure* and the *École polytechnique*, members of the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Medicine, the *Morts pour la France* database, etc.) and communicated our results and directions on how to locate individual files at the National Archives to those willing to ‘adopt’ instructors at the Paris faculty of sciences. Scholars involved also received the entry form with detailed instructions on how to fill it out.

This first step is underway. Presently, at the behest of Jean-Louis Halpérin (ENS) and under the direction of Catherine Fillon, a group of legal historians have begun a prosopographic study of instructors at France’s

faculty of law between 1802 and 1950³⁷. Early on, the team agreed to collaborate with the ‘Paris faculty of sciences’ project. This combined effort was natural and necessary, since the project aims not to understand how a single subsection operates, but the academic world as a whole. Moreover, the project likewise incorporated ‘local’ initiatives, in particular a study of the Nancy faculty of sciences³⁸.

Together this extensive collaboration will result in a cohesive, online, open-access database that will promote exchange among scholars working on socio-historical questions. Although developed for French academia, the prosopographic questionnaire ought to prove sufficiently flexible and robust for use in other national contexts. As the nineteenth century was a crucial period in the emergence of the modern academic profession in Western Europe and the United States, it constitutes a promising basis for international comparison.

Since 2012, the network Heloise (European Workshop on Historical Academic Databases) has promoted scholarly exchange on the social history of European universities from the Middle Ages to the present. It has likewise worked towards creating tools and technical solutions that promote further efficient collaboration in producing, treating, and making digital data and archives available. Its second workshop took place in Bologna in June 2013 and resulted in an academic blog: heloise.hypotheses.org/ (date accessed 19/06/2014). The discussion focussed on how to facilitate a simultaneous search of multiple online data-bases. This should provide a useful tool for comparison between the European countries implicated in the project and consequently further the history of European universities in the long-term. In result, the project as a whole offers another way of writing university history, in contrast and/or in addition to the traditional jubilee history. Instead of creating a false sense of unity by writing an artificial commemorative history of different institutions that have little more in common than their place of

³⁷ The presentation is available at www.droit.ens.fr/-Histoire-des-professeurs-et-des-.html (date accessed 19/06/2014).

³⁸ See Laurent Rollet, “Peut-on faire l’histoire des pôles scientifiques?”, *Histoire de l’éducation* (2009), no. 122: 91–113, histoire-education.revues.org/index1946.html (date accessed 19/06/2014).

business³⁹, the large-scale analysis of the teaching corps in this project, provides us with a useful tool to explore the specific fortunes of different establishments. A comparative approach is therefore essential, both within France and between French and other European institutions.

³⁹ See the example of institutions like the University of Avignon that was created long before the Revolution by the Pope in 1303 and disappeared in 1793, like all the other universities in France. The university lay dormant until 1963 when it became a satellite of the University of Aix-en-Provence, only acquiring the status of a full university in 1984. The University of Avignon inherited no more than a memory of its pre-Revolutionary namesake. Nonetheless, efforts have been made to transcend the century and a half long gap between the two institutions, as in the recent work Brigitte Bénézet (ed.), *L'Université d'Avignon: naissance et renaissance, 1303–2003* (Arles: Actes Sud 2003).