

CIVILIAN TEACHERS IN A MILITARY ACADEMY. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF CIVILIAN TEACHING STAFF IN THE LAND FORCES ACADEMY OF SIBIU

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study whose aim is to analyze the way in which civilian teachers from the Land Forces Academy of Sibiu are perceived by their students. In a first stage, the students were asked to rate to what extent their civilian teachers contribute to activities that are essential for the academy, listed in a questionnaire consisting of 24 questions. In the second phase of the study the students were asked to make a brief characterization of the civilian teaching staff. The results indicate that the students consider the influence of the civilian teaching staff on the quality of the academic environment in general and on their intellectual training in particular as being positive and significant. They also appreciated the high level of the teaching staff training in the areas of their specializations.

Keywords: *military educational system, civilian teaching staff*

1. Introduction

The military education system is a component of the national educational system and, at the same time, an important component of the Romanian Armed Forces. The *Training Doctrine of the Armed Forces* states that the process of military education primarily aims to the development of the military leader with the specific competences, established by the beneficiary, correlated with the training and the functional responsibilities of the personnel, with the operational needs of the Army and with the requirements of interoperability with the armed forces of NATO member states.

Military education has gone through multiple transformations especially after Romania's integration into NATO. A. Rațiu (2011) highlights a number of factors that acted as sources of pressure towards the transformation of the military education institutions:

- The reform of the Romanian Army in areas such as doctrine, structure, actions, training and education;
- The transformation of the national educational system according to the new paradigm of *education for transformation*;
- The need to ensure the complementarity between military schools;

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- The series of mutations and transformations of human resources in the army as a result of accession of Romania to NATO;

- The need to achieve the compatibility between Romanian military schools and those of other NATO member states in terms of organization, timing, content, purpose, competences, etc.

Roman și Giurcă³⁸ enumerates five key actions designed for integration through education of the Romanian army into NATO structures:

- Documenting Western military educational systems in order to identify patterns and trends of evolution;
- Assessing the current state of Romanian military education system and identifying its potentialities;
- Establishing a philosophy of the system in line with evolution trends and developments in the army and in the global society;
- Identifying pressures for adaptation that are coming towards the military educational system from the military institutions and national and international environment;
- Identifying possible and desirable courses of action for modernization of education in such a way that compatibility with Western systems of training military personnel is ensured

The result has been materialized in designing an educational system corresponding to both present and future interests of the Romanian Army and to requirements for compatibility with the armies of NATO members. The base from which to start in designing this system is represented by the model of the modern officer - the result of judicious combination of elements from its human, social and professional model. Starting from the roles and functions of military actions, this socio-professional model specifies the basic and specific competences which become strategic milestones for the design of the military educational system.

The Land Forces Academy aims at: *“Formation of command officers of all arms/services/military specialties belonging to the Land Forces, as well as for other beneficiaries, licensed in accredited/approved study areas and university specializations, able to access, according to the needs of the army and their own options, the specialization stage, able to take responsibility for specific missions and to exercise, in their close connection, the following roles: military leader, warrior, military specialist, educator, citizen in service of the nation, devoted to supreme values: Homeland, Honor, Duty.”*³⁹

As military higher educational institution, the academy has also assumed the following mission: *” to generate and transfer knowledge by means of.....research, development, innovation and technology transfer, through individual and collective creativity, in science, and exploitation and dissemination of results”*⁴⁰

The duration of studies is 3 years – 6 academic semesters. The academic component of the curriculum includes fundamental and specialized disciplines and provides the basic

³⁸ Nicolae Roman și Florin Giurcă, „Exigențe formative induse de exercitarea profesiei de ofițer în contextul funcțiilor ocupate la baza carierei universitare”, în Ghica-Radu, Grigoraș, C., Florișteanu, E. *Dimensiuni calitative ale curriculum-ului pentru formarea ofițerilor*, Editura Academiei Forțelor Terestre, Sibiu, 2010, p.19-33

³⁹ <http://www.armyacademy.ro/conducere/misiune.htm>

⁴⁰ ibidem

scientific preparation as well as specialized military training. The competencies that are formed are those of a military leader, educator and citizen.

The specialized military training component is carried out in a modular way and aims the training and skills development associated with the hypostasis of fighter/military specialist of the graduates. It consists of general military training targeting skills training and development of combat skills and of military training which form the initial military branch specialist competences.

Therefore, the instructive – educative process in the academy has a dual character generated by the need to design the activities both from a psycho-pedagogical and military point of view. Military training must be combined harmoniously with academic activity in order to prepare the cadets as future officers and to educate them in accordance with the requirements of the beneficiary.

This is the context in which activates, at the present time, the teaching staff of the academy, composed of 25 civilian and 16 military full time teachers.

In a military academy, the military teachers provide role models for the cadets with which they can identify themselves. To this is added their operational experience which enables them to create and present courses and seminars with a high degree of applicability in military contexts. Military teachers are familiar with the problems encountered by the cadets as future officers and are aware of the role that the Academy has in their development and that is why they can provide, formally or informally, career counseling.

But what is the role of the civilian teachers in a military educational establishment? If we rely on the principle that it takes a specialist in a particular field to form experts in the same field - a physician for physicians, a lawyer for lawyers, an officer for officers etc. – then a civilian teacher has no place in a military academy. But if we analyze the socio-professional model of the modern officer we find that it specifies certain competences which does not require the imperative presence of teachers with military ranks but with a high level of training in the their discipline.

As shown by Dughi și Roman, the teacher is not just an *organizer and leader of teaching and educational activities* in accordance with specific objectives, but also an *organizer of learning*, a *model*, a *partner*, a *counselor* and, not the least, an *educator* of students. In universities, teachers are also *members of the teaching staff* who are in continuous interaction and collaboration. All these roles are exercised simultaneously, formally and informally. Is thus created a favorable environment for training and education which will be perceived by the student and from which he will benefit without reflecting too much about the suite of actions, efforts and relations involved in its proper functioning.

This paper aims to open a series of studies that will outline the role and place of civilian teachers in the military educational system of Romania. We will present in the following the results of a study whose aim is to analyze the way in which the civilian teachers of the Land Forces Academy of Sibiu are perceived by the cadets. In a first phase, 450 cadets – representing 63.85% of the total - were asked to assess to what degree the civilian teachers contribute to a set of activities that are essential for the academy, listed in a questionnaire consisting of 24 questions. The answers to this questionnaire are shown below in a graphical form.

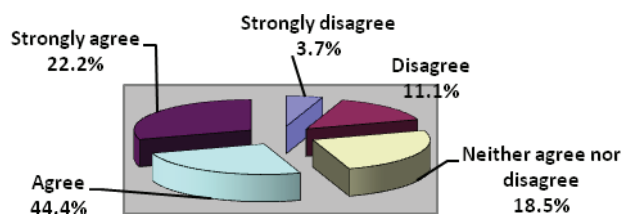


Figure no. 1. The civilian teachers contribute to ensuring the continuity and stability of the educational process of the Land Forces Academy

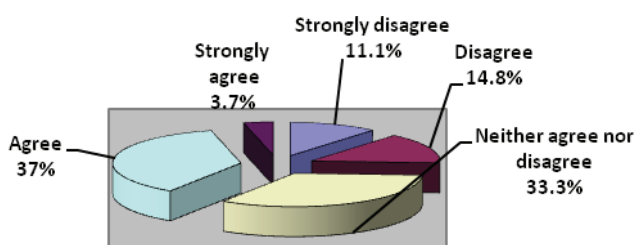


Figure no. 2. The civilian teachers contribute to ensuring academic rigour of the educational process of the Land Forces Academy

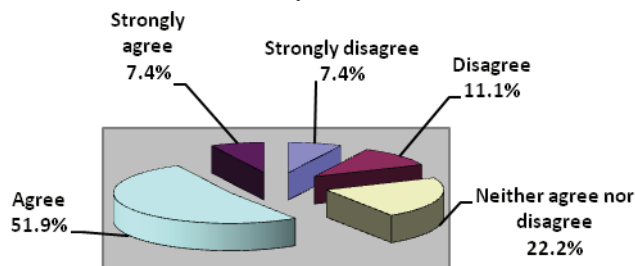


Figure no. 3. The civilian teachers contribute to ensuring pedagogical rigour of the educational process of the Land Forces Academy

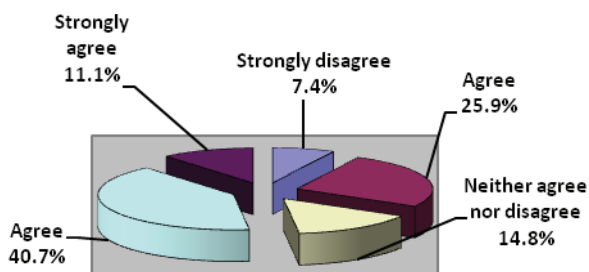


Figure no. 4. The civilian teachers contribute to connecting with other military academies and civilian universities

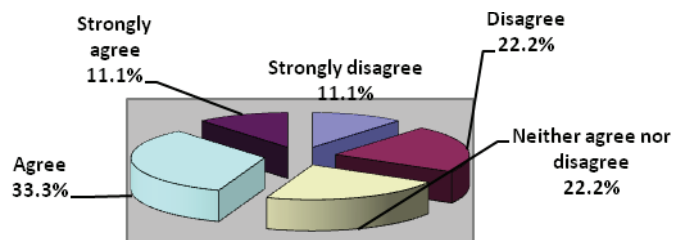


Figure no. 5. The civilian teachers help connecting with the national and international research community

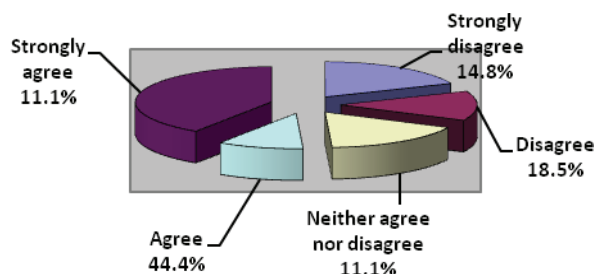


Figure no. 6. The civilian teachers contribute to diversifying prospects for development of the Land Forces Academy

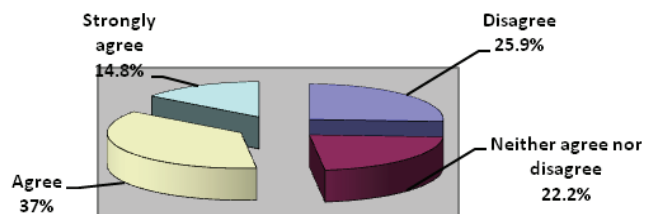


Figure no. 7. The civilian teachers contribute to military-society relations improvement

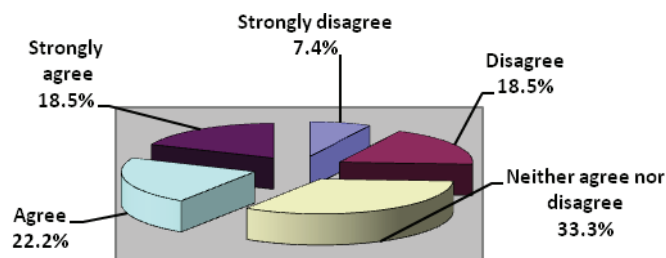


Figure no. 8. The civilian teachers contribute to openness towards civilian environment of the military academic community

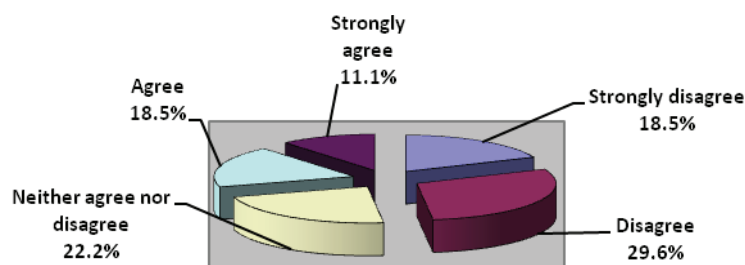


Figure no. 9. The civilian teachers contribute to openness towards foreign military universities of the military academic community

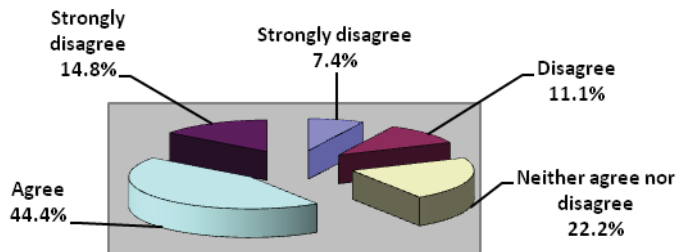


Figure no. 10. The civilian teachers contribute to achievement of the general and specific purposes of the Academy

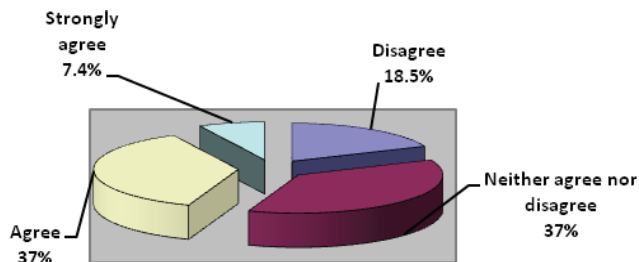


Figure no. 11. The civilian teachers make connections between the key concepts of their fields of expertise and the concepts specific to military domain.

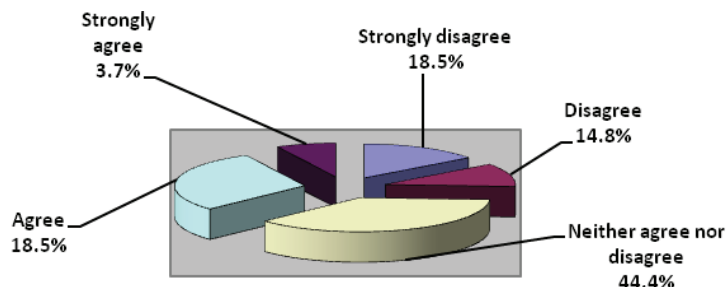


Figure no. 12. The civilian teachers use relevant examples from the military experience in their courses and lectures

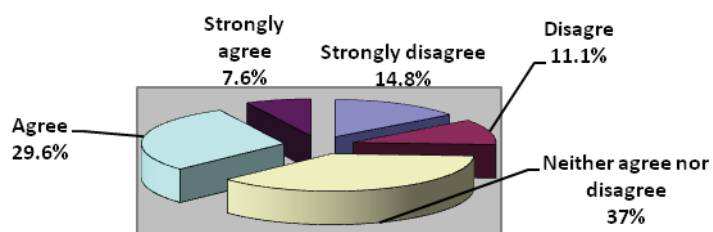


Figure no. 13. The civilian teachers explain how the information presented in their lectures and seminars can be applied in military contexts

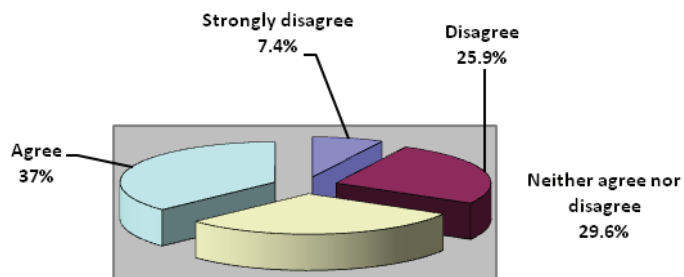


Figure no. 14. The civilian teachers explain in class the latest developments and changes in their fields of specialization

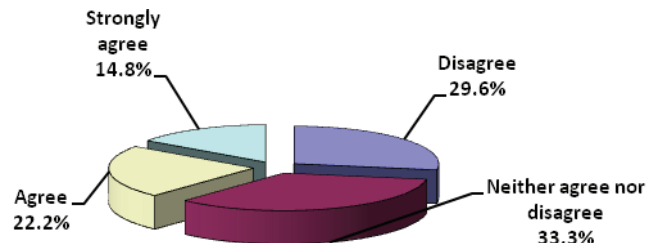


Figure no. 15. The civilian teachers have a significant influence on the development of students as future military leaders

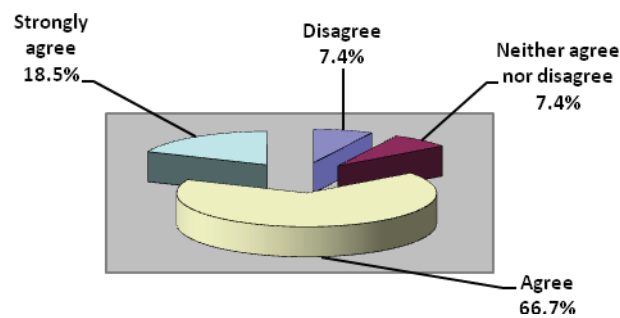


Figure no. 16. The civilian teachers have a high level of professional training

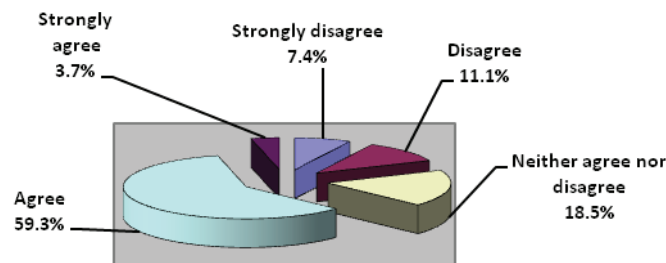


Figure no. 17. The civilian teachers have a positive influence on the psychosocial climate of the academy

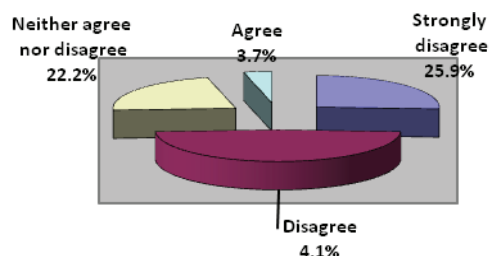


Figure no. 18. The civilian teachers have a significant influence on the development of students as fighters

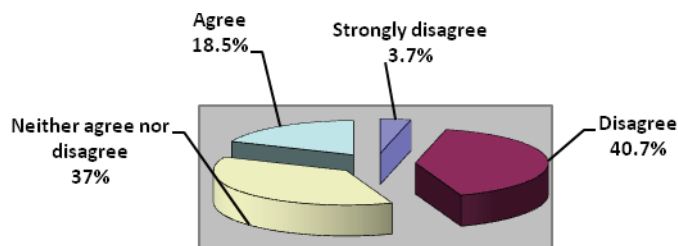


Figure no. 19. The civilian teachers have a significant influence on the military organizational culture

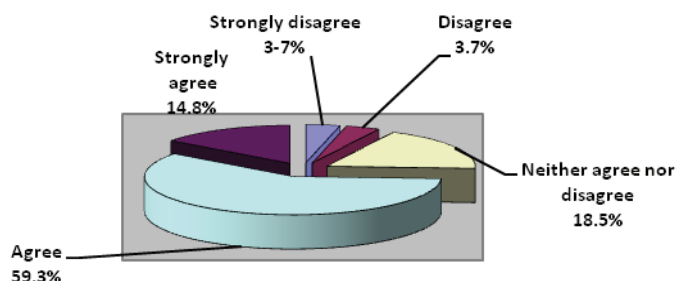


Figure no. 20. The civilian teachers have a high level of pedagogical training

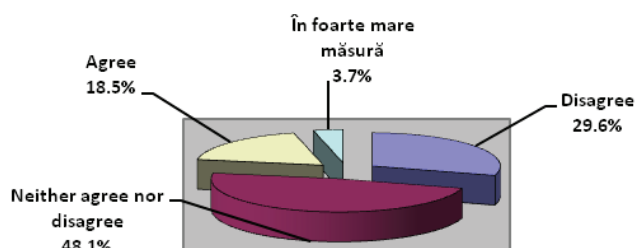


Figure no. 21. The civilian teachers have a positive influence on the development of students as military specialists

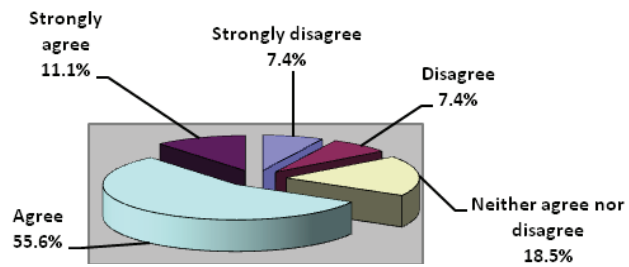


Figure no. 22. The civilian teachers have a significant contribution to the development of the intellectual abilities of the students

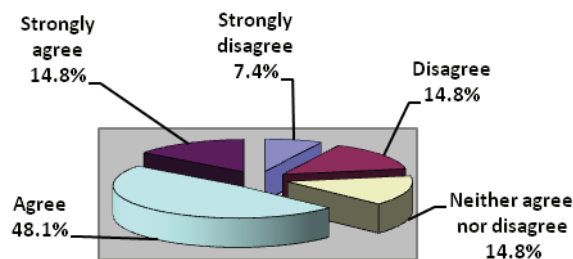


Figure no. 23. The civilian teachers have a positive influence on the development of students as citizens

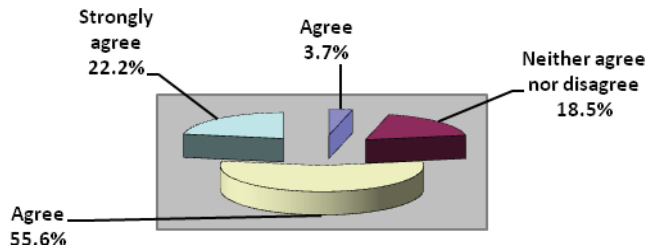


Figure no. 24. The civilian teachers have a positive influence on the development of students as educators

The analysis of the responses to the questionnaire allows us to sketch a characterization of the civilian teacher staff as perceived by the students. Therefore, they believe that:

- civilian teachers strongly contribute to ensuring the continuity and stability of the educational process of the Land Forces Academy and to the achievement of the general and specific purposes of the Academy;
- they have a high level of professional and pedagogical training;
- they have a positive influence on the psychosocial climate of the academy;

- they have a significant contribution to the development of the intellectual abilities of the cadets and on their formation as citizens and educators

We list below those actions of civilian teachers to which the students have responded with „agree” and „strongly agree” at a rate of only 48% - 55%: ensuring the academic rigour of the educational process of the academy, connecting the academy with other military academies and civilian universities, contribute to diversifying prospects for development of the Land Forces Academy and to military-society relations improvement. They also have a positive influence on the development of students as military specialists.

Answers to the following characteristics are highly dispersed between the five possible options, indicating that, according to students’ perception, civilian teachers have to improve some aspects of their activity in courses and seminars: to make more connections between the key concepts of their fields of expertise and the concepts specific to military domain, to use more relevant examples from the military experience in their courses and lectures, to explain in class the latest developments and changes in their fields of specialization and the way in which the students could use that information in a military context.

The students also evaluate on the full scale – from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” – the degree of influence of civilian teachers on their formation as future military leaders and on the military organizational culture. But 74% of respondents considered that the influence of the civilian teachers on students’ development as fighters is very low.

The analysis of the results of the T test for independent samples indicates that the students who graduated from civilian high schools gave higher scores to civilian teachers for almost every aspect of their activity compared to the students who graduated from military high schools. The only aspect in which the difference is not significant is related to the influence of teachers on connecting with other universities academy civil, military and research community. The female students too gave higher scores to civilian teachers for almost every aspect of their activity compared to male students, except those related to the influence of teachers on the training of the cadets as fighters, military specialists and future military leaders.

Also, the students were asked to make a brief characterization of civilian teachers. This task triggered, automatically and involuntarily somewhat, the comparison with military teachers.

The civilian teachers were described as follows: malleable, understanding, indulgent, relaxed during courses and seminars, open to new ideas, calm, objective and fair especially in evaluation. Compared with military teachers, they are more flexible about the attire and posture of the students. They accept questions and suggestions and create a pleasant atmosphere in classrooms. They are people *"who enjoy when students are interested in their discipline"*. A student writes: *"They create a greater cohesion among students because they encourage teamwork. They are effective because they ease the tension and allow free expression"*. Another student said: *"They change their teaching styles according to the type of students; they know what qualities to seek in a student and what expectations they should have from him. They offer us easily the right to reply and to personal opinion."*

Generally, they are described as being close to students, relaxed in relationships, sociable and communicative. One student summed up as follows, to the amusement of the researcher: *"(Civilian teachers) are much indulgent with us than military teachers probably*

because they pity us somewhat. They are nice and they understand our problems even if they never lived after a program such as ours to know how it is."

Civilian teachers have higher expectations from students regarding the level of knowledge and they are perceived to be highly trained in the discipline they teach. The students perceive them as being devoted to their work. They are not so punctual like the military teachers and also are not as authoritarian and do not appreciate as much the discipline.

The students do not appreciate the civilian teachers who tend to take over the behavior of the military: "(Civilian teachers) *have a close and warm relationship with students compared with the military teachers, which is due to a relaxed atmosphere which is unrestricted by the commander-subordinate relationship. Sometimes they try to emulate the behavior of the military and behave like them in order to gain some authority, but by doing so they alienate the students.*"

One student summarizes the opinion of all his colleagues: "(Civilian teachers) *are perfect for this environment because they managed to relax the atmosphere. If we had only military teachers it was something less good for the academy.*"

Many students agree with the statement of two of their colleagues: "*Even if they do not live in the military environment, some teachers are trying to understand the differences between a civilian student who has some free time and a military student who has to fulfill many additional activities.*" and "*Although they are not military they succeeded to fit here and they follow certain rules of conduct, asking forms of report, uniformity, respect and preparation so they are well trained.*"

One student shows a main cause of the difference in the attitude of students towards civilian teachers: "*A cause of this difference would be that teachers who have military ranks are at the same time the cadets' superiors and they tend to be more demanding and harsh in the way they teach and evaluate the cadets. Most students are reluctant to submit their ideas and opinions related to education or other aspects of life in the academy.*" Another student noted: "*I can say that students have more fear of the military cadres than civilian ones because military cadres have more power - for example, a student cannot afford to comment before a major or colonel. But civilian staff is much more understanding and more objective.*"

Nevertheless, the students realize that: "*In short, compared to the military cadres, I can say that I prefer to have contact mostly with civilian teachers, but my status as a military student makes me realize that I have more need of military cadres.*"

Conclusion

The model of the modern officer proposes the formation on five coordinates: leader for peoples and organizations, fighter, specialist, educator and citizen. Therefore, the education of the military students must integrate elements from areas of human life in general and of the military activity in particular and must achieve the harmonization between the military training needs and the needs of the liberal university education. This is accomplished by creating a military university that exposes the students to a variety of ideas, perceptions, analyzes and perspectives designed to form them intellectually, socially and professionally. The future officers must receive not only specialized training but also the general education that develops critical thinking and analytical skills, enabling them to

exercise the capacity to compare and analyze, to ask the right questions about what is happening around them, to show initiative, elements that are absolutely necessary to any person who wants to develop and advance in his/her profession. Such a university avoids indoctrination and unilateral socialization, builds a general culture which turns out to be the best support for vocational or professional training that, in turn, does not have to be separated from the scientific, moral or social education. We believe that, through their work in military universities, civilian teachers create, maintain and enrich an environment that is favorable to the development, research and innovation in a field considered until recently as rigid and less open to transformation.

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