

# Academic Integrity Considerations

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**ABSTRACT:** Ethics and academic integrity play important roles in fostering a balanced and contented life. Because integrity is a personal choice, an uncompromising and consistent predictable commitment to honoring moral, ethical, and spiritual values and principles, we assert that the present study entails highlighting academic integrity as a human valence. Academic integrity respects its unanimously recognized principles at the doctrinal level, and the violation of academic integrity has a negative impact on all levels: personal and professional development, self-esteem, social valorization, etc. The creation, transmission, exchange and application of knowledge are goods that belong to the entire academic community.

**KEYWORDS:** Integrity, ethics, morality, academic/university environment, professionalism, principles

## 1. General aspects regarding integrity in the academic environment

The university/academic environment must represent a benchmark of ethics and morality for all social domains. The personnel who are tangential to this environment, as well as those who interact, even temporarily this environment, must acquire professional, ethical and moral virtues and values of the highest degree because they represent benchmarks of conduct to which the beneficiaries of the activities will relate representatives of this environment, whether it is the academic one or the university one.

The concept of "academic integrity" was introduced in the specialized literature by the researcher Donald McCabe in the early 90s and refers to the conduct of academic activities by respecting the values represented by honesty, trust, justice, respect and responsibility. Thus, the emphasis is placed on the values, behavior and conduct of members of an academic community, especially with regard to intellectual fraud, especially plagiarism. Some authors (Durac 2021-2022, 33) define the phrase "academic integrity" as "a personal choice to act responsibly and take responsibility" and consider that the term "integrity" can be understood as "respecting the intrinsic value of each individual and his human dignity".

Moral integrity, professionalism, professional and social responsibility, justice and equity are just a few attributes that must complete a set of norms and virtues of the academic and university environment. The question can be asked: where are all these elements that define integrity to be found, if not in the academic and university environment? We believe that being whole means being in harmony with yourself and society. The ethical trajectory of each individual man is the expression of his way of relating to a concept of order, lived in universal extension (Pleșu 1994, 64).

The term integrity has different interpretations in the academic community. The word derives from the Latin term "*integritas*", which means whole, completeness. Starting from the essence of the word contained in the Latin root, integrity is a requirement to bring different parts into the whole that contains them. It can be deduced that integrity as a moral value can be synonymous with honor. When we say about someone that he is of integrity or moral, it means that that person cannot be reproached for anything, integrity being therefore the quality of being or remaining whole, of preserving his qualities, without them being tainted or altered by the pseudo-imperatives imposed by the condition of the opportunity of the times lived.

Academic integrity is the foundation on which academic life is built and developed. The role of academic integrity is to defend the fundamental values of the academic process, values represented by honesty, trust, justice, respect and responsibility. These values are closely related to each other, each representing a specific and decisive aspect of academic integrity and without which an academic community cannot carry out its activity (Aslam, Moraru and Paraschiv 2018, 26).

Academic ethics therefore falls within the genre of professional ethics and is a species of applied ethics specialized in analyzing the behaviors of agents and moral patients who are part of educational and research institutions: teachers, students, pupils, researchers, administrative staff, staff auxiliary, etc. (Aslam, Moraru and Paraschiv 2018, 25).

We observe that academic integrity emphasizes aspects related to ethics and morals, the adoption in professional and even personal life of desirable ethical behaviors and conducts as a result of the internalization of ideals, principles and ethical norms in moral consciousness. Academic integrity promotes compliance with ethical norms starting from the rational arguments present in the great ethical theories and not with eyes directed to the punishments provided by the legislation in force. Likewise, the moral agents involved in the educational act must respect the ethical norms, not out of fear of the punishments formulated by the legal norms, but out of the conviction that they represent the model of humanity to which the rest of our fellows aspire.

## 2. Integrity as a virtue

As a dominant character trait, integrity as a virtue makes the human individual better, from a moral and intellectual standpoint. From the perspective of ethics and integrity, research can also be considered an art. Being original means contributing to the completion of one's own learning with all the skills and talents that make us unique. Creativity is an intrinsic part of the academic process. Scientific research based on exploring existing information and bringing new knowledge in an original way is essential for academic success (Dinu 2021).

The academic/university environment pursues performance and is concerned with the construction, equally, of some ideas, but also some destinies, the academic activity must be calibrated by a spectrum of values to guide its profession, it needs moral benchmarks for so that her performance is not just a quantitative illusion and not a qualitative one at all. Therefore, the university environment aims through its activity not only to obtain percentage results that are advantageous to it (for example, a high percentage of integration on the labor market of its graduates), but also to cultivate and preserve a climate of debate and honest knowledge, result of respecting the principle of academic freedom. The academic or university professional who respects his mission and does not want to deviate from it has, from this perspective, the duty to make efforts so that this desired does not remain in the realm of the possible, but is a reality that is lived and built daily.

In this sense, the members of the university body bear this responsibility towards their own moral formation, but also towards that developed within the institution, because the standards imposed at this level will subsequently determine the quality of education and research, but also the level of honest performance which its members' touch. If the society complains (legitimately) that the scourge that destroys the balance in the society is precisely the moral corruption of the people, which may end up, sooner or later, manifesting itself in deeds, then it would be imprudence with dire consequences in the long run on the part of the universities to neglect the moral aspects of the training process for which they are responsible (Enoiu - <https://www.syntopic.ro/de-ce-este-importanta-integritatea-academica/>).

We highlight a statement by Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *“as long as his (n.r. man's) sensitivity is limited to his own person, he has nothing moral in his actions; only when sensibility begins to extend outside him, he first acquires feelings, then the notions of good or*

*bad, which make him truly human and an integral part of his species”* (Rousseau 1973, 203) what follows from this assertion, is that members of the academic community must observe what are the implications of their activities relative to the beneficiaries of the skills they distribute by checking and examining how its members relate to morality.

### 3. Respecting the principles of academic integrity

Inevitably, any prestigious institution, which trains highly qualified specialists, fully aims to promote academic integrity as well as to protect moral values such as: honesty, collegiality, respect, trust, responsibility, academic freedom, transparency, goodwill, care etc. From these moral wills arose the principles of academic integrity; these are: moral integrity, collegiality, loyalty, respect and tolerance, professionalism, honesty and intellectual correctness, justice and equity, transparency, professional and social responsibility, academic freedom, merit.

**Integrity** must be appreciated in correlation with various aspects related to a person’s life. It is about those attributes of a person’s behavior that outline their professional, artistic or intellectual integrity (Calancea 2019, 22). The same author rightly believes that integrity cannot be cataloged only as a character trait or a quality that a person or an organization can have, but also belongs to the efficiency with which social groups function, since a group can function effective only when the members who make it up are willing to always respect the same values considered by all to be important and to direct all their efforts in order to respect the social promises assumed publicly (Calancea 2019, 24).

Integrity is a concept that speaks of consistent actions according to values, methods and measures, as well as reporting to principles and expectations that can be verified by results. Integrity expresses the virtues, experiences and application of beliefs, without discrepancies between statements and the example of personal experience. In ethics and morals – integrity is considered as honesty and fairness, and is evaluated by the accuracy of one’s actions (Informative material from anti-corruption education campaigns - Competence makes the difference! Project selected within the Administrative Capacity Operational Program co-financed by the European Union, from the Social Fund European). According to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, integrity as personal autonomy implies *“always acting in such a way as to treat humanity, both in your person and in others, always as an end in itself and never only as a means”*. Thus, integrity becomes a necessary restrictive condition applied to systems of institutional rules. Every human being has a dignity and a moral status (Anticoruptiesebes.ro. n.d.)

**Collegiality** as a principle of integrity implies that the members of an academic group owe each other’s assistance, kindness and respect. They exclude not only vulgarity, but also harsh and inappropriate manifestations. The members of the academic group must refrain from any offending words, any malicious imputations, steps or service offers for their benefit or to the detriment of others and, in general, refrain from any action likely to harm others colleagues.

**The principle of academic loyalty** implies the obligation to loyally defend the prestige of the academic environment, as well as to refrain from any act or fact that may harm the image or legal interests of the academic institution. This does not mean that an absurd obedience is required and that a member of the academic environment must accept actions likely to bring violations of human dignity. We expressly mention that the loyalty of public officials to the public institutions in which they work is not the same as the loyalty to be found in the academic environment. If civil servants are prohibited from certain unauthorized actions or from disclosing and using secret information of the public institutions in which they work, in the academic environment the principle of loyalty implies, in our opinion, something else entirely, namely the externalization of respect and passion for the academic/university environment of an assertive behavior and discourse but also relative

nipitic to the professional activity as well as highlighting the accuracy of the members of this environment.

**Respect and tolerance** as principles of academic integrity represent moral values that manifest themselves in multiple ways. Respect means being polite and kind to others. Respect is also seen in the way we speak, showing understanding, fairness, punctuality, appreciation and care for the behaviors and feelings of the interlocutors. Respect is the ability to see values in ourselves and others. This ability presupposes a certain degree of social, cognitive and emotional maturity.

The notion of “tolerance” appears in the history of European culture at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in close connection with humanist thought, embodied in the person of Erasmus of Rotterdam, in his effort to combat religious fanaticism. Other personalities who illustrated themselves in their consistently tolerant attitude when confronted with other views or worldviews were John Locke (1632-1704), Voltaire (1694-1778) and Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781). John Locke.

Tolerance means knowing, recognizing and accepting the way of being of people and groups. This involves the deliberate choice not to prohibit, not to prevent, not to intervene in the behavior of a person or a group, even if we disapprove of that behavior and have the knowledge and the power to prohibit or prevent it.

The concept of tolerance has many meanings and can be understood in different ways. It was stated (Manole 2016, 18) that: *“tolerance, in the original sense, presupposes respect for the contrary opinion and is closely related to the freedom of the person. Also, tolerance means respecting the decisions of other people, groups, peoples, religions, other ways of thinking and points of view, other styles and ways of life. Tolerance is an active attitude, generated by the recognition of the universal rights of the human person and the fundamental freedoms of others. Under no circumstances can tolerance be invoked to justify the violation of these fundamental values. Tolerance has its limits in the rules of law, which regulate the coexistence of members of society, for the defense of people’s dignity and freedom. Tolerance is necessary both between individuals and within the family and community. The promotion of tolerance and the shaping of attitudes towards different opinions in the sense of mutual decision-making and solidarity are to take place in schools and universities and through non-formal education, at home and in the workplace. In accordance with respect for human rights, practicing tolerance does not mean tolerating social injustice, nor giving up one’s own beliefs, nor making concessions in this regard. Tolerance means the common sense of not being selfish and understanding that something that for you is unimportant to another comes first.”* We agree with the opinion expressed by the author and add that, both in accordance with the respect for human rights, but also at the global level, action should be taken to put into operation research programs in the field of social sciences and education for tolerance and nonviolence.

**Professionalism** as a principle of integrity can be analyzed and characterized starting from a definition of the profession that represents: *“an occupation that several people have voluntarily organized to earn their living by directly serving a certain ideal in a morally permissible way, beyond what the law, the market and the common morality directly demand of them”* (Davis 1999, 139). Professionalism can represent a relevant ideology for those who work in the same field, exercising the role of coagulating the common beliefs of a profession, strengthening the identity and increasing the self-esteem of the members of a professional group. Professionalism is characterized by expertise in the exercise of a profession (epistemic authority), by the belief in the autonomy of professional decisions and the exercise of the profession, but also by identification with the profession and with those in the same field. At the same time, professionalism sums up both the dedication for a long part of life to the chosen profession and the moral obligation to work in the service of the client, avoiding excessive emotional involvement (but not empathy), arbitrariness and unjustified preferential

treatment by field policies. Last but not least, professionalism is given by the belief in the capacity for self-regulation and the collegial maintenance of professional standards.

**Honesty and professional fairness** presuppose impartiality as an intermediate duty. Impartiality is fair as desired when it comes to respecting rights.

Honesty is that human virtue by which the person is determined to always act on the basis of truth and genuine justice, giving everyone their due. This virtue gives people the ability to take actions that are based on the exposition of truth, producing a positive effect on the environment or where it is applied. It is part of the principles that make up ethics, comes from morality and promotes favorable effects in all areas. Honesty is mainly considered a virtue because it is a human quality that improves the coexistence between individuals, society and community. It is considered a virtue, because it acts for social, cultural and human development (Milea 2021).

The formation of professionalism represents an act of creation in the profession. Each professional, specialist in a certain field participates in the creation of the profession he exercises by applying his own procedures, modes of action, tactics and strategy, bringing, at the same time, his contribution to the attitudes of the professional group to which he belongs (Blidariu 2020).

**Justice and professional equity** in the academic space presuppose, among other things, the application of non-discrimination, respect for equal opportunities and treatment as well as the prevention and combating of corruption, opportunities for professional training, personal development of members of the academic community. Justice and equity are values that the academic environment consistently promotes, always adopting, for all its members, correct attitudes and resolutely rejecting discrimination and exploitation, regardless of the more direct or subtle character in which they occur.

The members of the academic community have the obligation to objectively evaluate and apply the criteria related to professional competence by excluding favoritism and discriminatory treatment. Also, favoritism is prohibited in the evaluation of professional performances, the establishment of rewards, disciplinary measures etc.

Another characteristic of equity requires the prohibition of harassment, in any form, in the academic environment. Misogyny, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, sexual harassment or sexually corrupt behavior are condemned. On the same axis of principle, any activity or action or behavior, in the academic environment or outside it, that affects human dignity or university ethics is intolerable. The academic/university environment must adopt firm measures for non-discrimination and equal opportunities in access to studies, employment and programs, to eliminate conflicts of interest, to prevent and combat any form of favoritism.

**Transparency**, as a principle of academic integrity, must ensure to all categories, information that interests the members of the university community, potential candidates, graduates, the institutions with which they collaborate and the general public, ensuring consistent and correct information. This ensures the facilitation of equal opportunities in the competition and fair access to academic/university resources. The university space forbids the hiding, falsification or distortion of information to which its members and the general public are entitled (Code of ethics and university deontology of the University of Pitesti, 39). Also, this principle imposes decision-making transparency in the managerial and administrative act, communicating the decisions completely and on time to all members of the academic community. The members of the academic community have the duty and moral obligation to bring to the attention of the management any case, act or phenomenon of violation of the moral and ethical norms contained in the Codes of Ethics, this being a beneficial action, establishing a climate of trust and stimulating in activity, a sure way of increasing the prestige of the entire academic community.

**Professional and social responsibility.** Some authors (Costin 1970, 83) believe that responsibility represents an active way of reporting the individual and the collective to a

certain cause, it involves the assumption of responsibilities and risks, sometimes acting beyond the system of norms that generate their rights and obligations; responsibility therefore refers to freely consented self-employment, the obligation stemming from the system of rules becoming a duty imposed by the individual or collective through self-constraint.

The university/academic environment must encourage the application of the principle of personal and professional responsibility which requires the avoidance of behaviors likely to cause harm to another person and, at the same time, the adoption of respectful behavior in order to maintain an appropriate climate for the academic environment. The members of the university community must distinguish themselves by collegiality and civic attitude, as well as by a behavior appropriate to the academic environment (Code of ethics and professional professional deontology of the “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, art. 39).

The principle of *academic freedom* presupposes “the right of every member of the academic community to openly express their scientific and professional opinions, in courses, seminars, conferences, debates, but also in the works developed and supported or published. Members of the academic community have freedom in selecting and discussing relevant topics, in critically examining values, norms, institutions and social practices in the spirit of intellectual honesty and responsibility for the production and dissemination of knowledge. Also, the members of the academic community are protected against censorship, manipulations, persecution, under the conditions of respect for scientific standards and professional responsibilities.” (Idem, art. 5 and 6).

It is also considered (Explanatory Memorandum to the Code of Ethics of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, 1) that “academic freedom does not manifest itself in an ideal context; this can be limited by the existence of generally shared cultural values. The appropriate approach to such situations is rational and democratic deliberation. It is not morally permissible for academic freedom to be used as a shield against scientific and ethical criticism. Knowledge evolves, it is relative, but it must be respected in the sense of current scientific data.”

It should be noted that academic freedom also entails responsibilities. Thus, in carrying out academic work, discipline-specific methods and the fulfillment of scientific standards related to accuracy, completeness and relevance must be respected. Closely related to this concept is the idea of “institutional autonomy” of universities.

Very important to note is the statement that: “*a corollary to their role in advancing and disseminating knowledge, academics have ‘academic freedom’ - the freedom of academics to carry out their teaching, research and publishing activities without fear of intrusion or retribution by powers such as university governance*” (InaSchool.ro 2023), or the political factor.

*Merit* as a principle of academic integrity must ensure the recognition of merits, the cultivation and rewarding of personal and collective successes that contribute to the achievement of specific objectives and the increase of the university’s prestige. The merit “*will be appreciated according to the attachment and dedication to the profession and study, to the university and members of the academic community, according to talent and own effort, creativity, efficiency and performance.*” (Code of university ethics of “George Bacovia” University in Bacău, art. 5).

All these principles make up academic integrity and are found or should be found in all university Codes of Ethics and adopted by the entire academic body.

## Conclusions

It is inescapable that education is the cornerstone of a nation’s well-being, and an education devoid of sound moral principles cannot move in the right direction and instill in the nation the values it must believe in to progress. That is why it is essential that the country’s future

researchers and teachers acquire the ethical principles and moral values to transmit to other members of society in order to spread the notion of meritocracy based on fairness, professionalism and mutual respect.

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