

Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education 2013

## Academic ethics in conditions of the University of Zilina

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### Abstract

The current environment puts an increasing emphasis on increasing the quality of university education. It is also connected with the growth of requirements placed on the profession of a university employee that also include a strong ethical aspect. The implementers of the project Development of culture quality at the University of Zilina (ZU) based on European standards of higher education (DEQUA), whose output is to set up the basic rules of academic ethics in the environment of the University of Zilina in the form of a code of ethics, are aware of this fact. As foundation for creation of employee code the Code of Ethics of University Employees was used, whose observance is declared by ZU; however, it only has a formal character, it is not a binding norm in the environment of ZU, whose failure to comply with would be sanctioned. The purpose of adopting this document (Code of Ethics) was supported also by the results of organised workshops and surveys within the DEQUA project.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Contemporary Issues in Business, Management and Education conference.

*Keywords:* ethics; education; quality; employees; code.

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### 1. Introduction

The present period is in several areas marked with the absence of the basic rules of politeness. Many companies behave pragmatically, sometimes even unethically. From the aspect of future development of the thinking of society and state, it is necessary to pay higher attention exactly to university students. Universities represent a source of new thinking, progress and innovations. Innovations presently meet with ethics in the sense of maintaining mental richness, responsible and correct behaviour and mainly exploitation of innovations not only in favour of economic growth but also of growth in the social and society area. Universities educate new managers, teachers, doctors, who

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will utilise the knowledge and skills acquired in favour of the entire society. If we want to enroot in them the basic rules of ethical behaviour, we have to start not only with education of ethics as a subject, but also to institutionalise ethics into the life (environment) of the university, e.g. in the form of a Code of Ethics.

Authors (Bussard, Marček, Markuš, Bunčák, & Mazurkiewicz, 2004; Callahan, 1982; Cahn, 2010; Friesl, 2008; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Guicheva, Fobel, Kremničanová, & Vincúr, 2011; Králiková, 2009; Olejarova, 2008; Putnová & Seknička, 2007; Remišová, 2011; Werther & Chandler, 2010; Willinsky & Alperin, 2011) have been dealing with the issue of ethics from many points of view for many years, because ethics intervenes in several areas, not excluding the area of education, whilst currently we must clearly identify the values connected with academic environment. The need to introduce ethics into the academic environment shows important nowadays as it should improve not only the quality of relationships and environment in an academic organisation, but would also increase positive reputation of the given organisation. We know that ethics is not assigned any significant role by many people, and they are sceptical upon its implementation. However, we must start somewhere as we see that many values start to wither away even from the academic environment. The issue of academic ethics and questions related thereto deserve increased interest exactly in our society that some of the authors associate with a crisis of values. The most frequent implementation tool is a Code of Ethics, which should not only be a formality but a serious document that the individual members of the academic organisation will respect and be governed by. This will guarantee that the quality of the given organisation will increase since we know that pleasant atmosphere and relationships at the workplace represent substantial motivation to higher performance (Stecíková & Hrašková, 2013).

The importance of using a Code of Ethics is shown also by the results of the survey where Slovak companies indicated the following as the highest benefits from employing a Code of Ethics (Remišová, 2011):

- work discipline increased,
- interpersonal relationships at the workplace improved,
- quality of production / services increased,
- communication between the management and other employees improved.

Organisations may take different approaches to creating a code of ethics; either it is a code of ethics created by the management of the organisation, without participation of the members (employees of the organisation) – in this case we talk about a so-called American approach, or the code of ethics is co-developed under active participation of all members (employees) of the organisation – in that case we talk about a so-called Scandinavian approach. Certainly there is also an option to have the code of ethics tailor-made by a company that operates in this field. Upon creation of a code of ethics it is necessary to comply with certain requirements imposed on it. Remišová (2011) states that a code of ethics should be mainly:

- realistic,
- clear,
- understandable,
- contain information that its failure to comply with will be sanctioned.

Olejárová (2008) states that a code of ethics should contain:

- preamble – emphasises why a code of ethics is necessary in the profession,
- expected standards of behaviour and conduct,
- key values of the profession, general and also specific values of the profession,
- values and principles related to the mission of universities,
- obligations and rights of university teachers,
- possible conflict situations and their solutions typical for the field of universities,
- other areas,
- method of control and sanction for the breach of code requirements, and/or violation of the principles included in the code of ethics,

- indication of the responsible person for creation of the code and of the contact person – introduce the function of e.g. a confidence person – advisor, responsible employee for ethics, and/or indicate the contact (name and place) where a complaint may be filed in case of suspicion of offence against the rules in the code of ethics; to create an institution verifying the complaints related to violation of the code of ethics,
- determination of the method of control and observance of the code of ethics rules,
- indicating the date of code execution and signature of the person responsible for its creation.

## 2. Academic ethics

The question of academic ethics is a relatively new one in Slovakia that started to be opened in our universities only in 2000. The first school that adopted a code of ethics was The School of Management (Vysoká škola manažmentu). The primacy of this school in the field of introducing academic ethics is logical since this school was established by an American university institution. Since in the USA there have been discussions on the topic of academic ethics for some decades (Králiková, 2009).

Renowned universities of the world started to introduce codes of ethics in different forms already some centuries ago. Their contents changed together with development of the society and increase of knowledge from the fields of science and ethics. Education institutions in each society gained a high statute in the society, as well as recognition not only owing to spreading of wisdom but also owing to the character properties of pedagogues and students. Professors and their wards have always had the reputation of educated and virtuous people, elite of the society and guarantee for its future prosperity. Codes of ethics emerge from the values of universities and represent a summary of desirable ethical principles and standards of behaviour for students and university employees (Meško & Remišová, 2013).

Since 1915 in the USA there has been a professional organisation called American Association of University Professors. Its purpose is, inter alia, also to supervise the state of academic ethics and to solve its problems. The basic values, principles and standards of academic ethics are processed in the basic documents and guidelines reacting to the changing practice in the society (Gluchman, 2012). The American Association of University Professors adopted an Opinion on Professional Ethics already in 1966. In 1997 the Center for Academic Integrity issued the 10 principle of academic integrity aimed at strengthening the academic honesty of students, which were modified in 2004. Apart from the central initiatives, there were also codes of ethics produced at the level of individual universities where the tradition of academic honesty codes for students has had a tradition for some tens of years (Králiková, 2009).

In developed countries academic ethics is an integral part of world universities (Gluchman, 2012). The Code of Ethics fulfils several functions (Meško & Remišová, 2013): it regulates the behaviour of employees; helps to avoid illegal and unethical conduct; teaches to reflect one's own moral behaviour and the behaviour of other people; develops moral consideration and conduct; provides a guarantee to everyone in the academic field that others are obliged to behave to them in compliance with the determined moral standards; it helps to solve conflict moral situations at the workplace.

In Slovakia we have an institutionalised form of academic ethics; there is no professional association of university teachers and there is also no common agreement on the basic values, principles and standards of academic ethics. The Code of Ethics of University Employees adopted by the Slovak Rectors' Conference in 2006 even with the best will cannot fulfil this task (Gluchman, 2012).

### 2.1. Code of ethics at Slovak universities

In the Slovak Republic, according to the data on the website of the Ministry of Education, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, the following schools operate (MŠVVVaŠ, 2013):

- public universities,
- state universities,
- private universities,
- foreign universities (the number of schools is indicated in Table 1).

Table 1. Universities in the Slovak Republic

University type	Number of schools	Number of faculties
Public universities	20	103
State universities	3	4
Private universities	13	11
Foreign universities	4	8

In our survey we focused on finding out whether at the given universities, or at their faculties there is institutionalised ethics in the form of own code of ethics (codes of ethics) and for what party interested is/are the code/codes of ethics intended for – employees, students, etc. Since a code of ethics should be a document that is freely available and represents the given university outwards, improves its image in the eyes of the public, we decided that at first we will investigate whether the given university has a code of ethics (codes of ethics) published on its website. After that we focused on investigating whether the individual faculties (if the university is divided also into faculties – regardless of the fact whether the university as a whole has a code of ethics) as organisational units of universities have their own codes of ethics elaborated at their level of operation. The following Tables 2–4 show the summary results divided according to the above mentioned 4 groups of universities operating in the Slovak Republic and according to the target group that the code of ethics is intended for.

Table 2. Universities in the Slovak Republic with a code valid for the whole school

University type	Employee's code of ethics	Student's code of ethics
Public universities	2	1
State universities	0	0
Private universities	0	2
Foreign universities	1	0

Table 3. Faculties of universities in the Slovak Republic with a faculty code

University type	Faculty employee's code of ethics	Faculty student's code of ethics
Public universities	3	6
State universities	0	0
Private universities	0	0
Foreign universities	1	0

In case codes existed either at the level of university or at the level of faculty, we observed that there are separately prepared codes for employees and separately for students; only in one case we found one code valid for all members of the academia at the faculty level. Only one university has elaborated a code of ethics for employees and also for students.

It is a paradox that neither the university, not the respective faculty that educated students at the first and also second level of university studies in the field of ethics, while its graduate may, inter alia, participate in the elaboration of professional codes of ethics of employees in different professions and propose their wording, may work in national and multinational ethical committees, in expert teams, in management bodies and committees for assessing the state of ethical decision-making in different areas of social life of the society and social relationships, have elaborated (or was not found on the websites of the university or the faculty) a code of ethics for any of the parties interested.

Only one of the faculties analysed had its own code of ethics for students, although its parent university has a code of ethics for student of the given university elaborated. In this case we can accredit it to the fact that the faculty code was issued approximately 2 years prior to the code of ethics of the university.

All other faculties that have a code of ethics elaborates (either for the student or employee) are part of the group of universities that at the global school level have no such codes prepared.

### 3. Academic ethics at the university of Zilina

The current environment puts an increasing emphasis on increasing the quality of university education. This aspect is also connected with the growth of requirements imposed on the profession of a university employee. One of the most significant requirements is a strong ethical aspect. The implementation of the DEQUA project is also aware of this aspect and therefore we decided that with regard to the various structure of the academia members (students, university pedagogues, research employees, administrative employees, external co-workers) it is suitable to adopt a separate code of ethics setting forth the ethical principles and standards to be followed by the employees of the University of Zilina, and also its external co-workers and a separate code of ethics regulating the given area for students of the University of Zilina since the ethical requirements must not be imposed only on the employees of the university.

As foundation for creation of employee code the *Code of Ethics of University Employees* is used, whose observance is declared by our university; however, it only has a formal character, it is not a binding norm in the environment of ZU, whose failure to comply with would be sanctioned. Also from the content aspect, this document is rather a reflection element upon the creation of a full-value code of ethics; it does not meet the basic requirements (mentioned in the introduction) that a code of ethics must live up to. As a basis for creating the code of ethics for students the *Student's Code of Ethics of the Faculty of Special Engineering of the University of Zilina* of 14<sup>th</sup> June, 2010 was used. Other faculties of ZU do not have such a code prepared and it was also another impulse to elaborate a global student's code of ethics to be valid all over the university. Not only employees but also the students of the University of Zilina were invited to join the creation of both documents. Both documents are still in the phase of commenting on them and fine-tuning. The purpose of these documents was supported also by the results of the organised workshops and surveys within the project where, as the two personality competencies (out of ten) of a *university teacher* the following ones were defined: *morally and ethically acting personality* and *acclaimed author and honest personality*.

In order to obtain as many opinions on the desirable competence profile of a *university teacher* as possible we carried out a primary research composed of the qualitative survey, and based on this survey we performed subsequent quantitative survey. In order to define desirable personality competences of the university teachers we decided to engage both the teachers and students to creation of the university teacher profile. The teachers are in the direct contact with the students, cooperate with them and pass on them their knowledge and experience.

Approximately 11 000 students currently study in all forms of study at the University of Zilina. With 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error it was necessary to address at least 372 students. 395 students of the University of Zilina participated in the survey. The sample and basic characteristics of the respondents are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Identification of questionnaire survey participants.

Participants	Number	% of all	Average age
Male	279	70.63	20.48
Female	116	29.67	23.39
Level of study: Bachelor	346	87.59	20.48
Level of study: Master	49	12.41	23.39

The students were asked to assign significance to each of the 10 personality competencies in the scale from 1 to 10 whilst 1 = the least important; 10 – extremely important or essential characteristics. Tables 5 and 6 show the indicated values of importance assigned by the students to the above mentioned competencies: *morally and ethically acting personality* and *acclaimed author and honest personality*. In the tables the individual point values are also assigned with their frequency, relative frequency in percentage,  $\bar{x}$  frequency for male and female students. The lower parts of the tables show further statistical characteristics: mean  $\bar{X}$ , sample variance  $s^2$ , upper quartile  $x_{0,75}$ , median  $x_{0,50}$ , lower quartile  $x_{0,25}$ .

Table 5. Levels of importance of teachers' competence – morally and ethically acting personality, from the viewpoint of students.

	All [%]	Male	Female
10	74 [18.73]	44	<b>30*</b>
9	60 [15.19]	35	25
8	<b>113 [28.61]*</b>	<b>85*</b>	28
7	43 [10.89]	35	8
6	29 [7.34]	24	5
5	60 [15.19]	44	16
4	3 [0.76]	2	1
3	5 [1.27]	4	1
2	4 [1.01]	3	1
1	4 [1.01]	3	1
$\bar{x}$	7.59	7.43	7.97
$x_{0.75}$	9.0	9.0	10.0
$x_{0.50}$	8.0	8.0	8.0
$x_{0.25}$	6.0	6.0	7.0
$s^2$	3.81	3.72	3.85

Note: The most frequent value (modus) is marked with an asterisk\*

Table 6. Levels of importance of teachers' competence – acclaimed author and honest personality, from the viewpoint of students

	All [%]	Male	Female
10	40 [10.13]	27	13
9	43 [10.89]	28	15
8	76 [19.24]	<b>58*</b>	18
7	52 [13.16]	40	12
6	47 [11.9]	28	19
5	<b>89 [22.53]*</b>	<b>58*</b>	<b>31*</b>
4	18 [4.56]	17	1
3	16 [4.05]	11	5
2	7 [1.77]	6	1
1	7 [1.77]	6	1
$\bar{x}$	6.65	6.61	6.76
$x_{0.75}$	8.0	8.0	8.0
$x_{0.50}$	7.0	7.0	6.5
$x_{0.25}$	5.0	5.0	5.0
$s^2$	4.59	4.76	4.18

Note: The most frequent value (modus) is marked with an asterisk\*.

The reason why the students see a competency as less important is related to the fact that students more strongly perceive the competency of the teacher that they are in direct contact with. The characteristics such as *acclaimed author and honest personality* are not sufficiently visible for the students and therefore they do not perceive them so intensively.

Apart from that students were called upon to provide their statement also regarding the desirable and/or undesirable characteristics of the teacher personality profile. Students in their answers emerged from their own experience with pedagogues that they gained during their studies. In total we obtained 156 desirable and 176 undesirable characteristics of teachers. Table 7 shows the desirable teacher characteristics and Table 8 their undesirable characteristics arranged by the frequency of answers, whilst we indicate only the 13 most frequent characteristics.

Table 7. Identification of the most frequent desirable teacher characteristics expressed by students

Characteristics	Number	% of all
Professionalism	192	48.61
Fairness	147	37.22
Communicativeness	133	33.67
Helpfulness, thoughtfulness	113	28.61
Willingness to help	111	28.10
Tolerance	109	27.59
Patience	90	22.78
Meeting deadlines	89	22.53
Intelligibility	75	18.99
Kind approach	64	16.20
Comprehension	62	15.70
Sense of humor	58	14.68
Friendliness	58	14.68

Table 8. Identification of the most frequent undesirable teacher characteristics expressed by students

Characteristics	Number	% of all
Arrogant	77	19.49
Uneducated, unprofessional	71	17.97
Unjust	65	16.46
Boring	63	15.95
Unwilling	59	14.94
Biased	55	13.92
Conceited, vain	52	13.16
Haughty, acting superior	51	12.91
Moody, spreads bad atmosphere	48	12.15
Vulgar, impolite, perverted	48	12.15
Too much strict, critical	43	10.89
Unpunctual	43	10.89
Nervous	40	10.13

Králiková (2009) summaries a whole line of ethical problems at universities. She quotes Callahan (1982), who indicates as ethical problems for example abuse of students, tolerating cheating and plagiarism of students, irresponsible teaching without interest in students, consultant activities interfering with the obligations of the pedagogue towards the school and students, using teaching for indoctrinating students by the teacher's favourite topics, or failure of the pedagogue in realising their responsibility to the wider society. She further indicates findings from Dinç's (2008, as cited in Králiková, 2009) research area that points out to misinterpretation of data, inventing

or forging data, stating the authorship of someone that did not even participate in the research, or abuse of students for research work without indicating them as co-authors.

In the academic environment in Slovakia we most frequently meet plagiarism not only among students but unfortunately also pedagogues. At universities we also face biased access of teachers in evaluation of students, weak preparation of teachers for the lesson, unwillingness of officers at the lower management level to deal with the breach of ethical rules of teachers, asking for a bribe for exams from the students and teaching under the influence of alcohol (Králiková, 2009).

Asking for bribe for the exams was also mentioned by the respondents in our survey; however, it was only 4.30% of the respondents and alcohol as a problem was indicated by 3.29% of the respondents.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the environment of the university we often see on the part of students using the current possibilities in the IT field not only for studies but unfortunately also for cheating. Students often study not in order to acquire knowledge and skills that they can apply in their lives, but only to gain a diploma at any price, even at the price of cheating. This problem has become extremely serious and this is also one of the reasons for introducing a student code of ethics, which shall also deal with this area.

The university teachers represent a specific category of employees in each state and intellectual cream of each nation, they are a model of erudition and permanent progress used for the benefit of other people (entire society) and passed on other people (students, colleagues, employers). At present the university must experience and bear a high social responsibility for itself as a socially beneficial institution, as an employer, but also for its students, teachers and managers. It must operate like any other controlled entity applying modern principles of management.

Like in each other field of the society, there are certain rules valid also in the academic sphere, which are regulated by acts, decrees, internal regulations or directives. Breach of these rules by the academia members is being sanctioned. For example at schools there are disciplinary regulations prepared referring to all students registered at the given university (faculty) and working regulations that refer to all the employees of the given university (faculty). However, they are limited only to the breach of legal or internal regulations. Since these regulations do not take into consideration the variety of life and the issue of ethics, therefore it is necessary to define the ethical rules of academia operation in the form of a code of ethics. However, these rules must not be only of formal character; it is necessary for the code to also include sanctions for their violation and certainly also the procedure of evaluating their violation.

#### Acknowledgements

The paper was conducted within the project: Development of culture quality at the University of Zilina based on European standards of higher education, ITMS code 26110230060; Modern Education for the Knowledge Society/Project is funded by EU.

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