

Values of Academic Autonomy and Integrity

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Abstract: The hypothesis from which we start our approach is that in order to take the most appropriate decisions in university governance, certain principles should be applied, designed to ensure quality and performance in higher education. Thus, the principle of autonomy and the principle of integrity underlies, in academic area, quality of didactic and research activities, performance evaluation activities, efficient management, etc. Currently, it is increasingly necessary to consolidate a culture of academic integrity. Between society and the academic community there are certain expectations that imply the internalization of a set of values and values, the ethical principle that any higher education institution must promote. Another fundamental principle represents academic freedom, such as freedom to research, freedom to teach and freedom of free speech about the education system or any of its institutions. We argue in favor of our ideas using the official documents of Danubius University: *the Charter and the Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology*.

Keywords: autonomy; integrity; academic freedom; responsibility; value

1. Introduction

Academic space, which contains teaching and research as specific dimensions, involves free, rational and critical debates as fundamental and characteristic. Often, the subjects of these debates are their own moral principles and values, always subject to restrictive interpretations or restrictions. “Their review and ongoing debate, updating and specifying them when needed, only keep them alive and increase their moral force to generate moral behaviors” (Papadima, 2018, p. 13). As a field of applied ethics, the academic ethics is a particular application of the general ethical principles.

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2. University Autonomy

Everyone has the right to be autonomous, capable of treating a person as self-sufficient, capable of making life plans, making choices, based on his or her own opinions, decisions, judgments or skills. Therefore, people are autonomous, free to develop and act, according to their own choices. This is about freedom of will, manifested on the basis of internal moral laws, independent of affective or external causes.

University autonomy is a condition of higher education institutions in relation to the external environment and central authority. And at academic level, autonomy can be personal or public. As an academic ethical value, personal autonomy “ensures the exercise of its own consent and the possibility of choosing programs, competitions and opportunities for study and research” (Ștefan, 2018, p. 65). Each member of the academic community can choose, knowingly, the directions of his academic career, study and research programs, the level of performance it intends to achieve.

In the Constitution of Romania, at art. 32, university autonomy is guaranteed. According to the National Education Law no.1 / 2011, art. 123 states that “higher education institutions are organized and operate independently of any ideological, political or religious interference.”¹ University institutions must have autonomy in order to adequately benefit from academic freedom in order to fulfill their obligations and to assume the responsibilities that accompany their activities. University autonomy implies both academic freedom and accountability, monitoring and sanctioning violations of ethical standards; it is subject to compliance with the legislation in force regarding the autonomy and its determinations.

The most important elements of university autonomy “are expressed in the University Charter, approved by the university senate, in strict accordance with the legislation in force” (Ștefan, 2018, p. 68). Considering the value of organizational culture, autonomy can be exercised under the conditions of “assuming public responsibility”, as stated in the National Education Law no.1 / 2011. Public accountability is based on professional accountability, which elaborates standards in a collegiate framework, on university activities. Linked to public accountability is transparency that provides public access to data, information, and actions that may be of interest to the academic community or the social environment to which it belongs.

¹ <https://legeaz.net/legea-educatiei-nationale-1-2011/art-123>, accessed on 22.11.2018.

Autonomy is the level of leadership and self-management of an institution, which is necessary for the academic institutions to adopt effective decisions in accordance with the didactic and research standards, on academic management and appropriate activities, respecting academic freedom. At the same time, the nature of university autonomy can be different, nuanced depending on the particularities of the institution.

2.1. Academic Freedom

The freedom to teach, the freedom to research and the freedom to critically analyze social values, norms, institutions and practices are the components of academic freedom, which is an important principle of university organization.

Freedom of teaching is the right of teachers to choose the courses they want, or at least some of them; teachers have the freedom to set up the content to be studied and the perspectives of their interpretation. Also, the teacher can establish, without omission from the outside, standards and assessment methods. For objective and scientific training in the studied field, students should not be manipulated, indoctrinated or acquire certain knowledge in a non-critical manner. However, teachers' interests and preferences “must be aligned with disciplinary and educational rigors, with student interests” (Andreescu, 2010, p. 216).

Freedom of teaching is conditioned by certain collective decision-making bodies on the curriculum; so there are national standards established by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education regarding the types of subjects that should be studied in each study program, regardless of the university that supports it, in order to achieve a certain unity of the contents, meant to form specific competencies.

Freedom of research implies the intellectual freedom of the teaching staff to research and communicate the results of its research. This freedom is accompanied by social responsibility that accompanies and strengthens it. Freedom of research is conditioned by resource management or ethical constraints such as theft of ideas, plagiarism, communication of incorrect results, use of research for harmful purposes, etc.

Academic freedom is predominantly based on the social benefits which it makes possible, namely: “the unhindered search for truth, which brings with it, inter alia, scientific and technological progress; cultivating democracy and preventing the

tyranny of the majority; the cultivation of personal autonomy and critical spirit” (Andreescu, 2010, p. 215).

3. Academic Integrity Standards

Integrity is a concept that should characterize a person's conduct through probity, conscientiousness, dignity, self-esteem and authenticity. Integrity can be *personal* when it involves assuming and respecting the values that underpin the individual's ethical conduct, or it can be *public*, becoming a component of organizational culture. Shared beliefs, values, and norms are the basis of organizational culture; they “are a synthesis of the individual ones; they are reflected in symbols, attitudes, behaviors and different structures; they influence significantly the evolution and performance of the organization” (Şarpe et alii, 2011, p. 14).

According to the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, integrity means “integral character, feeling of dignity, righteousness and conscientiousness, which serves as a guide in the conduct of the man; honesty, incorruptibility” (*apud* Ştefan, 2018, p. 92). Ethical conduct of the individual configures personal integrity.

In the process of education, integrity is an essential feature for achieving quality education. Academic integrity refers both to didactic, teaching, training and evaluation, to scientific research and to professional promotion or any other activity related to awarding titles. The criteria set for such activities must be legitimate, predictable, objective and transparent.

Integrity is defined in the *ARACIS Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*, art. 9: “Integrity is a principle according to which the activity of ARACIS experts is exercised by honesty and fairness, in full compliance with the other ethical principles assumed at the time of registration in the ARACIS Register of experts in evaluation and accreditation.”¹

Academic integrity is reflected in the Codes of Ethics and Integrity of Universities, starting with the National Education Law no.1/2011. Academic ethics prescriptions are based on international or European regulations as well as standards specific to higher education institutions. Ethical norms refer to:

- relations between teachers;

¹ http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Legislatie-Proceduri/2017/Codul_de_Etica_aprobat_in_28_septembrie_2017.pdf, accessed on 23.11.2018.

- relations between students;
- relations between teachers and students;
- relations between employees belonging to non-teaching staff;
- relations between teaching and non-teaching staff;
- relations between students and non-academic staff;
- relationships between university management structures and university staff.

All standards of academic ethics mentioned in codes of professional ethics and deontology are intended to maintain and promote academic integrity”

4. The Autonomy and Integrity - Organizational Principles of Danubius University

4.1 The Charter of the Danubius University

The significant dimensions of university autonomy are specified in the University Charter. At the Danubius University, the Charter of the Danubius University¹ has the following vision:

“Danubius” University will be recognized in the space between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea as an international university of excellence, an open and stimulating environment for personal and entrepreneurial development, as well as for the constant exchange of ideas and values.”²

The mission of the university is to promote “knowledge and innovation by providing a unique learning experience, research and development, regardless of age, experience, level of knowledge or the training of students and their clients.”³

The values for which the Danubian academic community militates are truth, responsibility, innovation, respect and excellence.

At Danubius University level, the university autonomy is defined as “a specific way of self-control, self-organization and self-development, in accordance with the legal framework established by the Romanian Constitution, the Law of National Education, the provisions of its Charter, and in accordance with its own regulations.”⁴

The organizational autonomy of Danubius University gives it the right to set up its

¹ <http://www.univ-danubius.ro/documente-oficiale-udg-2/carta-udg.html>, accessed on 23.09.2018.

² *Idem.*

³ *Ibidem.*

⁴ *Ibidem.*

structure, “appropriate to the achievement of its mission and objectives, in accordance with the provisions of the law”¹; this university is entitled:

- select the didactic and research staff, the students and the technical-administrative staff according to the law and by their own criteria;
- to elect by secret vote the governing bodies established by law and by their own Charter;
- to “elaborate own regulations, signs and symbols in compliance with the legislation in force”.

Danubius University, due to its functional autonomy and respecting the general framework established by the Ministry of National Education, organizes the admission contest and the graduation exam for the undergraduate and master's degree studies for its graduates.

In accordance with national and international standards, Danubius University develops its own curricula and discipline lists, grasps its human and financial resources, observing the standards set by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. This institution forms the function states and the other regulations, methodologies and procedures necessary for the optimal functioning of the departments and services within its structure. It regulates and evaluates the conduct of members of the academic community.

Danubius University has autonomy in managing its human and financial resources, in compliance with the standards set by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. At the same time, she has the right to initiate and develop cooperation programs with other institutions in the country and abroad.

The University focuses on scientific research by organizing and managing scientific research centers and has the right to publish journals, textbooks, courses, research papers. Also, this university has the right to issue diplomas and certificates, according to the law, and to award academic, scientific and honorary degrees.

The teaching and scientific autonomy of Danubius University consists in its right to organize, develop and improve the education process in accordance with national and international standards, to propose bachelor and master degree programs, ensuring their compatibility with similar programs in the country and from abroad.

¹ *Ibidem.*

According to its Charter, Danubius University manifests its didactic and scientific autonomy by:

- organizing and improving the teaching staff;
- participation in international didactic programs;
- initiating and conducting scientific research programs or in collaboration with similar institutions in the country and abroad;
- the participation in competitions for obtaining the research grants provided by the national institutions and other types of national and international research grants;
- the right to exploit, through specific means, in the country and abroad, the results of the scientific research under the conditions of observance of the intellectual property rights.

The administrative-financial autonomy of Danubius University consists in its right to use and manage according to its own priorities and decisions, the budget it has and the right to carry out financial-banking operations, according to its own needs. This type of autonomy allows the university to set fees in accordance with legal provisions and to provide scholarships and other forms of support. Danubius University can make its own incomes through scientific research and other services.

The autonomy of Danubius University is exercised through specific competences granted to the Senate, the Board of trustees, the faculty councils, the departments' councils, the rector, the vice-rectors, the general administrative director, the deans, and the department directors.

4.2. The Professional Deontology Code of Danubius University

The adoption and application of the Code of Professional Ethics of Danubius University is a concrete form of assuming public accountability by this university and a way of manifesting academic autonomy¹.

The Code states, from the outset, that all people in the Danubian university community enjoy academic freedom. "Being protected against political, religious and economic pressures and constraints."²

¹ http://www.univ-danubius.ro/images/udg/atasamente/Codul_Eticii_si_Deontologiei_Profesionale_universitare.pdf, accessed on 10.12.2018.

² *Ibidem*.

Other moral values stipulated in this code are:

- personal autonomy, “ensuring the exercise of informal consent regarding their own careers, programs, competitions and study and research opportunities, and providing opportunities for each university member to take and apply decisions for his / her own academic and professional career.”¹
- rightness and equity, merit, professionalism, honesty and intellectual correctness, transparency, professional responsibility, respect and tolerance, goodwill and care.

Also, in this code there are stipulated the behaviors that violate the good academic behavior, as well as the sanctions that must be complied with by those who violate the stipulated ethical values and norms.

5. Conclusions

The activities at any university level are supported by norms of good moral and professional conduct, which are stipulated in official public documents and in articles of law, the purpose of which is to increase the performance and to establish good practices at university level.

Redeveloping, reviewing and periodically resizing concepts, principles and values of academic ethics is beneficial for the continued growth of the quality and performance of scientific research and the quality and performance of teaching and assessment in the academic world.

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¹ *Ibidem*.

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