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Ahead of Its Time. The Emergence of Insurance Education at the Warsaw School of Economics (1906–1939)

Abstract

This article examines the origins and development of insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) between 1906 and 1939. Against the backdrop of the rising importance of insurance in Europe, SGH established the first comprehensive academic programme in Poland dedicated to both business and social insurance. The study addresses three main questions: what historical, economic and social conditions influenced the establishment of this programme; how the SGH model compares with early initiatives in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as with attempts in Central and Eastern Europe; and what its achievements meant for insurance science and practice. The article demonstrates that SGH's pioneering curriculum – interdisciplinary, closely linked to market practice, and open to women – was unique in the region. Although interrupted by the Second World War, its intellectual and institutional legacy shaped later developments in Polish insurance education.

Keywords: insurance education, Warsaw School of Economics (SGH), insurance curriculum, insurance science, higher education history
JEL Classification: I23, N33, N34, G22

Introduction

With the development of the industrial economy in the 19th century, the demand for expertise in insurance – both business and social – steadily increased. In Europe, the first manifestations of academic insurance education emerged in the second half of the 19th century, with sources pointing to university lectures and publications on insurance as early as the 1870s, for instance at the University of Breslau (1878) and in Grenoble (1896), and by the end of the century also at universities in Tübingen, Paris and Toulouse. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, insurance became an established component of university curricula at European universities – most often within the faculties of law, economics or mathematics. Germany played a pioneering and leading role, with lectures on insurance delivered from the 1850s, and the first dedicated chairs established from 1885 onwards. Insurance topics also entered higher education curricula in France and other Western European countries – by the late 19th century, the first theses on this subject were being written at French universities [Kwon, 2024, pp. 14–15]. In the United Kingdom, the development of insurance education took a somewhat different form, as professional institutions played the leading role, while in the United States, by contrast, insurance education developed within schools of economics. These early initiatives across different countries shared a common goal: to educate staff capable of meeting the challenges of the emerging market for business insurance, as well as of administering the new social insurance systems (such as Bismarck's statutory workers' insurance introduced in Germany in the 1880s).

In this context, the origins of organised insurance education in Poland, associated with the activity of the future Warsaw School of Economics, are particularly noteworthy. Despite Poland's lack of statehood under the partitions, the Polish academic and business community recognised the necessity of training specialists in finance and insurance. In 1906, the Private Men's Courses of Commerce were established in Warsaw; these were subsequently transformed into the Higher School of Commerce (WSH), the predecessor of today's SGH [Trzcińska, 2021, pp. 36–37]. From the very outset, the institution sought to meet the needs of a modern economy, a manifestation of this approach being the establishment of the first university-level insurance programme in Poland. Archival sources indicate that the insurance programme at the WSH was formally approved in 1916, while actual classes began the following year [KA, 1917, p. 3]. This represented a pioneering development on a national scale – the university maintained close cooperation with the insurance sector. The academic curriculum was explicitly tailored to the needs of the insurance market, and experienced professionals from insurance institutions were actively involved in teaching. In the following years, the insurance programme consolidated its position, despite the relatively small number of students. At the time, insurance studies were considered academically demanding, including an extensive set of mathematical and statistical courses, which, although limiting their mass popularity, ensured a consistently high standard among graduates. Importantly, the SGH initiative was unparalleled in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In the western parts of the former Polish lands, the first insurance courses started to appear. However, no academic centre in Central and Eastern Europe developed such a comprehensive insurance programme prior to 1939. The pioneering role of the Warsaw School is further confirmed by the fact that in many countries in the region, comparable university-level programmes in insurance emerged only decades later – for instance, in Russia the first university chair of insurance was not established until 1991 [Gryzenkova, Zlobin, Tsyganov, 2022, p. 75].

A key role in the organisation and development of the insurance programme at SGH was played by distinguished representatives of Polish insurance science and practice. The uniqueness and significance of SGH's pioneering initiatives in insurance education are evident in their long-term consequences, and although the outbreak of the Second World War abruptly interrupted the dynamically developing programme (in 1939, teaching at SGH was suspended, and many lecturers and graduates joined the war effort), the achievements of the interwar period were not entirely lost. In the post-war communist reality, insurance education was not initially a priority, yet the knowledge and teaching materials developed before 1939 continued to be used. Textbooks prepared during that period – for example, the fundamental work of Jan Łazowski – still served as a basis for the education of subsequent generations of economists and financial sector employees as late as at the end of the twentieth century. Ultimately, the traditions of insurance education at SGH were formally revived in the 1990s (the Chair and the Insurance Specialisation were re-established in 1996) [Michalski, Śliwiński, Szumlicz, Kawiński, Podgórska, 2017, p. 95], which proves the durability of the vision of the pre-war pioneers.

From a global perspective, SGH represents one of the earliest examples in this part of the world of how the commitment of the academic community, combined with industry cooperation, could lay the foundations for a new scientific discipline. The most recent research indicates that the development of such a discipline requires the involvement of leaders and institutions, as well as adequate exposure of the social value of insurance – conditions that were already fulfilled in Warsaw more than a hundred years ago.

Bearing in mind the above historical and international premises, this article focuses on examining the origins and development of insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics in the years 1906–1939. It seeks to address the following research questions:

- What historical, economic and social conditions influenced the establishment of the insurance programme at SGH, and how did its organisational development proceed between 1906 and 1939?
- To what extent did the insurance education model developed at SGH differ from early approaches adopted in other countries (e.g. in Germany, France, the United Kingdom or the United States), as well as from current initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe?
- What were the main achievements and significance of SGH's pioneering insurance education for the development of insurance science and practice in Poland?

Research methods

This study applies a qualitative historical research design. The primary research method is a structured analysis of archival documents and historical records concerning insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics in the interwar period. The source base includes:

- university statutes and internal regulations,
- curricula, lecture syllabi and course catalogues,
- interwar and contemporary publications of SGH professors,
- biographical materials and memoirs,
- selected press materials and professional journals.

The study also employs the method of critical literature review, both with regard to Polish scholarship and selected international works on the development of insurance education, while elements of comparative historical analysis are used in order to position the SGH model within the broader European and American context.

The analysis remains qualitative and interpretative in nature. It does not aim at quantitative measurement of educational output, but rather at identifying structural features and institutional characteristics of the SGH model in a broader international perspective.

Academic beginnings under partitions and independence

The institutional development of insurance studies at WSH (1906–1939)

The beginnings of insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics are inseparably connected with the history of the institution itself and with the socio-political transformations taking place in the Kingdom of Poland at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this period, there was growing demand for the training of modern economic staff, capable of working in the expanding financial, commercial and industrial institutions – including insurance companies. The Warsaw School of Economics originated from private educational initiatives undertaken in the early twentieth century under Russian rule. In 1906, after the relaxation of Tsarist restrictions on Polish education following the revolution of 1905, August Zieliński obtained permission from the authorities to establish the Private Men's Courses of Commerce – a two-year commercial school for men. The aim of the institution, as stated in its 1907 statute, was "to promote and support higher commercial education in Poland". The courses were inaugurated on 13 October 1906 in Warsaw, at Smolna Street, with an inaugural lecture on the history of economic doctrines delivered by Jan Kucharzewski [Trzcińska, 2021, pp. 36–37]. Although these were initially only vocational courses (with a merchant and accounting profile), they marked the beginning of Polish economic education at the higher level. In the first decade of its activity, 689 students were admitted, of whom 236 completed the courses with a diploma. After the death of August Zieliński in 1908, the idea of training economists was continued by his collaborators, and in 1912 the leadership of the Courses was taken over by Bolesław Miklaszewski – a scholar and social activist who introduced new organisational impulses.

A breakthrough moment for the school came with the First World War and the accompanying political changes in Warsaw. After the withdrawal of Tsarist troops in the summer of 1915, the German occupation authorities granted Zieliński's institution the status of a higher education establishment. In October of that year, the Commercial Courses received the name Higher School of Commerce, derived from the German *Handelshochschule*. Even during the war, the school underwent reorganisation – the study programme was extended, and the curriculum expanded to include new specialisations in line with the needs of the economy and the administration of the reborn state. In addition to the existing commercial specialisation, new fields were introduced: local government (administration), cooperatives, banking and insurance [Jarosz-Nojszewska, 2026, pp. 44–45]. The decision to launch the insurance programme was taken on 15 December 1916 [KA, 1917, p. 3], which made the Warsaw Higher School of Commerce the pioneer of insurance education in Poland. The first matriculation of WSH students took place on 1 October 1917, and from the academic year 1917/1918 the new insurance programme was already formally in operation within the curriculum.

The programme committee established for this purpose included, among others, Adam Danielewicz (mathematician and statistician, chief mathematician of the *Przezorność* Mutual Insurance Company), Ludomir Grendyszyński (publicist and social activist), Bronisław Rogowski (technical inspector and expert in tariffs), and Zygmunt Limanowski (later professor of statistics and insurance theory). The work of the committee also involved representatives of insurance companies, including Bolesław Chomicz (President of Mutual Fire Insurance Company), as well as Stanisław Srebrny and Samuel Dickstein (on behalf of the *Przezorność* Insurance Company) [KA, 1917, p. 3]. The leadership of the newly created insurance programme was taken over by Bolesław Miklaszewski, who provided it with organisational structure and academic framework. The participation of these figures demonstrates the high ambitions of the founders of the programme, who aimed to combine theory with practice, drawing inspiration from foreign educational models in Germany, Austria and France.

Historians note that this was the only insurance course organised in such a comprehensive manner in Poland at the time [PIA, 1922, p. 35], although attempts to establish it had already been made as early as 1908. At that time, an evening insurance course was organised for employees of insurance companies, although it lasted only one year [Tanewski, 2025a, p. 13]. It was only the political conditions after 1915, and in particular the liberalisation of educational policy by the German authorities occupying Warsaw, that enabled the development of insurance education in a meaningful way – earlier obstacles (such as the lack of Polish insurance regulations and the restrictions imposed by the Russian partition authorities) gave way in the face of the economic and administrative needs at the end of the war.

It is worth noting that there were also local traditions of insurance education in other partitions: for example, in Poznań, the first courses in insurance were already being conducted around 1905–1910, and in 1921, at the newly established University of Poznań, the Chair of Insurance was created, followed in 1922 by the Chair of Insurance Law. In the former Galician territories, insurance topics were developed within the framework of statistics and economics (for instance, in Lviv). Nevertheless, it was the Higher School of Commerce in Warsaw that was the first in the country to establish a separate, full university-level programme in insurance studies.

From the outset, the insurance programme attracted both traditional full-time students and participants already employed in financial and insurance institutions.[1] Archived data indicate that the first cohort (1917) included only 8 regular WSH students, but as many as 21 participants came from the ranks of insurance company employees, either seconded or personally interested in upgrading their qualifications. These participants had at least a secondary education, and as many as eight of them already held a university degree [KA, 1917, p. 3], demonstrating the prestige and high academic level of the programme. Such a composition of the student body encouraged the exchange of knowledge between the academic community and market practitioners. This was a deliberate design – the WSH sought not only to educate theoreticians, but also to provide further training for the staff of existing insurance institutions. The programme was therefore adapted to the needs of working professionals: specialised classes were often held in the afternoons or in a condensed format, in order to facilitate the participation of practitioners. This close integration of theory and practice became one of the pillars of the programme's success, and as a result, graduates of the WSH insurance specialisation readily entered the labour market, bringing with them a unique combination of academic preparation and professional experience.

In the early period of the Commercial Courses, economic education was intended exclusively for men – as reflected in the school's very name (Private Men's Courses of Commerce), but the situation changed with the transformation of the courses into the Higher School of Commerce. As early as November 1917, the WSH Academic Council decided to admit women [Trzcińska, 2021, p. 37], with the first female students appearing in the academic year 1917/1918 [Tanewski, 2023, p. 113]. This was a relatively pioneering step – although women began to gain access to universities in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, they remained a minority, particularly in fields connected with finance. By comparison, in many Western countries, women were only able to study fully at economic and technical universities from the 1920s onwards. In the case of the Warsaw WSH, the participation of women in insurance education deserves particular emphasis, as from the very launch of the insurance programme women could take part on equal terms with men. Against the global standards of the time, this was far from typical – for instance, the first women in similar

[1] They were employed, among others, at the Warsaw Fire Insurance Company, the *Snop* Mutual Insurance Society, and the Mutual Insurance Society for Buildings Against Fire.

programmes in Germany and France appeared only gradually in the 1920s and 1930s, often in very limited numbers. The WSH in Warsaw thus aligned itself with progressive trends, becoming one of the few institutions of insurance education that was co-educational from the outset. This was significant not only symbolically but also in practical terms – female graduates of the insurance specialisation later entered the female workforce of insurance companies and public offices, which during the interwar period gradually helped to break down professional barriers for women.

The establishment of the insurance specialisation in Warsaw would not have been possible without a combination of favourable political and social circumstances. The German occupation during the First World War paradoxically created space for the development of Polish higher education – the occupation authorities, competing for the goodwill of the Polish population and in need of qualified administrative and economic staff, permitted the reactivation of the Polish-language University of Warsaw and the development of the Higher School of Commerce. At the same time, the dynamic growth of the domestic insurance market at the beginning of the twentieth century (including the emergence of new mutual insurance companies and the increasing importance of social insurance) generated a demand for specialists in this field. Warsaw, as the centre of economic life, provided the right environment – insurance companies were operating there, and social organisations interested in promoting the idea of insurance (such as workers' associations and trade unions) were active. Under these conditions, the Higher School of Commerce, drawing on the experience of its lecturers and the support of practitioners, was able to successfully launch a new programme that responded to the pressing needs of the reborn state. When Poland regained independence in 1918, the WSH already possessed an organised structure and curriculum in insurance education, which facilitated the further institutional consolidation of the school. The Act of 13 February 1924 granted the WSH the rights of a state academic school [Sochacka-Krysiak, 2006, p. 63], with the founders of Polish insurance science, such as Limanowski and Miklaszewski [Kaliński, 2005, p. 83], among the first appointed professors. Thanks to their efforts and to the pioneering vision of August Zieliński, the Warsaw School of Economics (formerly WSH) wrote the first chapters in the history of Polish insurance education, whose interwar achievements became the foundation for the further development of insurance science and practice in Poland.

The WSH model in an international comparative perspective

The establishment of the insurance programme at the Higher School of Commerce formed part of a broader trend in the shaping of academic studies on insurance, although on a global scale it was more of a pioneering than belated initiative. Germany was the pioneer in this field – already in the second half of the nineteenth century, the first lectures on insurance science appeared at German universities, and in 1885, the first professorial chairs in insurance were created. At the University of Leipzig, in 1895, the Chair of Insurance Science (*Lehrstuhl für*

Versicherungswissenschaft) was established – one of the first such units in the world. At the same time, in 1895, the University of Göttingen became the first to include "insurance science" in its economics curriculum, while in the following years Cologne developed dynamically, with the University of Cologne establishing the Institute of Insurance Science with four departments (insurance economics, insurance law, actuarial mathematics, and insurance medicine). Compared to this model, the WSH approach was more explicitly oriented towards combining theoretical instruction with practical professional preparation. The Polish programme integrated economic theory, insurance technique, law and elements of public policy, while maintaining close links with practitioners from the insurance sector.

France, too, can point to the early development of insurance studies, with scholarly works in this field appearing as early as before 1900. For example, at the University of Grenoble in 1896 and at the University of Paris in 1898, dissertations on insurance matters were written [Kwon, 2024, pp. 14–15]. In France, moreover, specialised insurance courses were offered from the beginning of the twentieth century within faculties of law and economics, although a separate institute (*Institut des Assurances*) in Paris was only founded later, in the mid-twentieth century. The insurance education in this country was historically strongly linked to legal scholarship and commercial law, with instruction in insurance often embedded within faculties of law and focusing on doctrinal analysis of contracts and liability. In contrast, WSH developed insurance education primarily within an economic and commercial framework rather than a purely legal one. The Polish model treated insurance not only as a legal institution but as an economic mechanism embedded in market structures and public policy.

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, under whose rule southern Poland remained, insurance education developed less systematically – elements of actuarial mathematics and insurance law were taught within legal and statistical studies (e.g. at the University of Lviv or at the Polytechnic School in Lviv), but no independent programme existed. The Vienna Higher School of Commerce (*Hochschule für Welthandel*) at the beginning of the twentieth century focused mainly on commerce and finance, although insurance was typically taught as part of commercial law, public finance, or statistics. The academic model was strongly influenced by the Austrian school of economics, as well as by legal positivism. Unlike the German tendency towards the institutionalisation of *Versicherungswissenschaft* as a distinct field, the Austrian approach remained more integrated within broader economic and legal disciplines, with insurance rarely treated as a fully autonomous academic domain. This tradition was particularly relevant for Polish territories under Austrian rule (Galicia), where legal and economic education followed the Viennese model. After the regaining of independence in 1918, Polish universities inherited elements of this academic culture. Against this background, the WSH model represented a step beyond the Austrian model. While drawing on the economic and legal traditions of Central Europe, WSH moved towards a clearer institutionalisation of insurance studies within a specialised commercial university framework, where insurance was not merely a subfield of commercial law or public finance, but gradually evolved into a structured field combining economics, law, technique and professional practice.

In the United Kingdom, the development of insurance education followed a dual-track approach. On the one hand, academic instruction was present at selected universities, while on the other, professional training was largely dominated by industry institutions such as the Chartered Insurance Institute (CII). As early as 1873, the Insurance Institute of Manchester was established, followed in subsequent years by educational societies in Dublin, Glasgow and London, with their activity culminating in the foundation of the CII in 1912 [Carter, 1921, p. 9]. The WSH model differed in that it sought to integrate academic education and professional orientation within a single university structure, where rather than leaving professional preparation exclusively to industry-led bodies, SGH incorporated applied insurance subjects into the formal academic curriculum, thereby institutionalising insurance as a legitimate field of economic study.

In the United States, insurance education expanded significantly in the first half of the twentieth century, especially within business schools, with programmes often developing in close cooperation with industry, and some institutions creating specialised departments or schools of insurance. However, American programmes frequently evolved within a broader business administration framework. The WSH model, while also embedded in a commercial university, displayed a distinctive feature: it formed part of a broader project of nation-building and state modernisation. Insurance education was not only professional training but also an element of economic policy formation in a newly independent state.

Given this background, the Warsaw initiative of 1916 comes across as innovative: as Poland entered the period of independence, it already possessed its own centre for the training of insurance personnel, while in many other countries comparable undertakings were only emerging during the interwar period. It is worth noting that the first regular academic programmes in insurance in the United States were launched in 1904 [Sass, 1981, p. 80], at the University of Pennsylvania – Wharton School, where in 1913 the first Chair of Insurance was established under the leadership of Solomon Huebner[2] [Kwon, 2024, p. 23]. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, formal actuarial courses on a broader scale were only introduced after the First World War. It can therefore be stated that the insurance programme at the WSH in Warsaw was pioneering on a global scale – especially considering its broad scope and the inclusion of women among its students.

In contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, insurance education typically takes one of two forms:

- specialisation tracks within finance or banking programmes, or
- industry-oriented professional training organised outside the university system.

Fully autonomous insurance departments are relatively rare, with insurance taught as a module within broader financial curricula in many countries in the region. Against this background, the historical SGH model appears structurally advanced. Already in the interwar period, WSH developed a coherent and relatively autonomous academic structure for insurance

[2] Lectures on insurance law were already being delivered there as early as 1876.

studies, combining economic theory, insurance technique, legal aspects and practical industry engagement, which suggests that the interwar WSH approach anticipated institutional solutions that in many Central and Eastern European countries have only partially emerged in the post-socialist period.

In comparative terms, the Higher School of Commerce model can be characterised by four distinctive features:

1) Institutional embeddedness within a leading economic university,
2) Integration of theory and practice,
3) Combination of economic, legal and technical perspectives,
4) Strong linkage between insurance education and broader economic policy objectives.

These elements differentiated the WSH model both from purely legal approaches (as in parts of France), purely theoretical academic traditions (as in Germany), and predominantly industry-led professional training systems (as in the United Kingdom).

Systematic and comprehensive – the insurance curriculum at the Warsaw School of Economics

The newly established insurance specialisation at the Higher School of Commerce was from the outset highly interdisciplinary, combining mathematical, economic, legal and social knowledge. According to the curriculum assumptions of 1916/1917, students of the insurance specialisation, after completing a two-year general economics course, pursued a block of subjects in insurance science. Among the general subjects were: theory of statistics, differential and integral calculus, probability theory, economic and social history, commercial law, finance, social policy, and organisation of social institutions. These courses were designed to provide a solid theoretical foundation, essential for understanding the principles governing the functioning of insurance systems and, more broadly, the economy and public administration.

Within the insurance specialisation, which could be undertaken from the third year of study, the following subjects, among others, were offered [Bijak, 2020, pp. 46–47; Sochacka-Krysiak, 2006, pp. 62–64]:

- *Actuarial Mathematics and Financial Calculus* – a subject covering the basics of financial mathematics, the calculation of premiums and insurance reserves, the valuation of benefits, and the construction of insurance tariffs; taught, among others, by Władysław Strzelecki and later by his students.
- *Insurance Statistics and Demography* – a course focused on the analysis of data concerning the frequency of random events, mortality and morbidity, as well as population structure; taught by Zygmunt Limanowski.
- *Insurance Law* – covering regulations concerning business and social insurance, contractual provisions, as well as the functioning of supervisory institutions; taught, among others, by Jan Łazowski.

- *Insurance Economics* – classes devoted to the economic analysis of insurance activity – the functions of insurance in the economy, the role of reinsurance, the calculation of premiums and benefits, the assessment of the financial stability of insurance institutions, and the importance of insurance for the development of the capital market; also taught by Jan Łazowski.
- *Organisation and Practice of Insurance* – combining elements of management, law and economics, including the organisational structure of insurance companies, procedures for concluding contracts, claims settlement, as well as the practical aspects of the work of agents and actuaries; led by Kazimierz Socomski.
- *Insurance Accounting* – a course in the accounting of insurance institutions, covering bookkeeping, preparation of balance sheets and profit and loss accounts, the recording of premiums, reserves and benefits, and financial reporting issues specific to insurance institutions; taught by Edward Miński.
- *Social Insurance and Social Policy* – lectures and classes devoted to pension, disability, sickness and accident schemes, reflecting the growing importance of social security in the Second Polish Republic; taught by Konstanty Krzeczkowski.

This broad range of subjects reflected a comprehensive approach to the field – from actuarial science and risk analysis, through legal regulations, to the economic and administrative aspects of insurance activity. Importantly, the curriculum combined theoretical instruction (lectures on risk theory, law, or economics) with practical training, including specialist seminars (economic-legal and mathematical) as well as workshop elements connected with the practice of the insurance market. Contemporary accounts emphasised the innovativeness and completeness of this programme, describing it as a "systematic and full course in actuarial science" [Bijak, 2020, pp. 47–50]. The interdisciplinary character of insurance education at the WSH corresponded to the complexity of the insurance sector itself, which required competencies at the intersection of mathematics (probability theory, statistics), financial economics, and knowledge of law and social issues (life, pension, accident insurance, etc.).

The programme also required the writing of a diploma thesis under the supervision of specialists – among them Łazowski and Limanowski (described later in the paper). Preserved data indicate that despite the limited number of students, several master's theses on insurance topics were produced each year.

Owing to the pioneering nature of the curriculum, SGH lecturers often prepared their own teaching materials. The most important textbooks and lecture notes included:

- Jan Łazowski's *Introduction to the Study of Insurance* (1934) – a comprehensive, interdisciplinary work covering both social and business insurance;
- The Polish translation by Zygmunt Limanowski of G.U. Yule's *Introduction to the Theory of Statistics* (1921), as well as his own internal lecture notes for students from the late 1930s;
- Published and duplicated lectures in actuarial mathematics by Prof. Strzelecki and his successors.

The SGH Library actively collected foreign literature, with the library catalogue compiled by Adam Grodek in 1939 including specialised works from France, Germany, Austria, England and the United States, as well as publications in Spanish and Italian. The collection included, among others, *Annales d'Assurances*, *Zeitschrift für Versicherungswesen*, *Journal of the Institute of Actuaries*, and the *Insurance Journal*.

An important component of the education was cooperation with business practice. Students frequently completed internships in institutions such as the General Mutual Insurance Company (PZUW), *Warta* Insurance Company, the Mutual Insurance Institution of Buildings, as well as in insurance supervisory offices or at the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. This cooperation not only enabled students to gain experience but also observe the implementation of legal and organisational solutions developed by SGH lecturers.

Some lecturers – such as Jan Łazowski – also conducted professional courses for insurance market practitioners, aimed at filling the gaps in the theoretical preparation of industry employees. These courses, organised by trade unions and educational institutions (for example, the Institute for the Training of Employees), contributed to the popularisation of insurance knowledge beyond the university.

Despite its high academic level, insurance education at SGH faced certain limitations. One of these was the relatively small number of students who chose the insurance specialisation, which stemmed from the demanding nature of the mathematical courses and from the somewhat limited career prospects compared with more popular specialisations, such as commerce or banking.

Moreover, access to modern teaching materials was still limited, and some textbooks – such as the translation of Yule – were difficult to follow and not particularly student-friendly. It was only towards the end of the 1930s that more accessible lecture notes, prepared by assistants on the basis of professors' lectures, began to appear.

Between scholarship and practice – the academic staff of the insurance programme

The development of insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics in the interwar period was inseparably linked with the work of a group of distinguished lecturers, who not only laid the foundations of this field in Poland but also actively influenced the shaping of its institutional, methodological and social framework. Their profiles exemplify the interpenetration of scholarship, professional practice, and public activity, with this synergy of science and practice becoming a defining feature of the Warsaw centre of insurance education.

One of the most prominent insurance educators of the interwar period was Jan Stanisław Łazowski (1889–1941) – a lawyer and economist who combined practical experience with academic passion. From 1919, he was associated with the Mutual Insurance Institution, and later with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, where he co-created the foundations of

Polish insurance policy. From the mid-1920s, he lectured at the Higher School of Commerce and at the School of Political Sciences, eventually becoming a professor at SGH. He was the author of one of the first Polish academic textbooks – *Introduction to the Study of Insurance* (1923) – which shaped the thinking of several generations of economists. He combined scholarly activity with managerial functions at PZUW and the State Insurance Supervisory Office, but his greatest and most lasting impact was as an academic teacher, valued for his demanding yet inspiring style of work with students [Tanewski, 2018, pp. 58–59].

Figure 1. Professors and graduates of the insurance programme at the WSH in the academic year 1925/26

Source: SGH Archives.

Among the pioneers of insurance education, a particularly significant role was played by Zygmunt Limanowski (1877–1943), an outstanding statistician and actuary, whose work gained international recognition (he became a member of the International Statistical Institute in The Hague in 1925). From 1917 he was associated with the Higher School of Commerce, where he co-created the curriculum of the insurance programme, introducing elements of probability theory and actuarial statistics. He headed the Chair of the Theory of Statistics [CBS, 2025a], teaching, among other subjects, statistical theory and actuarial mathematics. His course was both compulsory and particularly demanding. He authored significant publications in the field of statistics and insurance economics, and his works constituted a foundation of Polish actuarial literature. Respected by students for his rigour and precision, he played a key role in shaping the theoretical basis of insurance education in Poland [Tanewski, 2025b, pp. 71–74].

Attention should also be given to Władysław Strzelecki (1884–1935), an actuary and professor of actuarial mathematics at SGH, and at the same time director of PZUW [Czerwiński, 1958, pp. 209–219], who lectured on financial and actuarial mathematics, placing particular emphasis on the practical applications of premium and reserve calculations. As a teacher, he was renowned for a demanding yet lucid style of instruction, through which students acquired a solid foundation for work in insurance institutions. He supported young adepts, combining theory with practice, as exemplified by his cooperation with Kazimierz Secomski (who later became Deputy Prime Minister of Poland). Although his career was cut short by his premature death, he left behind important teaching notes and a group of students who continued his legacy [Bijak, 2020, pp. 50–51].

Also worth mentioning is Adam Bolesław Danielewicz (1846–1935), a precursor of Polish actuarial mathematics and statistics, who as early as the end of the nineteenth century published works on probability theory and insurance theory (*Mathematical Foundations of Life Insurance*, 1896). He lectured, among other places, at Zieliński's Commercial Courses and at the School of Political Sciences in Warsaw, introducing future economists to the basics of actuarial science and demography. Danielewicz created Polish actuarial terminology [CBS, 2025b] and trained the first generation of mathematicians for the needs of insurance institutions. His achievements provided the foundation on which later SGH lecturers, such as Limanowski and Łazowski, built.

Among other figures associated with the insurance Programme, the following should be mentioned:

- Konstanty Krzeczkowski, who taught courses in social insurance and social policy. He was one of the main lecturers in the insurance specialisation from its inception until the outbreak of the war in 1939. As head of the Chair of Social Policy at SGH, he ensured that issues of social policy and social insurance systems formed an essential part of the curriculum. He played an important role as a supervisor of diploma theses in social insurance, and alongside Jan Łazowski, he was among the most active academic mentors in this field. He remained a member of the SGH faculty until his death at the end of 1939 (after being arrested by the Gestapo) [Wrzosek, 1986, p. 218].
- Aleksander Grużewski, who delivered lectures in mathematical analysis and probability theory for the insurance specialisation. He was a specialist in probability theory and statistics, which was applied in teaching the mathematical foundations required by future actuaries. Among other subjects, he lectured on mathematical analysis (probably in the first year of insurance studies) and elements of mathematical statistics [Tanewski, 2020, p. 69]. Grużewski joined the faculty in the 1930s, and continued his work at SGH also after the war (although in 1950 he was briefly dismissed during political purges). His classes provided the solid mathematical foundations necessary for advanced insurance courses.
- Edward Miński, a specialist in insurance accounting, who between 1926 and 1932 delivered lectures at SGH on insurance bookkeeping (accounting of insurance institutions). He was an experienced practitioner, with an education in accounting and long professional

practice, which made him a suitable person to teach future accountants and actuaries of insurance companies [Tanewski, 2025a, p. 23]. Unfortunately, after Miński's death in 1932, this subject did not immediately gain a successor, and for some time insurance bookkeeping was not staffed on a permanent basis. Even in the official SGH lecture list for the academic year 1938/39, the post of lecturer in insurance bookkeeping was recorded as vacant [SGH, 1938, p. 34], which confirms that Miński was one of the very few specialists in this field before the war.

- Zbigniew Łomnicki, who was a lecturer in actuarial mathematics at SGH between 1936 and 1939. After the death of Prof. Strzelecki, Łomnicki (a nephew of the eminent mathematician Antoni Łomnicki) was engaged to deliver actuarial courses. From 1936, he lectured in actuarial mathematics, filling the staffing gap in this discipline. At the same time, Łomnicki worked as head of the Mathematical Department at the Social Insurance Institution, which attested to his strong practical qualifications. He continued his teaching until the outbreak of the war; after 1939, he remained in exile, and after the war he became, among other roles, professor of statistics at the Polish University College, which was part of the University of London [Tanewski, 2025a, pp. 22–23]. His work at SGH ensured the continuity of teaching actuarial mathematics after 1935.
- Kazimierz Secomski, who from 1938 was assistant professor and lecturer in insurance economics. Secomski was one of the most outstanding graduates of the insurance specialisation (he completed his studies in 1933) and subsequently developed his academic career under the supervision of Prof. Łazowski. In 1934, Prof. Strzelecki invited him to collaborate as an assistant in the Chair of Actuarial Mathematics, which enabled Secomski to gain both teaching and practical experience (he also worked at the General Mutual Insurance Company). From the academic year 1938/39, Secomski independently delivered lectures on insurance economics and organisation at SGH, and he managed to prepare and publish academic lecture notes in this field shortly before the war [Tanewski, 2025a, pp. 30–32]. Although his involvement was interrupted by the Second World War, he remains an example of an SGH graduate who became part of the teaching staff for the next generation (Secomski survived the war, and after 1945 he continued his career as a professor of economics).

The teaching staff of the insurance Programme also included, among others, Bolesław Chomicz, Mikołaj Kloczewski, Władysław Wojtowicz and Jan Wiśniewski.

The reputation of the SGH insurance faculty in the interwar period is evidenced by the fact that it attracted outstanding students, and graduates of this specialisation went on to play significant roles both in scholarship and in practice. Kazimierz Secomski and Roman Secomski – brothers who completed the insurance specialisation in the 1930s – were among the most distinguished graduates, although their professional paths later turned towards other fields. By contrast, Józef Antosiak (1899–1959) devoted almost his entire life to the insurance sector, becoming, among other roles, Director-General of PZUW (and later, in the Polish People's Republic, President of PZU) and the author of one of the first post-war textbooks on reinsurance. Many other graduates also strengthened the ranks of insurance companies, although not all were able to realise their full potential due to turbulent historical circumstances (for instance, Władysław Drozdowski (1892–1983) pursued a career with PZU, while the talented Wanda Ziemecka was unable to make use of her knowledge because of the war) [Tanewski, 2025a, pp. 32–33].

The role of SGH in shaping insurance institutions and thought

Although the number of students choosing the insurance specialisation at the Warsaw School of Economics in the interwar period was relatively low, the impact of this programme on the development of the insurance sector in Poland was disproportionately high. SGH was the only academic centre in the Second Polish Republic that consistently and comprehensively implemented a curriculum covering both social and business insurance, in close cooperation with public and private institutions. Among SGH graduates specialising in insurance were future state officials, actuaries, directors of insurance institutions, authors of scholarly publications, and experts involved in the creation of legal regulations. An example is the aforementioned Kazimierz Secomski, who, while still a student at SGH, wrote his diploma thesis on export credit insurance, and later became both an SGH lecturer and an employee of PZUW. Such career paths demonstrate the direct impact that insurance education at SGH had on economic and institutional practice.

Education at SGH also responded to the needs of the emerging Polish insurance administration, especially after the introduction of compulsory social insurance (the Acts of 1927 and 1933). The university provided staff prepared both for conceptual work and for executive tasks in the areas of risk assessment, premium tariffing, financial supervision, and technical control within insurance institutions. Unlike other universities of the Second Polish Republic, which treated insurance issues marginally (if addressing them at all), SGH was the only institution that had a specialised chair and a curriculum devoted exclusively to insurance. Universities in Lviv, Kraków or Poznań dealt with insurance topics only incidentally, most often within courses on administrative law, public finance or statistics, although they lacked dedicated staff and teaching infrastructure comparable to that of SGH. Another distinctive strength of the Warsaw model was the integration of theory and practice – SGH lecturers such as Jan Łazowski, Władysław Strzelecki and Zygmunt Limanowski combined academic activity with work in state institutions and in the private market, with this synergistic relationship reinforcing the credibility of the university as a centre of expertise and consultation in insurance matters.

Through the publications of its lecturers, as well as the activity of seminars and cooperation with professional organisations, SGH played an important role in the development of Polish insurance thought, with textbooks, articles and conference papers published by the university's staff forming the basis for discussions on the directions of development of both social and business insurance in the Second Polish Republic. The insurance specialisation at SGH, despite its elitist character and limited number of graduates, was distinguished by its high academic level, modern teaching approach, and strong grounding in the economic realities of the era, representing the only comprehensive example in the country of specialist education, which not only prepared students for professional practice but also co-created the institutional framework of the insurance system in interwar Poland.

Conclusions and research perspectives

The beginnings of insurance education at the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) in the years 1906–1939 constitute an important yet still insufficiently studied part of the history of Polish economic education. As demonstrated in this article, SGH was not only a pioneer in insurance education but also a centre that developed its own original didactic model, based on interdisciplinarity, the integration of theory and practice, and the strong involvement of its academic staff in public life. The insurance programme was the first attempt at systematic teaching of insurance at the academic level in Poland. Thanks to figures such as Jan Łazowski, Zygmunt Limanowski and Władysław Strzelecki, the university not only transmitted knowledge but also actively shaped national social and economic policy. Their scholarly achievements, professional experience and social engagement contributed to the development of insurance institutions in the Second Polish Republic, and to the dissemination of the idea of insurance as an instrument of rational economic policy and social protection. Although the insurance specialisation did not attract mass interest from students, it was of great qualitative significance, and graduates of this programme made an essential contribution to the development of state administration, the organisation of social security systems, and the advancement of insurance theory and practice.

Insurance education at SGH was brutally interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, with many lecturers killed or forced into exile, and the didactic and organisational achievements partly dispersed. Nevertheless, the intellectual legacy of this period survived in scholarly works, textbooks and memoirs, with some of these traditions continued after 1945 in different political and institutional conditions, among others by Kazimierz Secomski, who had already been associated with the insurance programme at SGH in the 1930s. The analysis carried out in this article makes it possible to answer the research questions posed. First, the establishment and development of the insurance programme at the Warsaw School of Economics in the years 1906–1939 resulted from a combination of historical, economic and social factors. The demand for modern economic staff, the dynamic growth of insurance institutions, and the favourable political circumstances of the First World War created the perfect conditions for initiating the first academic programme in this field in Poland. Second, the educational model developed at SGH – based on interdisciplinarity, the integration of theory and practice, and close cooperation with both public and private institutions – differed from foreign patterns. Although it drew inspiration from Germany, France and the United States, it also possessed original elements, including a unique combination of academic teaching with professional practice and an openness to the participation of women. Against the background of Central and Eastern Europe, the Warsaw initiative was decidedly pioneering. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the SGH model was not merely an adaptation of foreign patterns, but rather an original synthesis of selected European and American solutions, adjusted to the institutional needs of a newly independent state. Third, the achievements of insurance education at SGH were significant not only in didactic terms but also in institutional and social dimensions. Graduates of the field contributed to the development of the social insurance system of the Second Polish Republic, strengthened the staff of insurance companies, participated in shaping the state's economic policy, and contributed to the development of Polish insurance science. Although the war interrupted the development of this tradition, the achievements of the interwar period exerted a lasting influence on post-war education and insurance thought.

In conclusion, the beginnings of insurance education at SGH should be regarded as a major contribution to the development of today's insurance system in Poland, and as part of intellectual heritage that anticipated solutions later applied in many other countries of the region. Despite the availability of some sources, the history of insurance education at SGH still contains many gaps, offering promising avenues for further research. In particular, the following areas require in-depth analysis:

- curricula and syllabi from individual years, preserved in the SGH archives;
- correspondence and teaching notes of lecturers (especially Łazowski and Limanowski), available in special collections of the SGH Library;
- the career paths of graduates of the insurance programme and their impact on the social policy of the Second Polish Republic;
- a comparison of SGH curricula with the teaching offer of other universities (e.g. the University of Lviv, the Jagiellonian University), even if the scope of their activity was limited;
- the relations between SGH and the practice of the insurance market, including forms of cooperation with state institutions, insurance companies and trade unions.

The proposed research directions may not only broaden knowledge about the history of SGH and Polish higher education, but also provide a basis for reflection on the contemporary model of insurance education in Poland, as well as its historical roots.

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