

SUMMARY OF PROBLEMS WITH DR. AKULOV

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INTRODUCTION

As stated in the attached letter, the problems encountered by Dr. Roussev and I (along with some local faculty who do not wish to say anything publicly for fear of losing their jobs) can be grouped into two broad categories:

(A) poor management skills, characterized by:

- (1) disorganization and lack of planning, as well as
- (2) forgetfulness, impulsivity, and lack of focus

(B) an interpersonal style exhibiting a cyclical pattern of:

- (1) blame-shifting,
- (2) negative misinterpretations and hostile responses to suggestions, and
- (3) emotionalizing, minimizing, and ignoring faculty concerns.

The first category of issues (poor management skills) inevitably leads to various kinds of crises. For example, missed deadlines, missed meetings, additional last-minute work, work having to be redone multiple times, rules inadvertently being broken, inadequate time for grading and commenting on papers or for dealing with plagiarized papers appropriately, student complaints, responses to students being delayed (or students simply being ignored), parent complaints, etc.

These then leads to his habit of blame-shifting. Here Dr. Akulov will shift the blame for his failure to plan ahead to someone else. Often this is another member of the faculty. This falls into the

second category of issues – his interpersonal style – which prevents any improvements from being made.

After Dr. Akulov (1) shifts the blame for some crisis arising from his own poor planning onto some faculty member, that faculty member might make a suggestion to improve the way things are run, so that similar crises do not occur in the future. However, suggestions for improvement are (2) treated as misbehavior, “disrespect,” and threats to his “authority,” and met with extreme hostility. On the other hand, concerns expressed without reference to Dr. Akulov’s lack of foresight are (3) treated as though they are merely emotional, rather than practical. They are then minimized, and finally ignored. This naturally leads to a repetition of the exact same type of crisis later. At that point, the cycle repeats itself, returning to the phase of blame-shifting. Eventually, those who see this pattern naturally leave, instead of continuing to work in an irreparably chaotic environment, and accepting Dr. Akulov’s abusive behavior.

(A) PERFORMANCE AS DEAN

(1) Disorganization and Lack of Planning

First, then, as dean, Dr. Akulov consistently exhibits disorganization and lack of planning, even in fairly obvious matters.

Example #1: my original application was submitted by the January 2015 deadline. It received

no response until May, while the job was supposed to begin only three months later in August. By that point, it was obvious that if my interviews were successful, there might be very little time to arrange a visa by the time a job offer was made. Therefore, although I acknowledged that he still had others to consider, and I may not get the job, I suggested Dr. Akulov have Human Resources send me information about applying for a visa and any other preparations I might need to make. I volunteered to begin working on collecting documents ahead of time, and on my own time. That way, if I did get the job, I would already be done with that preliminary work, and could arrive in time for the Fall semester. Again, this is something I volunteered to do on my own time, whether or not I would get the job.

It seemed especially prudent in my case, given that I already had a commitment beginning May 28 to being the dean at a summer institute for children. This required 24-hour supervision, and I knew from experience I would be working at all hours, and have no time for collecting documents once it began. I would also be in a different state from where I lived, and I had all of my documents in storage, so I wouldn't be able to reach them anyway. I tried to explain this to Dr. Akulov. But rather than allow me to work ahead, which would have required no work on Dr. Akulov's part, Dr. Akulov dismissed this suggestion saying "the visa is not an issue" and declined to have HR send me information on the visa.

After he requested a second interview with me, I gently repeated my request. I reminded him that my duties as dean for the summer would begin on May 28, and that it would leave me no time to collect any documents, and that they would be hundreds of miles away in any case. However, he again delayed giving me the necessary information all the way until the end of June, a month after my position as dean had already begun and there was no time left to submit the necessary documents.

Result: I was nearly unable to arrive to Kazakhstan on time for classes. The only way I did manage to arrive on schedule was by making several costly overnight mailings at my own expense, having diplomas re-issued at my own expense (since the originals could not be retrieved from storage at that point), having my elderly father look for things for me, spending time collecting documents when I should have been supervising my own faculty as dean, etc. Even then, I still almost had to delay my arrival (and thus the beginning of classes), as Dr. Roussev did.

Comment: It is important to reiterate that none of this was inevitable. It was not the result of the bureaucracy of Kazakhstan. It was not the result of anyone else at KBTU. It was not anything outside of Dr. Akulov's control. It was simply a *choice* made by Dr. Akulov, and an obviously irresponsible choice. While there are real challenges arising from bureaucracy in Kazakhstan, in this case those challenges would have been manageable, with only minimal common sense. Indeed, I believe that most of the challenges arising from bureaucracy, while very real, are manageable with some planning. But in this case, as in many other cases, Dr. Akulov simply *chose* not to allow work to be completed ahead of time.

This lack of planning with respect to arrival and initial set-up might have had no lasting consequences if they had ended there. But Dr. Akulov runs the department in the same way.

Example #2: Dr. Akulov seems to consistently forget about deadlines for various documents and reports, such as the individual work plans, reports on publications, reports about student attendance, grades, etc. Deadlines come and go with no notice. Then suddenly an email will be sent out

to everyone in the department with “URGENT” in the subject line, and obvious displeasure is expressed if one does not respond to these “urgent” emails quickly enough for him. But the only reason these tasks are “urgent” is because he wasn’t mindful of the deadlines himself, and didn’t inform people about them ahead of time. The tasks themselves are merely recurring tasks that must be done on a regular basis. Their deadlines are (I assume) set far in advance, and thus can hardly be unexpected.

The first time this sort of thing happened, I assumed it must have been due to a lack of experience at being a dean. A good administrator would collect all such recurring tasks into some kind of task-management system (or just a calendar). So naturally I assumed he would be doing just that, and that in the future notices and reminders would be sent out in a timely manner. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Such emails and tasks being sent out marked “URGENT” was not an exception, but the norm. The same was true about faculty meetings, which he constantly scheduled with short notice, rather than making a clear schedule for the semester ahead of time. Contrast that, for example, with Dr. Frigerio. As soon as Dr. Frigerio assumed responsibilities as head of sector, he determined a day and time on which everyone could meet, and scheduled all meetings for the rest of the semester. He informed everyone when they would be, which then enabled us to plan our schedules around those meetings, rather than having to change our own schedules at the last minute. (His meetings were also much briefer, more focused, and more productive, as they appeared to have been well thought-out ahead of time.)

Result: The most problematic result of these short-notice meetings and last-minute unexpected work is that faculty’s attempts to carry out *long-term* projects (like research and publishing) are constantly derailed. The plans one makes for one’s time are consistently interrupted by having to

respond to “urgent” tasks or attend meetings one did not plan for.

To expand on that, consider that I spend 1 to 2 hours once per week planning out both my personal and professional activities for the week ahead. This habit has allowed me to simultaneously finish a PhD, run a small real estate company, organize a volunteer support group with over a thousand members, manage a political campaign, save a local community bank from being shut down by the FDIC by bringing it into compliance with all government regulations, and be both an instructor and a dean at a summer institute for gifted children, as well as pursue a career in academia, all while maintaining a normal social life, relationships, and having time for leisure and exercise. The fact that I have learned how to organize my life and projects so efficiently is something I take pride in. However, during the year and a half I worked under Dr. Akulov, I literally did not have *a single week* in which I was able to *execute* my plans. Instead, I spent my time constantly responding to Dr. Akulov’s various interruptions in the form of “urgent” tasks, emails, text messages, and even telephone calls in the middle of class.

It would be easy to write this off as merely an inconvenience for the faculty. But that would be a serious mistake. It in fact has far more serious consequences for KBTU, so I would like to explain with two more specific consequences.

Consequence #1: Before arriving in Kazakhstan, I had already prepared a certain paper for publication. But it still needed a few further revisions, and I anticipated what those revisions would entail. In October of 2015, there was a prize essay competition for one of the most prestigious journals in the philosophy of religion (*American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*). So I submitted my paper, even though I did not have any time to make further revisions. In fact, I had to stay up late nights just to

format it for that journal, then had to submit it as it was. In January 2016, I was notified that it did not win the competition, due precisely to needing the further revisions I had anticipated. However, it was accepted as a regular publication pending those revisions.

As I said above, I review all of my ongoing projects once per week. And I planned time for those revisions every week. However, I literally did not have a single week in which my plans were *not* interrupted by short-notice meetings, “urgent” tasks, etc. Therefore, although I scheduled time for these revisions almost every week throughout 2016, Dr. Akulov’s constant interruptions and changes of plans resulted in me having no time to make the revisions until nearly a year later – about a week after deciding to resign and to ignore any further communications from Dr. Akulov, including blocking his phone number and email address. Thus, the paper is finally forthcoming in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* – but no longer with an affiliation to KBTU.

Result: The ultimate result of Dr. Akulov’s poor management is not merely inconvenience and a lack of morale among the faculty. It is a decrease in research output in prestigious international journals that might have been credited to KBTU. I recall Dr. Roussev trying to explain this same point to Dr. Akulov on more than one occasion. But Dr. Akulov seemed not to care, and not to listen. Or if he does care, I can only assume that he is unable to act differently, due to his forgetfulness, impulsivity, and lack of focus, described below. This also ties into his problems listening to any critical feedback, which I will explain below on Dr. Akulov’s interpersonal skills.

Consequence #2: Similarly to the publication above, I sent a proposal in Fall of 2015 for a conference presentation at the annual meeting of the *North American Patristics Society* in May, 2016.

The abstract for that presentation was accepted in January, 2016. To my surprise and great pleasure, I was given a prime spot in the conference. I was put in a 4-person session alongside Elena Ene D-Vasilescu from Oxford, Christopher Beeley from Yale, and the great Michel Rene Barnes (one of the most important scholars of early Church history alive). The opportunity this represented both for myself and for KBTU should be obvious.

When I sent the proposal in the Fall, I still assumed that most of the emails, phone calls, text messages, “urgent” tasks, short-notice meetings, and other interruptions were due to Dr. Akulov’s inexperience at management. I assumed that after that first semester, the Spring semester would have fewer surprises and be easier for him to deal with. I therefore assumed I would have at least some time to turn the abstract into a full conference presentation during the Spring.

Instead, I had no time even to think about it until I left Kazakhstan in May for the conference itself. By that time, I realized the problem was not Dr. Akulov’s inexperience, but Dr. Akulov himself. I therefore had the forethought to leave as early as possible after classes ended, in order to give myself some time to write the paper. But in order to have anything at all ready on time, I had to literally lock myself in a room for several days prior to the conference with no phone or email, and work on the presentation nonstop. And while many people at the conference reacted very positively to the *ideas* I presented, the presentation itself was put together too quickly and was somewhat of an embarrassment for me, and for KBTU which I represented. The other presenters all had well-crafted papers that had clearly been given the sort of time that a scholarly presentation should be given. While the content of my presentation generated a lot of positive response, the presentation itself was obviously thrown together at the last minute.

This was the first time in history an analytic philosopher has given a paper at the world’s most

important conference on patristics. That was a truly remarkable event, given the traditional antagonism between historians and analytic philosophers, whom they often accuse of being “ahistorical.” Thus, again, had Dr. Akulov been able to schedule time in a more steady and efficient way, it might have brought a great deal of recognition to KBTU to have its conference presentation seen as on a par with those of some of the world’s leading scholars in the field. But as I mentioned above, Dr. Akulov seems either not to understand this, or else not to care. Or if he does understand, and does care, he apparently lacks the ability to plan and to organize efficiently enough to facilitate research and scholarly networking, due to his forgetfulness, impulsivity, and lack of focus described below.

Result: The above are merely two examples of the “hidden costs” of having a department run in a chaotic and inefficient way. This chaotic management style leaves no time for research, and focuses instead on tasks that are “urgent” only because they were not planned out ahead of time. While I have been at KBTU, I have had two other papers in preparation, and plans to turn the previously mentioned conference presentation and some material from my dissertation into yet another two, or even three papers. That makes a total of four to five papers that I believe could be published in equally prestigious international journals, given some uninterrupted time for research. But I have not had time to revise any of them until after resigning. I am also aware that Dr. Roussev had at least a few papers in preparation during his time at KBTU. But these six or seven (or more) potential publications could never even be submitted to journals. With Dr. Akulov leading, there was never time to do anything other than constantly respond to emails, phone calls, and text messages, attend meetings on little to no notice, and work on “urgent” tasks at the expense of long-term projects.

Comment: Again, I can imagine the defense that this is just a cultural issue, and endemic to Kazakhstan. Or that it is the fault of people higher up in the hierarchy of KBTU, which he also likes to claim. But contrasting Dr. Akulov's style with that of Dr. Frigerio shows that the blame for the disorganization must fall on Dr. Akulov himself. Dr. Frigerio scheduled meetings at the same time, and on the same day of the week, and on the same week of every month, sent out timely notifications for any necessary tasks, and made no unreasonable demands on anyone's time. Something as simple as having meetings planned out ahead of time – and being informed of that plan – immediately allowed me to begin planning my time around those meetings. The result was that, time scheduled for uninterrupted work on long-term projects never had to be interrupted or rescheduled because of Dr. Frigerio. (Furthermore, Dr. Frigerio's meetings were much shorter and more efficient, due to being highly-focused, and well thought-out ahead of time.) The result was that I could plan out the use of my time more efficiently at the beginning of the week, which would have created time for research, had it not been for interruptions still coming from Dr. Akulov.

This sort of thing ought to be obvious – that planning and organization leads to greater efficiency. However, this (scheduling meetings regularly, and informing the faculty of that schedule) is something that – amazingly – Dr. Akulov did not do for the entire year and a half I was at KBTU.

Overall Result: If Dr. Frigerio (or anybody with good managerial skills) had been running the General Education Faculty in 2015-2016, KBTU would likely have had 6 or more additional high-quality international publications to its name, as well as more international conference presentations.

Example #3: Another example of Dr. Akulov's lack of foresight and planning was how he consistently ignored or forgot about my and Dr. Roussev's requests for basic work-related information about KBTU. For example, an academic calendar. Dr. Roussev was eventually able to find an academic calendar only on a student Facebook page. Other examples include information about who to contact for technical assistance when computers or projectors in classrooms were not working, how the hierarchy of KBTU was organized, how to deal with disciplinary issues with students, and even who the rector was, whether he had a name, and if so what it was (that is not an exaggeration).

Result: The lack of basic work-related information about KBTU led to numerous problems. For example, before finding an academic calendar on Facebook, we would be informed about holidays usually only the day before – by the students themselves. In at least one case, I recall actually coming to KBTU in the morning only to find the building closed for a holiday.

But there are deeper problems as well.

For example, I have had a number of issues with students' behavior that should certainly have resulted in some kind of disciplinary action, or at least a complaint or warning. For example, one student persistently sent emails and came to my office wasting staggering amounts of time begging for his grade to be changed. He could offer no justification except that he *wanted* a higher grade – even after being given an absolute “no.” He would not stop until I told him I would file a disciplinary complaint if he didn't. However, if it had come down to it, I actually had no idea how to file a disciplinary complaint against a student – and still don't. Another student had approximately ten to

fifteen of her friends simultaneously spam my inbox with emails asking me to respond to *her* email. But that email turned out to be about something that had already been done for her almost a week beforehand – she simply hadn't bothered to check her turnitin account to see it had already been done the week before. (And this spamming happened within 24 hours of her initial email, even though my syllabus clearly says to allow 24 hours for a response to any email.) I could mention numerous other disciplinary issues as well, but even after a year and a half, I have no idea what the procedure is to handle such issues: whether there is a form for such a thing, if a letter is required, what to write, who to send it to, etc., even though I have asked for such on more than one occasion.

After a few months, we discovered that we could go to Louise Wheeler for information about how KBTU operates (we did not initially understand clearly how the hierarchy of KBTU was organized, and that she was one of our supervisors). Eventually, we both learned to bypass Dr. Akulov entirely and go directly to Ms. Wheeler for anything we needed. Although this was somewhat unfair to Ms. Wheeler, since Dr. Akulov was our more immediate supervisor, we had no other choice, given that he ignored our concerns, or would become distracted during conversations. This obviously placed needless additional burdens on Ms. Wheeler, but Ms. Wheeler was the only one who was willing and able to address our needs for basic work-related information and assistance.

Comment: As a contrast to this lack of information, consider also the example of Aigul Kumatova who simply gave me a list of documents to collect for my nostrification in September 2015 (essentially as soon as I had begun teaching). This simple delivery of well-organized information enabled me to have all of the necessary documents collected and turned in to her by October 2015, one month later. I was then able to have all of the notarizing and apostilling done in November 2015, when I returned to

the U.S. for a new visa. Waiting on advice from Dr. Akulov about translating my dissertation summary into Russian delayed the nostrification process until December, but I eventually gave up on him and had it translated by a private company at my own expense. Nevertheless, it was otherwise completed as quickly as possible. (I understand that Dr. Akulov himself has still never even gathered the initial documents for nostrification, even after being here since 2013, which I think also says a great deal about his lack of organization, planning and efficiency.) The rest of the wait time was all due to delays by the Ministry of Education itself, not to myself or Ms. Kuatova. This again shows that the kind of disorganization and forgetfulness exhibited by Dr. Akulov cannot be attributed to KBTU itself, to Kazakhstan, or to anyone else. Although there are real challenges created by bureaucracy, Ms. Kuatova's ability to organize and communicate information effectively proves that these bureaucratic challenges are all in principle manageable, if one is able to organize information effectively and plan ahead.

I could make numerous similar observations about Louise Wheeler's ability to plan, to organize, and to communicate information effectively, which was excellent. Indeed, it eventually became clear to me that most of the time Ms. Wheeler was reminding Dr. Akulov of deadlines, policies, etc., that he otherwise would have forgotten, and that she was actually in large part doing his job for him. This leads to the next topic – his forgetfulness, and issues stemming from it.

(2) Forgetfulness, Impulsivity, and Lack of Focus

The disorganization shown by Dr. Akulov ties into a deeper personality issue as well.

Specifically, Dr. Akulov seems to be extremely forgetful, as well impulsive. The impulsivity seems to be a result of the forgetfulness and lack of focus. That is, it seems as though Dr. Akulov is unable to keep track of all of the projects he is working on. As a result, rather than planning things, he insists that people drop whatever they are working on and work on whatever he happens to be thinking about, before he forgets about it or loses focus again. (And this is true even if what they are working on is research, or some other more valuable long-term task.)

Example #1: I suggested the basic ideas behind the Academic Honesty Policy around October 2015. I set these out in written form by November, and I continued to work on that document even after the Committee that was formed in conjunction with the Academy disbanded. However, I could never get clear answers from Dr. Akulov on what all steps would need to be taken in order to have it put in place, nor on what the deadlines would be for those. During in-person conversations, Dr. Akulov would consistently lose focus and change the subject to something else. On the other hand, if I presented the questions over email, they would go unanswered for long stretches of time. The end result of the Academic Policy is not significantly different from what was already in existence in 2015. But making various minor changes became another source of “urgent” tasks to meet various supposed deadlines. Once one of these deadlines was met, the document would then be forgotten again for long stretches of time. In some cases, I had to wait weeks just for a “yes” or “no” on some very simple decision. Again, in person Dr. Akulov would be unable to focus on the conversation, or he would suddenly remember something else he was working on and become distracted by that instead. If I sent the questions over email, they would go unanswered for long periods of time. Then after wasting weeks’ worth of time on

simply responding “yes” or “no,” Dr. Akulov would assign me the “urgent” task of writing up an entire section or making some major revision by some quickly-approaching deadline. (Similarly, Professor Zagidullin was forced to translate the entire document into Russian on extremely short notice, which could have been avoided with better planning.)

If Dr. Akulov had only been able to focus on a few simple, yes-or-no questions during a verbal, in-person conversation, or responded in a timely manner to those same questions presented over email, it would have allowed me to continue working on the document at a regular pace. That in turn would have allowed me to schedule that work, as well as my research, in an efficient way. Likewise, even if he were not able to focus in-person, if he had had some kind of task-management system in place to help him remember it before some urgent deadline, the work still could have moved forward efficiently. I then could have completed most of those tasks in an orderly way very quickly and then freed up time for research, for developing new courses, and for other important long-term projects.

Result: Again, an enormous amount of time was wasted on developing and implementing the policy. This also resulted in more time taken away from research. To be fair, I should mention that a fair amount of time was also wasted, at one point, simply trying to get several deans to meet and even discuss the ideas. But far more time was wasted by Dr. Akulov’s own delays. Furthermore, when an informal meeting of several deans finally was coordinated, the meeting itself was essentially squandered, due to not having a focused agenda prepared beforehand.

Example #2: The meeting of the deans’ council that Louise Wheeler and I were called to attend in Spring 2016. One would expect that to be important enough to think about ahead of time. However,

Dr. Akulov apparently decided only hours before the meeting to try to add the Academic Honesty Policy to the agenda. He then called me on the telephone during the middle of a lecture (that type of occurrence was also common). Of course, I do not normally even look at my phone during the middle of a class, because it would be completely unprofessional. So when I did not answer his phone call during the middle of class, he had Louise Wheeler call me as well. (This was also a common behavior – having other people, such as Ms. Wheeler or his secretary, call me on the telephone when I didn't answer immediately). During a break, I returned their phone calls. I discovered that this meeting was scheduled for 3pm and that Dr. Akulov wanted me to prepare a presentation for it. However, my classes would not end until 2pm. This gave me only a single hour to prepare a presentation during the time I would normally have lunch. This is an example of his impulsivity, and was also a common type of behavior.

As for this presentation, no guidance was given as to what it should contain. In the end, however, I was not even called on to make any presentation at all, or even to discuss the policy or answer questions about it anyway.

Result: The impulsive decision to suddenly put the policy on the agenda, call me during the middle of a class, and have me attend this meeting with only a few hours' notice, completely unprepared, resulted in yet more time taken away from other scheduled activities at the last minute. And in this case, ultimately, for no point. While this is only one example, this type of thing was common. The cumulative effect is, again, a decrease in research output and time taken away from long-term projects.

Example #3: Toward the end of the Fall 2016 semester, I went to Dr. Akulov with concerns about discrepancies between academic dishonesty reports and statistical data on turnitin. Specifically, the statistical data on turnitin indicated that there were almost certainly more highly “unoriginal” assignments than there had been academic dishonesty reports filed. This indicates that some instructors were likely not submitting reports, even when turnitin had caught cases of plagiarism. I put together the relevant data in a spreadsheet and brought it to Dr. Akulov to discuss.

I went to him with this concern at the end of one week, and Dr. Akulov informed me he had just then decided to schedule a meeting for the beginning of the very next week. He then asked me to put together a report about this statistical data over the weekend to present at the meeting. Again, however, he gave no guidance as to what that report should contain, other than the data in the spreadsheet I had just given him. My requests for further guidance were met with his characteristic inability to focus, so that I could get no explicit guidance on what information this report should contain, even after asking multiple times.

I therefore ended up spending time over the weekend trying to anticipate what information he might need. I then produced a spreadsheet over the weekend that would contain all of that information. But at the meeting, he did nothing but hold the spreadsheet in his hand, wave it around a little bit, and point at it a couple of times. He said nothing about any particular numbers in it. I do not believe he even looked at it prior to the meeting.

Result: On a surface level, the result was only one more weekend during which my previous plans were derailed. But there was a much bigger consequence this time, so I would like to elaborate.

This was done close to the end of the semester (Fall 2016), and resulted in the waste of a weekend's worth of time I had planned to spend grading -- time that I could not afford.

As early as an email sent during my first semester (Nov. 4, 2015) I had made Dr. Akulov aware of various problems that, as I put it, gave me "grave concerns about" whether I could continue working at KBTU.

I went to Dr. Akulov at the beginning of Fall 2016 with similar concerns about my grading load for that semester, and requested not to be given extra courses through the ISE.

In both of these cases, he emotionalized, minimized, and then ignored these concerns, as I will describe below. So, I had carefully planned my assignments, due dates, and time for grading during the final weeks, so that 180 final papers and exams would be spread out over multiple weeks, so that there would be enough time for all of the grading. Due to having those plans disrupted by Dr. Akulov's impulsive decision to add extra work and schedule meetings at the last minute, that time was diminished down to about one week. Eventually, I had to block Dr. Akulov's phone number and stay away from my office in order to avoid disturbances while I literally graded non-stop during every waking hour of the final days before second attestation grades were due.

Even then, the final papers had to be graded too hastily, and mostly without comments; plagiarized papers had to be flagged and given zeros, without providing full explanations to students; responses to subsequent questions from students had to be delayed; students understandably complained, but responses to those student complaints had to be delayed, etc. And it was this final crisis that precipitated my resignation at the end of the semester.

Thus, the ultimate result of his impulsivity and lack of foresight was that it was a contributing

factor in the resignation of his second foreign PhD (me) at the end of Fall 2016. This came after already (1) having been warned of that possibility over a year earlier, after (2) having that possibility repeated to him again at the beginning of the semester, and after (3) having already actually lost his first foreign PhD hire (Dr. Roussev) at the end of Spring 2016.

All of this shows the deep level at which Dr. Akulov is unable to foresee problems, even when they are extreme, obvious, and have been brought to his attention explicitly and on multiple occasions. In fact, *even after I already told him I had decided to resign*, his responses over email treated the situation as though I was *not* actually resigning. In this sense, he appears at times to be living in his own imagination, in some way disconnected from what is actually happening in the world around him. This brings me to the discussion of his interpersonal style, which is at least one source of this disconnect between Dr. Akulov and reality.

(B) INTERPERSONAL STYLE

Dr. Akulov's unprofessional interpersonal style is in my view the most problematic issue. This is not merely because it is abusive and insulting, but because its *cyclical nature* makes it ultimately incurable. The biggest problem is that it prevents him from being able to see and address faculty concerns, which is what will ultimately lead to his foreign faculty leaving when they can. The pattern consists of a cycle of (1) blame-shifting, (2) negative misinterpretations and hostile responses to suggestions, and (3) emotionalizing, minimizing, and ignoring faculty concerns. All of this results in

drama and crisis, leading back to another instance of blame-shifting, and then repeating the cycle. It is this vicious cycle that leads one eventually to leave, since there is no way to fix it, and no way to avoid its negative consequences. Therefore, I will address the parts of this cycle in order.

(1) Blame-Shifting

First, when the natural, predictable and inevitable consequences of Dr. Akulov's poor management skills described above occur, Dr. Akulov invariably shifts the blame to someone else. This is so even when these crises stem from Dr. Akulov's own failures to plan ahead, failure to inform people ahead of time about a certain rule, a meeting, etc., or failure to listen to faculty concerns brought to him. Inevitably, he would fail to take responsibility for his mistakes, and blame the problem on somebody else. Usually that would be one of us (a faculty member). But it was also frequently some kind of alleged conspiracy against him among the other deans, or within the Office of the Registrar, or within the Security Department, or among some unspecific and nameless "them" somewhere higher up in the hierarchy of KBTU.

Example #1: Dr. Akulov was well aware that both Dr. Roussev and I were on business visas that required us to leave to Bishkek every 30 days. He was also aware that these visas had to be renewed every 90 days from outside the country through a one week process. This required us to be gone for that one week out of every semester, a fact of which Dr. Akulov was also well aware. He also knew when we had made our first trips of this sort, so that he could easily calculate the dates of the

second trips, and any subsequent trips. Aigul Kumatova, for example, had no problems calculating the next time we were due for one of these trips. In fact, even Dr. Roussev and myself were aware of each other's schedules for these trips, although we had no need to be, and even though they were on different weeks. This is because we were each able to infer from the time of the last trip when the next trip for the other person would be.

In February 2016, Dr. Akulov decided to schedule a meeting on short notice, and either forgot, or just didn't think about, the fact that I was already out of the country for my visa. While I'm sure this was frustrating for him, there was no way for me to avoid being gone. By the time he decided to schedule the meeting, I was already out of the country. And the trip could not have been scheduled for any other week even if I had wanted to, since I was required to exit the country by law. But instead of taking responsibility for planning the meeting at a bad time, he described it over email as not "informing me [Dr. Akulov] first before presenting me with the fait accompli."

In reality, of course, he already had that information three months in advance, if he had only taken the time to think about it (and not forgotten). And again, the trip was unavoidable in any case. Furthermore, he had never before asked to be informed about similar trips, nor expressed any expectation that I do so before I was already gone. So there was no way to know in advance that this was an expectation before being blamed for violating it.

Result: On a surface level, being blamed for not following expectations that one hasn't been made aware of leads to decreased morale. But again, there is a deeper problem. That is that one will want to avoid such a thing *in the future*. And this leads to a dilemma.

Either (a) one can point out that the fault was actually with Dr. Akulov's own lack of planning

and making clear his expectations, and suggest that he change his approach, or (b) one can accept the blame for it oneself, but ask for help in avoiding similar problems in the future (like being given clear guidelines, such as a definite day or range of days on which to remind him). The first option leads to step (2) of his interpersonal cycle (negative interpretation and hostile response). The second option leads to step (3) of his interpersonal cycle (emotionalizing, minimizing, and ignoring concerns). And *either* of those has the potential to lead to further crises, then back to step (1). I'll discuss these further below.

Example #2: After I informed Dr. Akulov of my intention to resign at the end of Fall 2016, I happened to see Ewan Simpson. Dr. Simpson attempted to intervene and help find a solution by setting up a meeting between myself and Yuri Loktionov over a long weekend. Dr. Loktionov's conversation with me was diametrically opposite in every way to the way Dr. Akulov had treated me over the last year and a half. He took a great deal of time with me, and seemed to genuinely listen to my concerns. In fact, he addressed most of them, and convinced me to stay through the Spring semester by offering a workable compromise that seemed like a win for all parties involved.

However, the holiday weekend was not even over when Dr. Akulov then sent an email scheduling a meeting with less than 24 hours notice. So, I had not yet even seen the email about this final short-notice meeting when Dr. Frigerio, who had also been invited, thought to send me a text message about it.

This text message was sent only an hour and a half before the meeting was to take place. Obviously, I told him I was not able to make it on such short notice, and suggested we meet the same time the next day. Since I was busy at the time and away from my computer, Dr. Frigerio volunteered

to send an email to Dr. Akulov about the matter. But rather than thanking Dr. Frigerio for his help, and seeing that he should have given more than 24 hours notice for the meeting, Dr. Akulov responded by email, saying:

My question is: how is it, Alessandro, that you know that Beau cannot make it today and I don't?

When Dr. Frigerio informed him he had texted me, Dr. Akulov responded:

Dear Beau and Alessandro,

When cancelling the meeting, I would like to be informed of this as well - all the more so since I was the one to have proposed it in the first place (not to mention that it is only polite to keep everyone in the loop).

I hope we would avoid that type of communication breakdown in the future.

Thus, rather than accept responsibility for requesting a meeting with too little notice, he mis-described it as us (or me) “cancelling” the meeting and not informing him of it, shifting the blame to us (or me).

In addition to being an example of blame-shifting, it is also another example of the disconnect between Dr. Akulov’s perception of the world, and reality. In reality, nobody “cancelled” the meeting – I had never agreed to it (indeed, I was not even aware of it). Additionally, the timeline of events *in reality* was that I informed Dr. Frigerio *immediately* after I had been made aware of the meeting that I could not attend, and Dr. Frigerio informed Dr. Akulov *immediately* after that (literally within minutes). But in Dr. Akulov’s *imagination*, this *literally immediate* communication of information to

him counted as a “communication breakdown,” in which he was not informed of things that, in fact, he had been informed of immediately.

While again this is only one example, there has not been even a single instance in which I have ever seen him take responsibility for any of his own shortcomings in failing to plan or do things properly. Instead, the fault must always lie with someone else. This may be someone in the department who was in fact doing nothing wrong, someone in the Office of the Registrar who is “resisting him,” Security “playing games with” him or “trying to sabotage” him, another dean who “has a grudge against” him, or, in short, anything else other than his own failure to think ahead and plan effectively.

Result: One might think the negative consequence of such behavior would be limited to bad feelings and a general lack of morale among the faculty. But again there is a much deeper problem with constantly being on the receiving end of accusations about violating various rules or expectations, when those rules and expectations have not been made clear in advance. Or, as in this example, being blamed for doing something (“cancelling” a meeting without informing him) that did not even happen at all.

First, along with veiled threats to one’s job (which I discuss in the next section), the constant blame-shifting contributes to an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among the faculty members. This atmosphere of fear and intimidation in turn leads to faculty members attempting simply to avoid interacting with Dr. Akulov as much as possible. (Multiple other faculty have explicitly stated to me that they essentially avoid him whenever possible, as I eventually did as well). This in turn leads to a general lack of communication, and makes any kind of useful collaboration with Dr. Akulov extremely difficult.

Second, blame-shifting creates a scenario in which no improvements can be made to inefficiencies in the faculty's processes. To say that Dr. Akulov could "improve" anything that he does would imply that something about his management is not already perfect. And he cannot seem to tolerate any such feedback, preferring to shift the blame to others. If others point out that it is in fact his own behavior that needs to change, he responds with extreme hostility (as described in the next section). Rather than realizing that he is repeatedly doing things in a problematic way (like scheduling meetings with short notice, or expecting people nearly a decade older than him to be constantly connected to email in the way that he is), he blames any problems on the allegedly bad motives, disrespect, etc., of other people.

This brings us to the next part of his cycle – negative misinterpretations and hostile responses to suggestions.

(2) Negative Misinterpretations and Hostile Responses to Suggestions

Dr. Akulov's responses above are themselves examples of the hostile aspect of his interpersonal cycle. But I will give a few further examples here. In this part of his cycle, suggestions for improvement are interpreted as "disobedience," "disrespect," "refractory behavior," "resistance," attacks on his "authority," etc. These imaginary attacks on his authority are then met with extreme hostility, preventing any progress from being made.

Example #1: after the email accusing me of "not informing" him of the trip for my visa, I

suggested that I could set up an electronic calendar with a system of automatic email reminders about visa trips and other recurring tasks. Such a system was in fact part of what I did at the bank I worked for prior to coming to KBTU to improve efficiency and ensure that various federal reporting deadlines were not missed. It resulted in the bank going from nearly being shut down by the FDIC to receiving the highest possible marks for the efficiency of its process on its next inspection. It is also an example of the kind of very easy, simple, and common-sense improvements that could be made in the General Education Faculty, which could put an end to most of the missed deadlines and “urgent” tasks, etc., and greatly improve efficiency. But instead of thanking me for this offer to set up a system that would improve the department, his response was:

Your words are filled with disrespect - all the more so that I am not asking you much.

I don't want automatic emails. I would like to be informed personally.

Thus, volunteering to do something that would avoid similar problems in the future and improve the overall efficiency of the department, was interpreted as being “filled with disrespect.” Although his request for personal reminders was obviously less efficient than my suggestion, I respectfully agreed to his request, since he was my supervisor. But then after *agreeing*, I was accused of “sarcasm.” I then had to send further emails assuring him that I sincerely intended to do what he asked, and apologizing if in any way I had somehow inadvertently hurt his feelings. Only after having his ego attended to in this way was he finally able to let the matter go. This was a common pattern both over email and in his verbal interactions, both with me and with Dr. Roussev.

But more important than the tone of his responses and the tediousness of having to take time

assuaging his ego was that, due to his interpretation of a suggestion for improvement as being “filled with disrespect,” the suggestion *was rejected*.

Similar suggestions from both Dr. Roussev and myself could have led to greatly increased efficiency and productivity, including increased research output, but were met with these kinds of accusations of being “disrespectful,” “resistant,” “refractory,” and so on, no matter how gently we worded them. The result was that suggestions for ways to improve the functioning of the department were almost always rejected. In fact, as far as I can remember, of the numerous suggestions made either by myself or by Dr. Roussev, or both of us, only my idea of a formal Academic Honesty Policy was accepted as an idea worth pursuing – everything else was treated as “disrespect,” a challenge to his “authority,” etc. (And it is worth noting that the Academic Honesty Policy only punishes *students* for their behavior, so that there is no way to interpret it as an attack on Dr. Akulov himself.)

Dr. Akulov’s responses to these imaginary threats to his authority were disturbing not only to me and to Dr. Roussev, but to local faculty as well. However, local faculty tended to acquiesce out of fear of losing their jobs. Indeed, more than one has complained about Dr. Akulov to me in private, but they have asked for the conversation to remain private, for fear of losing their job. This is due to Dr. Akulov’s habit of making veiled threats on people’s jobs in response to perceived criticism (which I will describe in the next example).

Example #2: Sometimes these veiled threats were made through vague references to rules and expectations that would never be made explicit. For example, in the same thread of emails regarding informing him personally about visa trips instead of setting up automated emails on a calendar, he

wrote:

Let's just say there are certain rules, and one needs to heed them.

But he would never state explicitly what these rules were. Again, although this is just one example from an email I happen to have saved, these sorts of veiled threats were common, as Dr. Roussev will attest.

I recall Dr. Roussev on numerous occasions trying to get some kind of clear, explicit statement about what exactly the rules and expectations for our positions were. But Dr. Akulov consistently remained evasive on specifics. In the few times he could be pinned down in writing over email, or verbally in the presence of a third party witness, like Ewan Simpson, he would later change or re-interpret what he had agreed to before.

Ultimately there was only one fact about the expectations for our jobs that was very clear – that the renewal of our contracts would depend largely on Dr. Akulov's personal recommendation at the concourse. The clear implication was that the “rules” were to follow whatever whims he happened to have, and to do it on a moment's notice, or be faced with losing one's job.

Result: While the pattern of blame-shifting prevents Dr. Akulov from listening to any constructive criticism or suggestions for improvement, the pattern of negative misinterpretations and hostile responses to suggestions encourages faculty not even to raise any suggestions for improvement in the first place. One learns to think, “We could easily do X in a way that is far more efficient. But suggesting that Mikhail do anything differently would likely be interpreted as an attack on him, met

with accusations, personal attacks, threats on my job, and other nasty behavior. It just isn't worth it."

On the other hand, remaining vague about what was expected of us, and making frequent hints and veiled threats about our jobs, is part of what contributes to the atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the department. In order to receive Dr. Akulov's recommendation, we would have to essentially try to read his mind, since he refused to clarify his expectations of us. More realistically, of course, we would not be forced to try to read his mind, but to *accept his abusive behavior*, since there is no realistic way to know in advance which specific actions would incur his hostility. Without any explicitly stated rules or expectations, anything we did might count as an infraction of those unstated rules and expectations. Thus, there was no way to avoid either being blamed for disobeying them, or of being accused of disrespect and attacking his authority, and so on.

Example #3: Another example of a hostile response (though this time in no way *veiled*) was the email he sent me after I had made it clear to him again that the situation was so serious that I felt I had no choice but to resign unless changes were made. At that point, he made it very clear that he would not listen to any of my concerns, and essentially dared me to resign:

Obviously, if you believe that the conditions under which you are compelled to work are unbearable and that I am either contributing to this, or even at the source of your travails, self-preservation dictates an obvious solution.

It is incredible to me that a manager would essentially dare a faculty member to resign at all when that faculty member had done nothing wrong and had contributed a great deal of service to the university. But this is especially so when there is an obvious third option – which would be to have a

genuine dialogue with that faculty member about his concerns (as, for example, Dr. Loktionov did). To my mind, this is as clear a proof as there could be that Dr. Akulov is more concerned with defending his own ego than with the good of the department, or of the university as a whole. In any case, he is certainly more concerned about defending his ego than he is with addressing his faculty's concerns. I will discuss this in more detail in section (3) below.

Example #4: After I made my final decision to resign, I blocked Dr. Akulov's email address (having already blocked his phone), so he could no longer contact me. As I had expected, he attempted to email me a harassing message. Initially, it bounced back to him due to the filter. You might expect that when this email bounced back to him, he would take the hint that I did not want any further contact and cease behaving in an unprofessional manner. Instead, he registered a new email address and sent this message a second time:

I see that you are becoming very loquacious in expressing your judgement of me. Unlike you, I will abstain from telling you what I think of you - except that I should thank you for providing me with an interesting prototype for a secondary character in a novel I am planning to write.

Do not worry, I will have your name changed to something less conspicuous.

What seems most noteworthy about this email is that, even at this point, he had nothing to say about any of the actual facts leading up to my resignation. Instead, it focuses purely on "judgement" and what one person thinks about another. In other words, ego. I discuss this kind of emotionalizing to the point of ignoring facts in section (3) below.

Result: The immediate result of being subject to constant accusations and hostility, veiled threats on one's job, being dared to resign, and a personality that must always get "the last word," is obviously a massive lack of morale and enthusiasm among the faculty. And it also leads to the faculty not making any recommendations for improvement, in order to avoid losing their jobs. But again, there is a deeper result.

In this case, both Dr. Roussev and I immediately felt that our jobs were unsafe within only the first few days of working under Dr. Akulov. We therefore felt it was imperative to begin looking for employment elsewhere immediately, since there was no way to predict what Dr. Akulov's mood would be, or whether we would be in his good graces at the time of the concourse.

I myself began looking for other jobs during my first week at KBTU.

This was not because I did not like KBTU (I had almost no experience of it yet at that time). Rather, it was because the difficulties with Dr. Akulov were already apparent within only a few days of knowing him. In fact, although I have had almost no time to send out job applications, and therefore no other job to go to, I finally decided that simply being unemployed would be preferable to being employed under Dr. Akulov.

Similarly, Dr. Roussev ultimately chose to take employment elsewhere, despite great difficulty in relocating to Almaty, and despite making a great effort to remain in Almaty, and despite his expressed enthusiasm about working with the students and his other colleagues at KBTU.

Overall Result: Dr. Akulov's unprofessional interpersonal style has *negated* KBTU's difficult conversion of international PhD's salaries into dollars. Despite the financial incentives,

***both* of the foreign PhDs from prestigious American universities hired by Dr. Akulov have left, preferring the stress of relocation, and even outright unemployment, over dealing with Dr. Akulov's abrasive behavior.**

I will let you to draw your own conclusions about that fact.

(3) Emotionalizing, Minimizing, and Ignoring Faculty Concerns

I come finally to the third aspect of Dr. Akulov's interpersonal style. Suppose one is willing to put up with Dr. Akulov's unpleasant behavior and take the blame oneself for problems arising from Dr. Akulov's management choices, as I typically did. Nevertheless, there is a final habit of Dr. Akulov's that still renders it impossible to avoid the inevitable crises that result from his choices.

One can try to discuss potential crises ahead of time, and try to avoid Dr. Akulov's ego issues by sidestepping his poor management decisions and framing it as one's own failing, and asking for help in avoiding the inevitable crisis that will result. But even when these concerns are presented in purely logical, mathematical, or factual terms, he treats them as though they are really only *emotional*. At that point, he either minimizes their importance, or gives some kind of "motivational talk" that in no way addresses the facts presented to him.

After that, the issues are ignored.

Example #1: When I began teaching at KBTU, I came from a prestigious university in the

United States (Notre Dame) that had very few cases of academic dishonesty. Over the course of 4 years of solo instruction, and more years of teaching assistance and grading assistance, I had dealt with, at worst, 1 or 2 cases of plagiarism *per year*. This was with an average load of 60 students per semester. Note that we considered this level of cheating an “epidemic” and a “crisis.” Having never lived outside the U.S., I was obviously not familiar with the level of the problem that exists in the post-Soviet world. (I should note that, by his own account, Dr. Akulov was not either, when he first arrived here.) So, with a load of 165 students my first semester, I planned on having a maximum of 3 to 4 cases of plagiarism throughout the entire semester, in a worst-case scenario.

The fact that Dr. Akulov did not think to have a detailed talk with me about the severity of the issue, and ensure that I had a workable strategy in place to deal with plagiarism, is another example of his lack of foresight. But here I want to discuss the way in which he avoided dealing with the problem *even after* it occurred and was brought to his attention.

After my first written assignments were turned in, and I began grading the first few, I quickly saw that on average about 50% of the papers were plagiarized. After I checked more of them for plagiarism, I calculated the average amount of time it was taking me to determine that a paper was plagiarized and find the sources they had plagiarized from. (At first, this was especially time-consuming for me when students had plagiarized from Russian language websites, as it had been over 15 years since I only briefly studied Russian in college). I then calculated the number of hours remaining in the semester. I subtracted some obvious factors such as time for sleeping and eating, time spent in the classroom, time spent preparing lectures for a new course (Religion), etc. I then projected that if the same percentage of remaining papers were also plagiarized, there would literally not be enough waking hours left in the semester to finish grading all of the assignments I had planned – even

if I worked at the same average level of efficiency, with no breaks, during every available waking hour for 7 days a week until the end of the semester.

Once again, when I attempted to discuss this with him in person, Dr. Akulov was distracted and unable to focus. I therefore sent him an email explaining the situation so that he would be aware of the potential for a crisis and so that we could perhaps try to think of a solution. But he ignored the purely mathematical point that the number of hours available for work during the rest of the semester was less than the number of hours necessary to finish grading the assignments. Instead, he treated them as merely emotional issues that required “understanding.” He told me about how he appreciated my “earnest care” for the students and so on. All of that is fine and good, but in no way relevant to the purely mathematical problem I had brought to his attention. I have highlighted the emotional terms in his email, which make up the substance of his response. I have also underlined the parts where he projects his own emotions onto me, which I will discuss afterwards.

Beau,

I understand how heavy the load is - I remember going through the same **ordeal** in my first semester here in the fall 2013. I had ninety odd papers to grade and they were largely plagiarized.

I too couldn't believe my eyes having only known western academia - I too hated this place and the students and was literally on the verge of mental collapse. But I actually **persevered** and was, if not fully, recompensed - I don't mean financially, of course.

Actually I see students plagiarizing less (although you may have gotten particularly bad case - but I know some of your students and **they sincerely regret** having done what they did). Moreover, I see some becoming **really interested** in questions beyond their immediate purview - among them former

plagiarizers. There are others who are **trying to breathe into that institution a spirit of creativity**.

Today and tomorrow, for instance, we will be hosting a student film festival that is already making news.

I know, this is not much of a solace, and, let me stress it again, **I understand you. You do us a great service** - as you put in a long letter to a student of yours, arriving here **to do some good in the world**. **Believe me, your impact is already felt**. I hear students talk about your class, discuss ideas which you introduce during your lectures - all that **in the spirit of gratitude**, for they hardly ever received **such attention and earnest care** which you give them.

Please, **don't despair**. Better tell me what you mean by the impossibility of completing your courses? I think I am not understanding this correctly, but I find this alarming.

Next term, by the way, you will have a lighter load (about 8 hrs of teaching).

All of this emotionalism is fine and good (whether sincere or not), but it in no way addressed the mathematical point that it would be impossible to complete the grading for the course. The laws of mathematics are the same whether one is “despairing,” or merely *acknowledging* them. And all the “understanding” and “gratitude” in the world is not enough to make $2+2=5$.

Result: The result of Dr. Akulov’s emotionalizing of purely factual, logical, or mathematical issues is that even when potential crises are brought to his attention ahead of time, they are not dealt with. And in this case, this is so despite my avoiding any mention of the fact that it resulted from his own lack of foresight and poor planning. In these cases, the issues are *still* not dealt with because they are reinterpreted as being about *feelings*, rather than about *facts*. They are then responded to by giving a

kind of motivational talk (“I understand you,” etc.), rather than by looking for an actual solution.

On top of that, in this case, besides emotionalizing the issue, he also engaged in the psychological phenomenon of *projection* of his own emotions onto me in the underlined text above. In particular, when discussing his own hatred of KBTU, and of the students of KBTU, he uses the word “too” – *as though I also hated KBTU, and the students, like he did.*

This was a **particularly offensive** habit of his, for obvious reasons, and was also very common – projecting his own feelings onto others, assuming that they must feel the same way he does. More than once, when I suggested that he should hold students to *a normal standard of conduct* (i.e., the standard of conduct to which they will inevitably be held after they enter adult life in the workforce), his response was to interpret my words as meaning that *the students themselves* were not normal, which I had never said, and which was again insulting, for obvious reasons.

When one only points out that $2+2=4$, and then is treated as though he “hates KBTU, and the students,” one naturally feels insulted. First, insulted at having distasteful emotions and attitudes attributed to oneself. And second, insulted at the fact that one’s *actual, explicitly stated* concerns are being ignored.

Example #2: The same phenomenon as in Fall of 2015 repeated itself again in Fall of 2016.

I again had two courses to prepare, and one of them was a new course. But in this case, the situation was made even more problematic by the fact that the new course was outside of my primary research areas. Therefore, I did not even have a syllabus prepared for it; I had no idea what a good textbook would be; I had never even thought of teaching such a course before. So it was obvious that it would take far longer to prepare lectures each week. In addition, the number of students was even

greater than it had been in Fall 2015 (180). So, I anticipated the possibility that it would be too high of a grading load, and that it might lead to similar problems as in Fall 2015. This time, I went to Dr. Akulov with this concern before the semester even began.

In this case, the second course (Philosophy of Social Science) was through the ISE, and not even part of my contractual workload. So I suggested I not teach it and do something else instead, like the Religion course I had already taught. That would have allowed me, if necessary, to spend the fall doing some preliminary preparations for the ISE course, or creating a course in Classical Islamic Philosophy we had also discussed. However, in his office, Dr. Akulov again emotionalized the issue, telling me that I was “exaggerating” and “overreacting” and telling me instead to, “Think of it as a reward”(!) As though simply changing my mindset would somehow change the laws of mathematics. And this is despite the fact that Dr. Akulov himself was, in his words above, “[literally on the verge of mental collapse](#)” during a semester in which he had only 50% of the workload he was assigning to me. (90 students vs. 180 students.)

For some perspective on how obvious the problem I came to him with should have been, consider the following facts. (I hope these will not be misinterpreted as complaints, but understood as they are intended – evidence regarding how out of touch with reality Dr. Akulov is.)

As Chair of the Academic Honesty Committee, I had access to statistical data on all submissions to KBTU’s turnitin account. Although for some reason Dr. Akulov himself has not made use of turnitin, he nevertheless required all (other) instructors in the General Education Faculty to use turnitin. (Such double standards were not uncommon with Dr. Akulov either, but that is an issue I do

not have time to cover in detail.) Since Dr. Akulov's classes tend to have very small enrollments, we can make a good estimate of the total amount of work being graded in the General Education Faculty.

That semester, **the total number of all written assignments uploaded to turnitin through KBTU's account was 2,428**. Of those, **1,038 were mine**. Thus, from a purely objective, mathematical point of view, during the Fall 2016 Semester, **a single instructor graded 42% of all written work submitted to KBTU courses through turnitin**.

Now consider that this 2,428 figure includes some instructors from outside the General Education Faculty as well. (Several instructors from other faculties took advantage of turnitin, since the cost is per-student, not per-instructor, making it free to add them.) So, when non-Gen Ed instructors are subtracted, it is likely that my grading load was closer to 50% of all written assignments graded within the General Education Faculty. This means that **a single instructor's grading workload may have been roughly equal to the entire rest of the General Education Faculty combined**.

Again, I do not point these facts out to complain, but to demonstrate the extreme degree to which Dr. Akulov is out of touch with reality.

For more perspective, consider that the median number of written assignments for those who complied with the policy of using turnitin was only 66. The *next highest* number of assignments submitted, after my 1,038 assignments, was Peter Rickerby, with 216 – just over 20% of my grading load.

These numbers do not include in-class writing on the mid-term, end-term, and final exams (which would add another several hundred pieces of written work to my total, and different, mostly smaller numbers, for other instructors who mostly had fewer students). It should nevertheless give at least a rough idea of the extreme imbalance in the amount of grading being done.

Once again, I hasten to add that the point of this is not to complain. The point is to show how obvious it should have been that the situation was, in fact, problematic, and not just an “overreaction” or “exaggeration.”

Contrast Dr. Akulov’s claim that it was an “overreaction,” for example, with Dr. Frigerio, whose response when he heard about my workload was, “That’s suicide!”

Result: The result was another very predictable, and very real, crisis at the end of the semester, just as I had feared, which as I mentioned above, was part of what precipitated my resignation.

In order to meet the Office of the Registrar’s deadline, final papers had to be too-hastily graded (almost all without comments); plagiarized papers had to be flagged and given zeros without taking time to provide full explanations to students; students then made inquiries about their grades, but responses had to be delayed until after grades were submitted; students complained; responses to those complaints had to be delayed; etc. And when I finally *did* complain, Dr. Akulov simply dared me to resign, rather than address my concerns, the purely mathematical facts behind them, and his own poor decision-making that led to the crisis. And this (daring his faculty member to resign, rather than face the reality of his own lack of foresight), ultimately led to the loss of his second foreign PhD hire.

The problem with emotionalizing, minimizing, and ignoring faculty concerns goes back, in fact, to before I was even hired.

Example #4: After Dr. Akulov informed me, informally, that KBTU intended to offer me a job, there was a long delay before I had a written contract. Since I had applied to other universities between

the January 2015 deadline for KBTU and May 2015 (when he finally responded to my application), I ended up with three other job offers after KBTU's. I rejected two of these, but the third was from one of the top 50 Philosophy departments in the United States (the University of Missouri, Columbia) who seemed very eager to hire me. When they telephoned me to ask if I was still interested in the position, I informed them I had already informally accepted the offer from KBTU. However, when they asked whether I had a written contract yet, I told them I did not. At that point, they tried to negotiate an offer with me, and the very next morning the head of the department emailed me a written contract with every change to the offer I had said I would want that was under his control. While of course I wanted to honor the informal agreement I had made with Dr. Akulov and KBTU, it obviously made no *logical* sense to turn down a firm, written offer from a top 50 department, on the basis of having only informally been offered a job by KBTU, without a written contract. Yet, when I expressed to Dr. Akulov that I needed to get at least some kind of draft of a written contract from KBTU, given the circumstances, he again turned this *logical* and *practical* point into an emotional one in his email to Aigul Kuatova (which he for some reason exposed to me in his response):

Айгуль,

добрый день!

Вы получали имейл от Бо Брэнсона? Не могли бы Вы ему послать что-то похожее на job offer и контракт. Он нервничает (сами видите). Надо как-то успокоить.

Спасибо,

Михаил

But, just as I never said I hated KBTU and its students, I never said I was “nervous” (“Он нервничает,” as he put it). Nor did I need to be “calmed down” (успокоить). What I needed was *to receive a written contract*, so that I could logically justify to myself turning down a written offer from one of the top 50 Philosophy departments in the United States.

Result: The immediate result, in this particular case, was that I nearly took the other job offer, since he appeared to be delaying on addressing the practical point that was my actual concern, and focused instead on emotions. This was late in the summer, so that KBTU would have had to go back through other candidates they had decided to reject, and see if any of them still had not accepted other offers. This potentially could have put KBTU in a situation of being short on instructors for the fall.

I will discuss the deeper negative consequences to the *overall* pattern in my conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The problem with Dr. Akulov’s interpersonal style is not only that it is unprofessional and needlessly conflict-creating, but that it creates a *cycle*.

After he minimizes your concerns, and leaves the issues you raise unaddressed, those problems will have their natural, predictable consequences. Specifically, some kind of drama or crisis.

Things then return to step 1, where he will shift the blame to you.

If you suggest that the drama or crisis could be avoided by making different choices, he will then (2) interpret your statement as a challenge to his “power” and “authority” (“resistance,” as he often calls it). It is likely he will also issue a veiled threat about not recommending you for rehire (or, as in my case, dare you to resign).

This leaves no other option but to carefully present crises as being due to your own shortcomings and to ask for “help” or a “favor.” But in this case, he will go to (3) emotionalizing your purely factual points, minimizing their importance, and ignoring them. Then the predictable and inevitable crisis occurs, and the cycle repeats itself.

This cycle is the immediate result of his interpersonal style. But the long-term result is the inevitability of resigning (or taking employment elsewhere, as Dr. Roussev did). This is because, once one sees Dr. Akulov’s overall pattern, it becomes obvious that there is no way to avoid the drama and crisis that he creates. Of course, most local faculty have far fewer options for alternative employment. But foreign faculty generally do. And that is why his loss of foreign faculty is not an accident, but a natural and predictable consequence of his personality. I predict it will continue to happen in the future for as long as he is in a position of power.

In my summary up to this point, I have tried to focus only on specific facts about Dr. Akulov’s actions and their consequences, and general patterns that can be observed. Here I would like to be permitted a single speculation, and that is that there is a deeper explanation behind all of it.

Dr. Akulov has gone almost immediately from being a graduate student to being a dean. At this

time in his life and career path, what he really needs is to get experience teaching and publishing, so that he can more fully understand how an academic department works as a byproduct of those experiences. Only after one first establishes a rhythm in one's own academic work should one think about assuming administrative responsibilities. Instead, Dr. Akulov has been thrust into being a dean with no prior experience. From my observations, he seems deeply insecure both about his abilities as a teacher and as an administrator, even if he does not acknowledge these insecurities publicly. My speculation, then, is that, either consciously or subconsciously, he is sabotaging his own faculty members' careers. Particularly foreign faculty – with whom he is most likely to be compared – since their success in fulfilling their responsibilities and in advancing their careers throws his own struggles in these areas into sharp contrast. If I am correct, then you will see one of the following patterns emerge.

In the future, either:

- (1) he will hire local faculty members instead of foreign faculty members when he can, to avoid having anybody to whom he could be unfavorably compared, or
- (2) he will select less high-performing / more mediocre foreign faculty, from less prestigious / more mediocre foreign institutions, who exhibit only mediocre performance, to ensure they don't outshine him, or else
- (3) he will continue sabotaging his most high-performing foreign faculty, by throwing their careers into chaos through his own disorganization.

Of course, whichever of these is the case, you will see an upper limit on the level of performance in the General Education Faculty.

Thus, my advice would be to keep a very close eye specifically on the relationships between Dr.

Akulov and his foreign faculty. Especially any ones you might have independent reasons to think are very high-performers.

This is, I admit, my own interpretation of facts, and therefore speculative. However, I believe the bare facts themselves are damning enough, regardless of how one interprets or explains them.

APPENDIX ON DR. ROUSSEV'S LETTER

Having seen Dr. Roussev's letter, I want to also add a brief appendix corroborating some points in his letter that I did not address in my summary, which only addresses a handful of major issues.

First, Dr. Akulov misrepresented the salary and payments schedules to me as well. In my case, it nearly resulted in my accepting another offer. I am not familiar enough with the laws of Kazakhstan to know, but I imagine what he did could potentially result in legal problems for KBTU given the wrong circumstances.

When I had spoken to him over Skype about my salary, he said that my *net* yearly salary would be about \$44,000. He again said -- in writing (over email):

By the way, I managed to raise your annual net salary to about 44,000 per year. Next May, upon completing our annual review process, there will be a raise - at least, such had been our practice.

But after getting a draft of my contract, it became clear that \$44,000 would be my *gross* yearly salary. I responded:

My understanding was that the salary would be 700,000 tenge **after** taxes, but the contract sounds as though the taxes will be **taken out of** the 700,000.

In his response, he offered no explanation for this discrepancy, and said only:

Yes, indeed, 700000 is a sum before taxes, amounting to (at the moment we spoke) about \$ 3800, or \$ 45,000 per year before taxes.

That's what we were talking about,.

Of course, I did not even bother to respond to this bizarre, illogical message, which immediately

lowered my expected take-home pay by 20%, and I debated taking Missouri's offer instead. At that point, Dr. Akulov followed up by also making a non-factual claim regarding a 10% raise:

I did not get a reply from you; I think you should regard the pay as the "entry-level salary" subject to a 10% augmentation at the end of a school year.

Indeed, after my first year at KBTU, I seriously debated not re-applying at all. The main reason I applied for another year was that there would have been a combination of the above 10% "augmentation," plus an additional month of paid vacation, plus a 10% reduction in my taxes, due to my nostrification, totally up to an increase of around \$10,000 in take-home pay during my second year, which would have raised it to *almost* the amount that Dr. Akulov had initially promised (see the next paragraph). And I had hoped that perhaps somehow something would change with Dr. Akulov's behavior. But when it came time to sign my next year's contract, and I reminded Dr. Akulov of this supposed 10% increase, it became clear that there is in fact no automatic 10% pay raise, as he made it appear. Rather, he began trying to "pull strings" and get favors to see if he could get me a 10% raise, which of course he was not able to do, though he promised it would be in place by the Spring. But this then put me in the awkward position of having supposedly asked for a raise, and having been done a "favor," when in fact I had only thought that I was reminding him about a policy that was a standard matter.

This is not to mention that the \$44,000 figure is not even the accurate amount *before* taxes, as our contracts were not 12-month contracts. So, my actual *gross* yearly salary was only \$37,000, and my *net* yearly salary was actually \$29,600 -- almost \$15,000 less than what Dr. Akulov had quoted in writing.

Second, regarding Dr. Akulov sometimes raising his voice or outright yelling at people -- such

as employees of the Security Department, or the Office of the Registrar. I have also witnessed these angry outbursts and verbal altercations, along with the wild accusations he made against some of them. In one case, I was severely embarrassed when I asked for a schedule change, and rather than simply ask the woman in the Registrar's Office if it was possible to change, he began yelling at her at the top of his lungs for a very, very long time, embarrassing me in front of them and some of my students. This is another example, by the way, of the way in which he seems to believe that emotion can somehow triumph over reality. Louise Wheeler later explained to me how the scheduling process in the Registrar's Office works, and ways to facilitate the scheduling of classes. While I do believe there are real problems with scheduling, I do not want to be associated with someone who screams at people after there is nothing that can be done in any case.

Third, I also was never given an opportunity to see my student evaluations. I do not know to what extent this is a fault of Dr. Akulov's or with the way in which the process works at KBTU. But in any Western university, a professor will *eventually* be allowed to see his evaluations, or at least a summary of them. This helps the professor know whether there are problems with the course content, structure, assignments, etc., that may need changed, as well as things that are working well and that should not be changed, so that it assists professors in constantly improving. Evaluations are also included in job portfolios as evidence of teaching effectiveness for future possible employers. I am (and KBTU is!) now in the odd position that, while I have summaries of teaching evaluations and student comments for my other teaching work, there is simply an asterisk in my teaching portfolio explaining that KBTU, for unknown reasons, has not allowed me (or other professors) access to my own student evaluations.

Finally, while I hope that Dr. Akulov is a more competent teacher within his field of study (History), I agree unreservedly with Dr. Roussev's assessment that Dr. Akulov is incompetent to teach Philosophy.

Briefly, the lecture we attended was disorganized, and appeared not to have been planned. (Given my description of his management style above, this is perhaps unsurprising.) At one point, he actually left in the middle of class to go back to his office, and left the students with nothing to do but sit and talk. He later returned with a new set of powerpoint slides, since he had run out of things to talk about regarding his first set. Apparently, he either forgot to bring all of the powerpoint slides he intended to use, or just did not plan well.

He also at one point gave what seemed to be a completely *impromptu* discussion of the medieval problem of universals. This is a highly (indeed, infamously) technical problem, not at all suitable to lower-division undergraduate students. On top of that, Dr. Akulov did not appear to understand it himself. His discussion of it was unclear, and apparently unplanned. If I did not already know what the problem of universals was, and that it concerns the semantics of predication and the existence of abstract objects, I would literally have left thinking it had something to do with *tables and chairs*.

It was the worst lecture I have ever witnessed, and likely (hopefully) the worst I ever will.

It also stood out to me that when he read a passage out loud from one of the reading assignments, it was in Russian. This was confusing, since Dr. Akulov had been very insistent that all of my and Dr. Roussev's readings should be in English, and that our teaching should be done in English. Obviously it would have been much easier for the students to do some of the reading in Russian, but the discrepancy between the rules for his courses and those for our courses was never explained. That

kind of inconsistency between his expectations of others, versus his own behavior, was also a pattern. (As, for example, his insistence that others use turnitin, even though he was not.)

My assumption (my hope!) is that Dr. Akulov was never really supposed to be teaching Philosophy courses, but only elective history courses with very small enrollments. (He indicated to me only about 9 students took his History elective in Spring 2016). So I assume (I hope!) that his being assigned a Philosophy course was some kind of fluke. The lecture contained no Philosophy.