

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY OF RIGA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE (1958–1988). HISTORICAL LEXICAL ASPECT

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Summary. One of the documents from the Soviet era that reflected information about a specific person's skills, experience, and personal qualities was a personal characteristic. It was issued upon graduation from educational institutions, including eight-year schools, secondary schools, technical schools, and universities. Each graduate of Riga Polytechnic Institute (RPI) had at least two characteristics, which are stored in the student's personal file in the archives of Riga Technical University (RTU). The number of characteristics was not limited, and some students also had other characteristics, such as recommendations for trips abroad.

Personal files of faculty members had several characteristics in their personal files; they had been with RPI significantly longer than students, some even 30 years or more. Some of them had more than ten personal characteristics. Each time when faculty members were re-elected to positions, recommended for admission to postgraduate studies or for trips abroad, a characteristic was required, signed by the university administration, the leaders of the party or Komsomol organization, or the trade union committee. With the beginning of the Awakening and Latvia gaining independence, such a document was no longer required in universities.

Nowadays, when applying for a job, a recommendation or letter of recommendation is often requested, which is, to some extent, comparable to the former characteristic. Research has shown that positive characteristics of people also contain elements of laudatio texts.

Keywords: personal characteristics, Riga Polytechnic Institute, personal files, students, faculty, 1958 to 1988, lexicon.

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Introduction

During Soviet rule, personal characteristics were recorded for all students and faculty, and these records are still available in personnel files today. A personal statement (characteristics) – a description of a person's actions, character, and personality traits, as well as an assessment – was an official document. Although there were no official typographically printed forms, the descriptions were certified with signatures by their authors and the heads of educational institutions or structural units, the party, and trade unions. The original personal characteristics were adorned with the official seal of the institution. To date, no research has been conducted on personal characteristics – one of the Soviet-era documents in Latvia.

Brief descriptions of individuals, including university students and faculty, have been known since the existence of this type of higher education institution and can be found, for example, in letters of recommendation. Applying this fact to the Baltic provinces, especially Riga, several examples can be found. In one of them, a letter from Carl Schmidt (1822–1894), a chemist and Professor at the University of Dorpat (now Tartu), to the Director of Riga Polytechnicum, dated 20 November 1881, one can read that his colleague, private docent Wilhelm Ostwald (1853–1932), is a very skilled and agile experimenter, mechanic, glassblower, etc., who possesses tireless energy and excellent oral and written communication skills, and his communication is clear, concise, logical, and suitable for a wide audience. Furthermore, Professor C. Schmidt wrote that he and his colleagues would like to see W. Ostwald in a decent job [1], one where he would be appreciated and have all the conditions for growth.

Personal descriptions of the interwar period are found only in some of the personal files of university faculty, and in this research, they help to obtain more information about specific individuals and provide a more comprehensive characterization. University faculty are honoured by being elected Honorary Members of a higher education institution. For example, in 1944, Mārtiņš Bīmanis (1864–1946), a graduate (1891) of Riga Polytechnicum, Professor (1920–1944) and Rector (1931–1933) of the University of Latvia (UL), also received such an honour – he was elected UL Honorary Member in 1944. The honorary member's diploma recorded the professor's merits, praising his achievements – outstanding work in science and technology, the education of young scientists and academic citizens, and «vigorous organizational activities, especially at the University of Latvia» [2].

As the political system and university traditions changed in the 20th century, during the Soviet era, some *laudatio* texts disappeared (diplomas of Honorary Members, as Honorary Members were not elected

at universities). New documents were introduced, and one of the most common was the personal characteristics.

This study was created as part of the consolidation project «Historical Development of Laudatio Texts in Latvian: Influence of Other Languages and Traditions, Linguistic Specificity and Situationality in the Academic Community», which is being implemented from autumn 2024 to November 2025. The author has researched the personal files of 15 engineering students and 45 faculty staff. All 60 individuals are associated with the oldest technical university in Riga and the Baltic provinces. It resumed its activities in 1958, when the engineering faculties were separated from the State University of Latvia (SUL). Engineers were trained at the university for almost 40 years (1919–1958). In order to preserve the confidentiality of personal data, the article only mentions those persons who have already passed away. During the research, attention was paid not only to the lexicon used in the person's descriptions, but also to their content, reasons and purposes, why, when, and under what circumstances they were written.

This study did not examine negative personal characteristics. It is likely that some of them were issued, for example, to law enforcement agencies for serious violations (consumption of alcohol in public places, causing bodily harm to other persons).

Personal Characteristics of Students

The first profile of students was from their previous educational institutions and was attached to students' personal files. The descriptions were written by teachers, usually the class teacher or the teacher of the pupils who completed either a seven-year or an eight-year school or secondary school. When enrolling to study further at a vocational school, technical school, or university, these personal characteristics, along with diplomas from educational institutions and applications expressing the desire to study at the institution and in the speciality, were the mandatory documents to be submitted for admission to the aforementioned institutions.

There were no standards or rules for what a person's characteristics should be in the 1940s and 1950s. Teachers received guidance at various professional conferences, and educators exchanged experiences with their colleagues. From time to time, discussions have arisen in the educational press expressing concern that a person's description does not objectively reflect the person's abilities, interests, and skills. In the second half of the 1950s, the Ministry of Education of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) issued an order stating that secondary school graduates must have

an objective personal description (characteristics) with an indication of their interests in the studied professional field. Universities felt and still feel this, because it is only after some time that students understand whether the speciality they have chosen is suitable for them and whether they are interested in it. Some students left universities because they were not interested. This was the case at Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute [3] and not only there. Some students also complained that teachers did not delve into the psychology of students, and professional orientation was not always at the proper level [4].

Personal descriptions were written in both Latvian and Russian, depending on the school the young people had graduated from. There were no major differences in the text structure between the Russian and Latvian descriptions, which included birth data, party affiliation, character traits, hobbies or areas of interest of the young people. The lexicon and scope of the description, as well as other details, were each teacher's individual choice. Teachers wrote what they considered essential and important. Some of the profiles contain information about the length of study at a particular educational institution, the social background or the workplace of the parents. In other cases, when reading the profiles, it is clear that the young person is not an orphan; his parents take care of him and take an interest in his studies. Such an example can be found in a personal statement dated 25 June 1975, written by a teacher and class teacher from Vidzeme: «...parents are interested in their son's academic work and behaviour. The class teacher has always had contact with the pupil's parents» [5].

Another personal profile, published on 28 June 1975 in Riga, states that the secondary school graduate's father is a collective farm foreman, while his mother is a pensioner. The characterization contains both praise and criticism about the school graduate – he lacks dedication, systematic work, values personal interests highly, fits into the «worst part» of the class, and also has a desire to «leave a good impression of himself», which does not always succeed, because he has been tactless and has formally fulfilled his duties of the culture leader of his class. The personal profile acknowledged that the pupil's achievements were good and mediocre, and he even participated in a Riga City Olympiad, winning a prize. It must be assumed that both the young man himself and his parents were worried that such a characteristic, upon entering RPI, could be a reason for not being admitted to the university. Although the guy passed the entrance exams, in the event of equal scores, both personal characteristics and practical work experience could be taken into account. It should be remembered that preference for admission to universities was given to those who had two years of work experience. This young man did not have that much work experience, but for nine months during his summer vacations he

worked on a collective farm in Pierīga and received a short, positive description from the chairman of the collective farm, the secretary of the party organization, and the chairwoman of the trade union committee, in which the young man was described as a disciplined, conscientious, and diligent performer of the assigned tasks, who fit in well with the working collective and also participated in the collective farm's physical education activities. The second description was written less than a month later – on 18 July 1975 [6].

It is difficult for the author of the study to assess the objectivity of the school's personal description, but the issue existed in many schools. Teachers lacked time; not all of them conducted a pedagogical analysis of pupils at the end of each school year, recording changes. There was bias in some of the descriptions submitted to universities, not mentioning shortcomings, difficulties in performing certain tasks, or negative character traits. In particular, excellent people, diligent performers of public service, were idealized, often exaggerating their character traits and achievements. In 1969, the Ministry of Education of the Latvian SSR issued an order stating that all descriptions must be typewritten or neatly handwritten. At that time, not all teachers had access to typewriters, so many continued to write by hand, as evidenced in the descriptions submitted to RPI in 1975 [5] and 1980 [7]. It must be acknowledged that teachers wanted their pupils to enter universities, thereby increasing the school's prestige and the teachers' work.

The main parts of the personal description were determined by the aforementioned order of the Ministry of Education of the LSSR, defining that the description must include:

- general information about the pupil (name, father's name, surname, year of birth, membership in the Komsomol organization, brief information about the parents, health status);
- information about the pupil's academic work (general characteristics of success, attitude towards studies, characteristics of intellectual activity, language culture);
- information about the pupil's personality traits – social activity, behaviour, character, and traits of will [8].

When reviewing the personal files of 15 engineering students, the personal profiles issued by the school did not mention any health conditions; only some had information about their parents' names, surnames, and workplaces and positions held. However, it was recorded, for example, that «political knowledge is good. Reads newspapers. Treats socialist property with care» [5]. This description of the person was written in 1975.

Another characterization was placed in the students' personal files, which was written after their studies – for graduates to submit to the

State Distribution Commission. This applied to all graduates of all higher education institutions, including RPI. At that time, all full-time students studied free of charge, funded from the state budget, and they were obliged to work for three years after graduation in a workplace where specialists were needed and to which they were assigned by the State Distribution Commission. It coordinated the entry of young engineers into the job market. Student lists were created, offering them jobs in order of rank according to their performance. Additionally, the marital status of the new specialist was taken into account – new mothers were exempted from the mandatory distribution, as well as graduates whose spouses were already working or had been assigned to work in a city, trying to send the family member to the same city. The personal description was secondary, but not to be ignored. For example, one description stated that an RPI graduate had a category 3 concrete worker qualification, and if the company was engaged in concrete work, it was an advantage for both the graduate and the company. Those who were sent to study by companies, even paying scholarships, after their studies ended up working for those companies and were not subject to the state distribution. Representatives from potential workplaces were also invited to the State Distribution Commission to distribute future jobs.

The personal characteristics of the new specialists – university graduates – differed from the characteristics that were issued to future students. They were in the language of communication of the inhabitants of the Soviet Union – Russian. Some graduates chose to work outside Latvia in one of the companies of the vast Soviet Union, and then the descriptions did not have to be translated. It should be noted that studies at RPI were conducted in both Russian and Latvian – study groups were formed not only by speciality, but also by language of instruction. These descriptions also indicated nationality, marital status, qualifications obtained, briefly describing the period of study, sometimes also noting reprimands and their reasons, public duties, theoretical and practical training in the chosen profession, internships, and awards.

There are more than two personal descriptions in the files of former RPI students who have gone abroad for internships, tourism trips, or as members of artistic groups, mainly to socialist countries. Then the description included such phrases as «morally stable», «politically educated», which actually meant that the person was not anti-state, and therefore loyal to the Soviet regime. What really happened was known only to the people being profiled themselves, but such was the requirement, and, as eyewitnesses of the time recount in individual conversations, the writers of the profiles had no choice but to make such statements in order to recommend the people for trips abroad. It was also a «guarantee» that the person would return to the Soviet Union and not

2025/9

seek asylum in another country. It must be admitted that there were very few such cases where individuals sought asylum and remained living abroad. In such cases, the «guarantors» were threatened with negotiations with Cheka officers, the university administration, and the leadership of the Communist Party. A 1983 profile of a student who went to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic as a member of a student construction unit states that he was «practically healthy» [7].

A personal profile was also issued to some of those who discontinued their studies for some reason. In the 1980s, the RPI printing house had a special form printed in Russian for such cases, in which the necessary information could be entered in Latvian, as can be seen in Figure 1. This description indicated the former student's name, father's name, surname, year of birth, nationality, membership in the Komsomol organization, reason for expulsion (of his own free will), breaks in studies (the student had taken an academic leave due to health), and public duties. If the student had had any reprimands or academic debts, they would have been recorded. The column regarding class attendance was also left blank. The personal description was signed on 9 November 1987 by Deputy Dean for Academic Affairs of the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Oļģerts Buka (1925–2010) [7].

ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА
на студента, представленного к отчислению из РПИ

Remmerts Vello Kārlis d. Tehnikstapa
na tehniskos fakultātes studēs (Имя, фамилия, отчество)

Год рождения *1960* Национальность *латыш* Партийность *КПЗСР-86*
(курс, факультет, специальность, вид отчисления, за что, когда)

Причины отчисления (подробно) *по своей воле!*

Академическая задолженность _____
(знамен, лист, дисциплина, за какой курс)

Посещаемость занятий _____
(число пропущенных занятий в процентном выражении)

Оставался ли на повторный курс обучения *1986. 09.13.06 - 13.06.87*
№ 01-697/25.06.86 на стр. №13080 д. 017
(дата, по какой причине, на какой курс)

Отчислялся ли ранее из института _____
(дата, на каком курсе, причина)

Поощрения за период учебы в институте _____
(дата поощрения, когда, за что)

Взыскания за период учебы в институте _____
(дата взыскания, когда, за что)

Краткая характеристика общественной деятельности за период пребывания в институте
нет. Общ. работ.

Примечание. При отчислении студента за недостойное поведение прилагается объяснительная записка отчисляемого студента.

09.11.1987. Декан факультета *Оļģerts Buka*

Figure 1. A personal description of Vello Remmerts (1960–2001), who left RPI of his own free will. 09.11.1987.

Personal Characteristics of Faculty and Rectors

All RPI rectors were also professors who taught various study courses, and they also had personal characteristics, many more than lecturers or senior lecturers. Similar to students, the characteristics of faculty were also written during the Soviet period, that is, immediately after World War II.

Most of the personal descriptions of the faculty were in Russian, even though the native language of some of their writers and signers was Latvian; all of these descriptions were typewritten. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was common to issue socio-political profiles. They were shorter in length and indicated the attitude towards the Soviet system. Only those whose profiles stated that they were loyal to the Soviet regime were allowed to continue their teaching and scientific work [9].

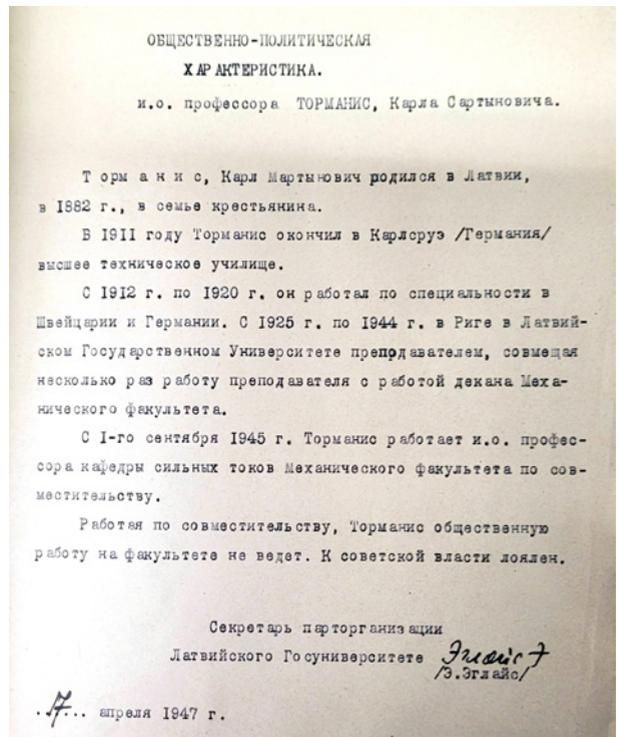


Figure 2. Socio-political characterization of Kārlis Tormanis, acting Professor at the State University of Latvia. 07.04.1947.

When examining the personal files of 45 faculty members, it was found that all personal descriptions were typewritten and their number was large for long-term lecturers, for example, for RPI Lecturer (1958–1985) and Rector Aleksandrs Veiss (1918–1985) there were 46, of which 16 were issued before trips abroad [10]; for Assistant Professor Arvīds Kanbergs

(1934–2025) – 12 [11]. A. Kanbergs also travelled abroad several times. His contemporary and colleague, Assistant Professor Kārlis Timmermanis (1931–2025), travelled abroad eight times [12]. The personnel files mainly contain copies of personal characteristics, some without dates, some in two or three copies, also without signatures. Their size ranges from one to three typewritten pages. Comparing the person's characteristics, it is evident that previously issued characteristics were often rewritten, adding current information – changes in the position held, a different addressee. Of the 46 characteristics of the Rector, Professor A. Veiss, several are characteristics-recommendations [10].

If an already working faculty member, upon re-election to a position, had his/her personal characteristics written earlier, he/she could be issued a job description that did not include personal data [11].

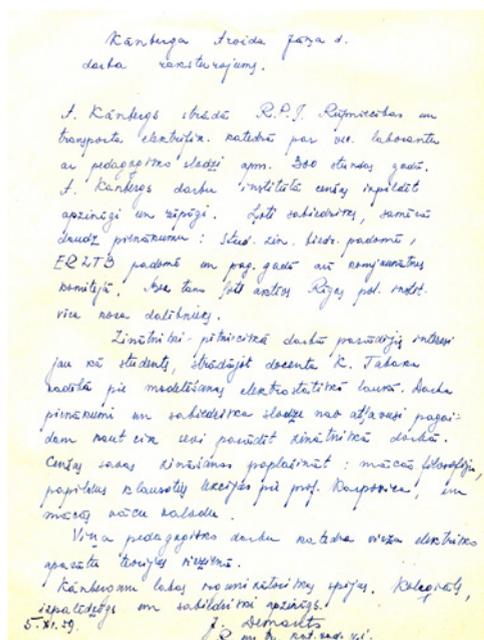


Figure 3. Description of the work of Assistant Professor Arvīds Kanbergs. 05.11.1959.

Personal characteristics for RPI faculty were compiled in the following cases:

- admission to postgraduate studies;
- defence of a dissertation for a candidate of technical sciences;
- election and re-election to office;
- travelling abroad;
- nomination for an award;
- nomination for a candidate for deputy.

Individual faculty members were issued personal characteristics, recommending them for the title of Honour, for example, «Meritorious Worker of Science and Technology of the Latvian SSR», «Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences» (A. Veiss) [10].

A personal description was issued for a young lecturer for submission to the Military Commissariat, possibly to avoid being drafted into compulsory military service, since military training in universities took place during studies. In 1987, in anticipation of the RPI's 125th anniversary, a personal characteristic recommended to award Assistant Professor Georgijs Obuševs (1929–2020). The Rector's order in Latvian followed, with a characteristic in Russian attached [13].

Personal Characteristics of Students and Faculty of Riga Polytechnic Institute (1958–1988). Historical Lexical Aspect

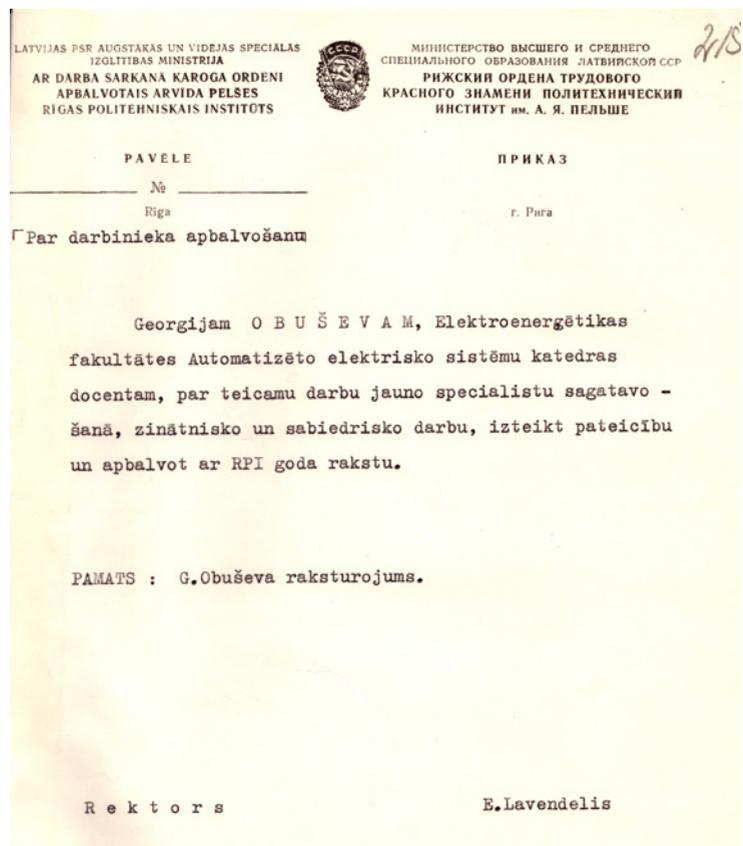


Figure 4. Order of the RPI Rector Egons Lavendelis on awarding Georgijs Obuševs. Copy. 1987.

Personal profiles were actually also award sheets, recommending the awarding of state awards [10], and posters with information about parliamentary candidates and their profiles [14].



Figure 5. Latvian SSR Supreme Council election poster, calling for votes for deputy candidate Aleksandrs Veiss. 1985.

When examining the personal descriptions, it was concluded that their authors wrote both essential facts characterizing the person (personal data, including nationality and family status, education, work history and positions held, attitude towards work duties, character traits, organizational abilities, participation in public organizations and the Communist Party), as well as facts, which they knew about their colleagues (for example, the number of children and grandchildren) [13].

Personal Characteristics' Lexicon

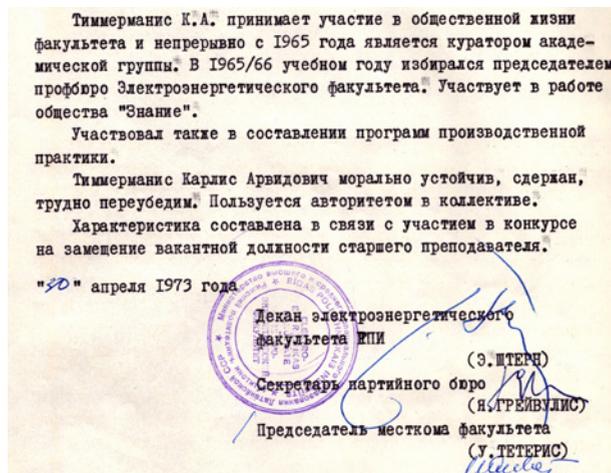
When analyzing the lexicon used in personal descriptions, the author paid attention to the praise of persons and the terms used. Not all personal descriptions can be included in the *laudatio* text. Translated from Latin, *laudatio* is a solemn speech in which a person is honoured at an award ceremony [15], a eulogy, not a statement of fact. *Laudatio* texts, or eulogies, have been known since the time of Ancient Rome, and they were also used in funeral speeches. *Laudatio* is still written today, and they were also written in the 20th century, during the Soviet era.

The author of the study concluded that in the positive personal descriptions, at least some sentences are dedicated to praising the person, and the most frequent terms in the descriptions of both students and faculty are: collegial, helpful, conscientious, sociable, honest, morally

stable, helpful, modest [11]. Terms such as politically educated, has authority in the team, possesses organizational skills [12] are also often used. The personal descriptions are written in a business style.

Personal Characteristics of Students and Faculty of Riga Polytechnic Institute (1958–1988). Historical Lexical Aspect

Figure 6. Fragment of the personal description of Assistant Professor Kārlis Timmermanis. 30.04.1978.



There are also such descriptions of a person in which personal qualities are not indicated, for example, for Professor A. Veiss in the 1960s. It has been found that most descriptions of Rector A. Veiss do not contain the features of a laudatio text.

Conclusions

The personal characteristics of the future student, as one of the basic documents upon entering a higher education institution, including RPI, differed from the characteristics of the student and the university graduate. The personal characteristics issued at the end of the studies emphasized the young engineers' abilities and skills to work in their profession, indicated practical skills, as well as nationality and family status. The personal characteristics of RPI faculty members also included information about specialization and practical activities, including scientific and pedagogical work experience, nationality, and family status.

Personal descriptions were written for both students and faculty when they went on internships, experience exchange experience, tourist trips or concerts abroad, indicating their political beliefs, or rather, loyalty to the Soviet regime. All descriptions were signed by the heads of the relevant structural units, party or Komsomol organizations, and trade unions, and the descriptions were in Russian.

The personal description was one of the documents of persons living during the Soviet period and provided comprehensive information about people's lives, including party affiliation, participation in various organizations, character traits, interests, and family status. The personal description is interesting for research in linguistics, history, political science, the history of pedagogy and universities, and future research could provide a valuable contribution to various branches of science. Although the personal description is not considered a laudatio text, it also used lexicon that was found and still is used in such texts, praising a person's achievements or character traits. It is part of the personal description.

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SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. RTU arhīvs.

Figure 2. LNA LVVA 7427. f., 13. apr., 1782. l., 12. lp.

Figure 3. RTU arhīvs, 6046. lieta.

Figure 4. RTU arhīvs, 1442. lieta.

Figure 5. RTU IVPC.

Figure 6. RTU arhīvs, OA 101–2. lieta.



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Rīgas Politehniskā institūta studentu un docētāju personas raksturojums (1958–1988). Vēsturiskās leksikas aspekts

Viens no padomju varas laika dokumentiem, kurā tika atspoguļota informācija par konkrētas personas prasmēm, pieredzi un personīgajām īpašībām, bija personas raksturojums. Tas tika izdots, absolvējot mācību iestādes – astoņgadīgās skolas, vidusskolas, tehnikumus un augstskolas, un katram Rīgas Politehniskā institūta (RPI) absolventam bija vismaz divi raksturojumi, kas glabājas studentu personāllietās Rīgas Tehniskās universitātes (RTU) arhīvā. Raksturojumu skaits nebija ierobežots, un daļai studentu bija arī vēl citi raksturojumi, piemēram, rekomendācijas braucieniem uz ārzemēm.

Vairāk raksturojumu ir docētāju personāllietās, viņi RPI pavadījuši arī daudz ilgāku laiku nekā studenti – pat 30 un vairāk gadu. Dažiem no viņiem personas raksturojumu skaits mērāms vairākos desmitos Docētājus pārvēlēja amatos, rekomendēja iestātei aspirantūrā, ārzemju braucieniem, un katru reizi bija nepieciešams raksturojums, ko parakstīja augstskolas administrācija, partijas

2025/9

vai komjaunatnes organizāciju, arodkomitejas vadītāji. Sākoties Atmodai un Latvijai iegūstot neatkarību, šāds dokuments augstskolās vairs netika prasīts. Mūsdienās, stājoties darbā, nereti tiek prasīta rekomendācija vai ieteikuma vēstule, kas zināmā mērā pielīdzināma kādreizējam raksturojumam. Veicot pētījumu, secināts, ka pozitīvos personu raksturojumos ir arī *laudatio* tekstu elementi.

Atslēgvārdi: personas raksturojums, Rīgas Politehniskais institūts, personāllietas, studenti, docētāji, 1958. līdz 1988. gads, leksika.