

The Components of Integrity in the Academic Environment

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ABSTRACT: This endeavor aims to highlight some of the components of academic integrity, specifically those related to fairness, professionalism and respect. We believe that these three basic structural components, the emollient of academic integrity from which they derive and the other components we find can also be called principles. Academic integrity plays a vital role in academia and has a number of benefits and significant importance. This ensures an environment where students can acquire knowledge and skills in a fair and equitable manner. Academic ethics and integrity are essential to the proper functioning of academia. They provide a fair, equitable and incredible framework for the development of knowledge, promoting authentic learning, collaboration and core academic values.

KEYWORDS: Academic integrity, fairness, professionalism, respect

1. Introductory considerations

Academic integrity is built through the ethical behavior of members of the community of each university, which generates a culture based on academic honesty and intellectual rigor, in which the educational act strives for excellence and is supported by a fair and objective evaluation, and all members contribute to the prevention, identifying and reporting actions that endanger this target, so that the university can intervene and sanction reprehensible acts.

The university environment holds immense potential in shaping characters and instilling desirable behaviors or, on the contrary, cultivating the feeling that morality remains an isolated and theoretical dimension of the university environment, not a generally valid and assumed practice.

Consequently, the members of the university body bear this responsibility not only towards their own moral formation, but also towards the development of the institution's standards. The standards imposed at this level will subsequently determine the quality of education and research, as well as the level of honest performance that its members achieve. If the society complains that the scourge that destroys the balance in society is precisely the moral corruption of the people, which can end up, sooner or later, manifesting itself in deeds, then it would be imprudence with dire consequences in the term on the part of the universities to neglect the moral aspects of the training process for which they are responsible.

Although university morality should not be confused with Christian morality, the two categories of morality intertwine, creating a symbiosis with academic morality based, as substance, on Christian morality. On the other hand, academic and research ethics are parts of the "common morality", representing forms of institutional ethics. Moral principles and norms have always been present in the university environment, but most of the time in the form of unwritten rules, academic habits and good professional practices that vary from one university to another.

The problems specific to academic ethics cover a wide range of fields, being able to take forms related to professional ethics, to the ethics of scientific research, to the ethics of relationships between students and between students and professors. The specialized literature talks about "the moral specificity of academic life, which is given by the respect of moral values such as academic freedom, the intellectual autonomy of the researcher or the acceptance of the diversity of opinions" (Socaciu 2017, 12).

2. The components of academic integrity

Academic integrity refers to observing the principles of academic ethics and avoiding inappropriate or fraudulent behavior in the academic environment. This involves, among other things, avoiding plagiarism, cheating or falsifying results. The university environment is, and in some situations, must become, a truly democratic environment, an environment where values are recognized and promoted, intellectual work and scientific creation are stimulated, where each member acts honestly and correctly, where acts of corruption are penalized, where the future elite of the state is prepared and thus, the university truly becomes the main engine of the development of a society and the well-being of its members.

Over time, several definitions and characterizations of ethics and academic integrity have been formulated, which led to the identification of the components (principles) of these values of the academic environment. Ethics and professional integrity are closely related to professional codes of ethics, different from one profession to another, in relation to the areas of applicability but with a common structure in relation to common moral particularities.

The components of academic integrity are: fairness, honesty, respect, professionalism, collegiality, loyalty, tolerance, justice, equity and merit. All these attributes of academic integrity are also called principles of academic integrity. As we specified at the beginning, we want to highlight in this approach the components that refer to fairness, professionalism and respect.

2.1. Correctness

Academic honesty – involved in the educational activity and the development of development – facilitates the correct evaluation of the performances of students, teaching staff, PhD students or other employees, avoiding cheating, data fabrication, self-plagiarism and voluntary or involuntary plagiarism, the inclusion of false professional information and finally, creating advantages offered without justification. The application of this principle is essential for the full realization of the act of education and the development of knowledge. The lack of academic honesty and intellectual fairness can lead to the incorrect assessment of the performance of students, teaching staff and administrative staff, to the violation of intellectual property rights.

Benefits and payments must be given to all who are at the origin of the intellectual property. All those who participated in different stages of the research, the results of which become public, must take into account the spirit of professional correctness. The academy must ensure that all teaching staff, including the students involved, recognize the right to intellectual property.

According to some Codes of Ethics (The Code of University Ethics and Professional Deontology of the University “Dănearea de Jos” of Galați), it has been rightly stated that academic honesty requires that members of the academic/university community must be treated justly, fair and just and must promote equal opportunities regarding access to studies and study programs, employment and promotion, contribute to the elimination of conflicts of interest by preventing and combating any form of corruption, favoritism and nepotism, as well as persecution of any kind.

An opinion poll (Socaciu et al. 2018, 45) shows that the main immoral behaviors encountered in universities are the following: the flawed relationship between professors and students (referring to the way of addressing, harassment or arrogant treatment of students), plagiarism, conflict of interest and nepotism, influence peddling, correctness of grading, violation of the right to privacy or the status of small institutional gifts. These problems have the ability to erode to the point of destroying the edifice of the university, to create animosity or contempt not only for the individuals concerned but also for the educational act in general, they can demotivate deserving students and even corrupt to the extent that such behavior becomes generalized. Moreover, through long-term experience, students may come to take

them for granted and imitate these attitudes themselves when they find themselves in positions of authority. Difficulties inherent in the learning activity generated by the problems exposed in the survey above.

A professor who, by his conduct, is a model of fairness, may naturally impose such a standard upon his students, and they will be encouraged, at least by the power of example, to act likewise. It is true, however, that a fair professor cannot, by his mere presence and activity, make up for the ingrained unfairness of an entire academic community; therefore, the university must constantly cultivate that climate of fairness in which slippages are exceptional, being reported and corrected, as much as possible.

2.2. Professionalism

According to the principle of professionalism, the university must cultivate an environment conducive to research and competitiveness. For this purpose, they must develop academic programs at high standards, capable of leading to the evolution of knowledge, the training of specialists, competitiveness and the increase of prestige in research. It must also encourage and reward the orientation towards scientific, pedagogical quality, especially towards excellence, of professors, researchers, students and study and research programs. The university must encourage and reward efficiency, quality and professional excellence at the managerial and administrative level. It must act against impostors, amateurism, superficiality, disinterest and platitude.

The need to research professionalism, professional thinking and the process of its formation is generated by the high rate of development of sciences and technologies, achievements in the field of science and practice, the enormous information flow, which does not allow the momentary access to the necessary information, for to be applied in the decision process; extraordinary situations faced by specialists in the work process, the need to react quickly in ambiguous conditions; the transformations of the social and individual axiological system, changes in the social perception of life and work activity, changes in the perception of work and its place in the individual value system (Mahdi 2022, 123).

Professionalism is considered a relevant ideology for those who work in the same field. It exercises the role of coagulating the common beliefs of a profession, strengthens the identity and increases the self-esteem of the members of a professional group. The formation of professionalism associated with a creative act in the profession. Each professional, specialist in a certain field participates in the creation of the profession they practice by applying their own procedures, modes of action, tactics and sales strategy, bringing, at the same time, their contribution to the attitudes of the professional group to which they belong.

The defining features of professionalism are considered (Blidariu 2020) the elements that make up: honor, language, the separation of private life from the professional life, the boundary between personal and professional life ethics: appropriate behavior (without lying and assuming the work of others), positivism and enthusiasm, taking responsibility: both in the case of success and in the case of potential failure, without looking for excuses, behavior: attentively sober, without confusing professional activities with leisure activities.

2.3. Respect

In the academic community, respect is translated as the esteem, consideration, or value accorded to a person, based on a value or set of values that defines their profile. Respect is also manifested through the politeness shown in the relations between the members of the community, which contributes to the creation of a stimulating academic environment. Respect also includes tolerance towards the differences between individuals, the differences between opinions, ideas, beliefs, attitudes (Draga et al. 2018, 19-20).

The academic environment implies mutual respect, tolerance and cooperation. A dispute is not resolved by actions that represent personal attacks or by uncivilized language, but by

clear arguments and evidence. In this sense, harassment for reasons of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, sexism, chauvinism, homophobia, religious or political beliefs must be disapproved.

3. Conclusion

The essential aspect of academic integrity is maintaining the credibility of educational institutions and the value of degrees earned by students. When institutions and members of the academic community respect and promote ethics and integrity, a student's degree becomes a symbol of academic competence and quality. This increases the confidence of employers, other educational institutions and society in general in graduates and in the education system.

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