

## SOME ETHICAL CHALLENGES TO CONTEMPORARY ACADEMIA

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**Abstract.** *Contemporary reforms in academia provoke comprehension of current processes here from the point of view of ethics, to analyze actual academic practices and to judge academic misconduct. This means implementation of procedures of ethical regulation to educational and research areas. The paper deals with matters of contemporary transformations of academia, ethical regulation of academic misconduct and the ways of improvement of practices in academia. Special consideration is given to the possibility to differentiate academic and administrative positions at contemporary universities and to minimize current practice of simultaneous administrative and academic careers and their interdependence.*

**Keywords:** *ethical regulation, the Bucharest Declaration, ethical audit, academic misconduct, false co-authorship.*

## Introduction

The contemporary system of higher education in post-Soviet states, including Ukraine, is in the process of reformation. The decision to join the Bologna process was made in 2005. But until today, entering the integral academic space of Europe means subjection to various complications. One of the fundamental problems of self-identification of post-Soviet academia is the process of transformation, in which the European system of education itself is engaged today. European experience of higher education is challenged and is still in the process of revision.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze ethical regulation matters in contemporary academia. Thus, the following tasks were defined to achieve the purpose: 1) to identify considerable issues of contemporary transformation of higher education and their ethical content in light of the Bucharest Declaration; 2) to outline the process of shaping ethical regulation in contemporary academia; 3) to represent an example of academic misconduct and to expose the variant of overcoming with the help of ethical tools. The research method of the paper is based on philosophical analysis of an ethical document (the Bucharest Declaration) and ethical judging of current practices.

### 1. New Ethical Attitudes of Contemporary Academia

Scholars call contemporary society “post-industrial,” “postmodern,” “information,” depending on the foundations that determine it. But in spite of the difference in foundations—temporal, economic, informational—the “knowledge” dimension becomes a fundamental one. Knowledge society is a basic definition of contemporary social space. This is stated in the Bucharest Declaration on Ethical Values and Principles of Higher Education in the European Region (2004), which defines the main tendencies of modern education. The Declaration outlined and demonstrated the revision of the topos of education and of its product, knowledge, in the contemporary world. Also, the Declaration specified the role of university as an educational institution. Popularization of higher education, educational and research integrity, widening of social functions of University are qualitative transformation content of contemporary academia.

Today, the University as an educational institution mainly lost its status of an élite organization, responsible for generations and the preservation of fundamental science and scholarship. It becomes a provider of mass education according to the needs of contemporary society. Masses of students study at it on different qualification levels, from first year freshman student to doctorate student. Large-scale involvement of people in university education is becoming normal and demands special ethical regulation. It is reflected in “The Bucharest Declaration” that proper direction of ethical values and principles have to be kept in new intellectual circumstances. In the preamble of the Declaration it is stated: “It is very important that consideration of these ethical and moral responsibilities, more crucial in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than ever before, should take place with a full understanding of the impact of this radical and rapid enlargement of the university

mission within the knowledge society.”<sup>1</sup> Ethical regulation of these processes, ethical support of the balance between their quality and popularity are important tasks for contemporary ethics.

In the Declaration, for the first time in European intellectual space, the integrity of education and scientific research is established on the normative level. Values and principles of education are represented in their integrity under the title of “academia.” It gives the possibility to consider the University as a “knowledge” institution, called upon to provide the development of knowledge. Today the University applies knowledge that is achieved in the process of solving problems that challenge contemporary society. It creates technologies that serve to strengthen human capacities; spreads the scientific influence in all spheres of human activity (industry and agriculture, healthcare, education and communication, administration and security, and so on).<sup>2</sup>

Up-to-date research ethics and academic ethics were disciplinarily differentiated. Research ethics was regarded as ethical support for scientific investigations. Academic ethics was mainly occupied with the problems of interaction of participants of the educational process. A Russian researcher A. Skvortsov observes such disciplinary division: “It can be said that the first trend [research ethics—M.R.] directs regulation of mature scientist activities, whose duty is to carry out research in accordance with the highest values of scientific exploration. The second trend [academic ethics—M.R.] exists for entry-level scientists, who are only at the beginning of their way to acquire these values, and for their tutors.”<sup>3</sup> Talking about the fallaciousness of further strict differentiation of research ethics and academic ethics, Skvortsov, in concordance with the spirit of the Bucharest Declaration, notes that the academic community cannot be limited to the space of educational institutions. Contemporary academia involves not only the University, but also science, all public spheres of education, popular science, electronic space, connected with research activity and ways of its translation and presentation.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the mission of the University (and academia as a whole) is being substantially transformed. And the Declaration registers the contents of this transformation: “[Universities] have key intellectual and cultural responsibilities that are more, not less, important in a knowledge-based society.”<sup>5</sup> These responsibilities are based on the ethos of academia, its spirit, values, and principles. Thus, value-laden academia influences inevitably “society-at-large.” The Declaration emphasizes that universities

1 The Bucharest Declaration on Ethical Values and Principles of Higher Education in the Europe Region [interactive]. [accessed 23-12-2011]. <[http://www.cepes.ro/September/declaration\\_print.htm](http://www.cepes.ro/September/declaration_print.htm)>.

2 Apressyan, R. G.; Kubar, O. I.; Yudin, B. G. *Ethical Principles of Science Activity: Analytical Review and Draft Declaration for CIS countries*. SPb.: Pasteur Institute, 2011, p. 27.

3 Skvorcov, A. A. Ehticheskoe regulirovanie v akademicheskoy srede: razlichnye modeli postroenija. *Ehticheskoe regulirovanie v akademicheskoy srede: Materialy mezhdunarodnoj nauchno-prakticheskoy konferencii* [Ethical Regulation in the Academic Sphere: Different Constructing Models. Ethical Regulation in Academic Sphere: Material of International Scientific-practical Conference]. Moskva: MAKS Press, 2009, p. 63.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Supra* note 1.

“should accept explicit responsibility and take action for promoting the highest possible ethical standards.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time it should be noted that the set of values to which the Declaration appeals is really rather traditional and consists of academic integrity in teaching and learning and combines them with research values. Integral values of academia, as defined by the Declaration, are the following: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and accountability.

One more transformation area in contemporary academia is connected to the extension of governing and administrative activities at contemporary academia that correspondingly result in gaining significance of the administration in the University’s functioning. The Declaration underlines that increasing the size and complexity of institutions calls for efficient and effective operation of governing bodies and management. In such prospects one of the main demands for university administrators and managers becomes ethical competence. “Presidents, rectors, vice-chancellors and other institutional leaders should be held accountable—not only for their successful academic development, but also for providing ethical leadership.”<sup>7</sup> With that end in view, the Declaration proposes to take into account the regulatory potential of “ethical audit” as a part of institutional activity.

It seems that the massovization of the higher education, the call for integrity of education and research, increase of administrative and managerial roles at the University are main transformation areas in contemporary academia. They are mentioned in the Bucharest Declaration and in respect to them the Declaration proposes to use the procedure of ethical monitoring and audit.

## 2. Basics of Ethical Regulation

Ethical audit is a rather new phenomenon in contemporary practices of academia. That is why more attention should be paid to general principles of ethical regulation of academia, where ethical audit is the constituent part. The set of ethical documents, practices of control over activities in accordance with these documents, and instruments for procedures of control constitute general ethical regulation of the activities in academia.

Among the ethical documents which regulate the activities of academia, the Declaration is undoubtedly the main roadmap for ethical regulation. The Declaration, as a normative document, is of recommendatory (though insistent) character. “The declaration may only recommend and nothing else.”<sup>8</sup> The declaration, in its obligations, is less strict than any code or agreement. But, as experts mention, there are examples of declarations which overcome proper recommendatory character and achieve pathos of obligatory guidelines. First of all such tendency in obligatory force of declarations is noticed in vulnerable fields of human practice, such as in medicine, human rights.

6 *Supra* note 1.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Apressyan, R. G.; Kubar, O. I.; Yudin, B. G., *supra* note 2, p. 17.

Undoubtedly, academia is among them. Academia is a socially sensitive and publically vulnerable space, where ethical regulation is more than necessary. Thus, the Declaration as a normative document obtains additional arguments to be more obligatory than recommendatory. Such quality of the Bucharest Declaration is exposed in the following statement: “It is not enough to espouse high ethical standards at a rhetorical level. It is crucial that such standards are respected, and put into effect, in every aspect of the work of institutions—not only through their teaching and research programs, but also in terms of their internal governance and management and engagement with external stakeholders.”<sup>9</sup>

It is important to take into consideration the stages of concretization of general principles of declarations and their consecutive implementation to the fabric of reality. Russian researcher A. Sychev describes the process of concretization of the principles in these words: “At first, governments modify their policies in accordance with international normative documents and guidance of international general public. Then, already in concordance with governmental policies, activities of organizations and groups are transformed, and their moral codes and regulations are corrected. Finally, when new ideas are rooted at organizational level, they start to exert influence on convictions and actions of concrete people.”<sup>10</sup> Though these processes are observed on the example of environmental ethics, they are homologous to the processes in the field of academic ethics.

Job descriptions, determining powers and duties of public officers, made with due regard for the letter and the spirit of the Bucharest Declaration, can be placed into a row of normative ethical documents regulating academic activities.

In light of the elements of ethical regulation mentioned above, ethical audit can be regarded as a specific procedure of activity assessment within academia. The algorithm of this procedure, as well as algorithms of other elements of ethical regulation is designed in a rather free format. The main purpose of this audit is to assess actions of public officers in accordance with accepted normative documents.

At the same time it is necessary to underline that the call for ethical rule-making in academia (as well as in other spheres of social life, which demand regulation of activities of their actors) means that creation of normative documents and compliance with them in practical life should be combined with detection and identification of ethically questionable vulnerable practices. Discussion and subsequent implementation of consensus achieved in new or improved regulations is a perpetual process. And this, in its turn, makes it possible to affirm that actualization of issues which were previously not regarded as problematic, it testifies the rise of the level of ethical culture of society.

Leading experts-ethicists in the post-Soviet space were invited by the Permanent Commission of Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Science and Education to develop a normative document

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9 *Supra* note 1.

10 Sychev, A. A. *Ehkologicheskaja ehtika kak sfera prakticheskikh dejstvij. Ehtika i ehkologija* [Ecological Ethics as a field of Practical Acts. Ethics and Ecology]. Apresjan, R. G. (otv. red.). Velikij Novgorod: NovGU imeni Jaroslava Mudrogo, 2010, p. 92.

on the ethical principles of research activity for CIS members. They had to take into account the social and cultural context in their rule-making document. The first notice that experts mentioned in their resulting document was some kind of a fashion on codification of public activities. “Codification of special types of activity remains but a fashionable idea, a mark of ‘civility’ or an expression of receptivity to what political authorities have said or recommended, the term ‘code of ethics’ may have a formal and superficial interpretation.”<sup>11</sup> It is more and more obvious that practical realization of normative documents depends on the level of ethical consciousness of people. It is important for experts to emphasize that such activity “requires a real organizational background to monitor the implementation of norms and principles started in the ethical document.”<sup>12</sup> Ethical infrastructure—i.e. authorized ethicists, ethical committees, ethical commissions, the institute of public hearings—will be able to function in a real way only in the space of “a high social and normative culture and public responsiveness.”<sup>13</sup> But the focus of domestic academia on European quality standards, unfortunately, does not presuppose complete acceptance of normative ethical documents to regulate the activity of professionals in the academic community. As in the other spheres of social life, the declaration of “European values” does not necessarily mean their conceptual comprehension and reforming of post-Soviet academia with due regard for effective and (which is of no small importance) admissible tools and procedures, created and adopted in European practice.

### 3. Administrators and Researchers: Do Limits of Competence Exist?

The Bucharest Declaration does not take into proper consideration a number of issues of contemporary academic activities. After acceptance of the Declaration, important activities for academic ethics professionals consist in interpretation of ambiguous practices, correction and adjustment of normative content of the regulations.

One of the problems in the functioning of academia is demarcation between scientific and pedagogical functions of a professional (a professor) and administrative functions of a manager of university and research institutions. Ethical problematization of the fusion of administrative and research functions arises in connection with principles of professional integrity and fairness in academic activity, defined in the Declaration. So, the question of the separation of academic and administrative positions is a second-order problem. The academic community now just approaches the solution of this problem, while it successfully solves first-order problems, represented in the Declaration as principles. First steps in the solution of the problem of separation of academic and administrative functions, which are outlined by specialists in ethics, can be regarded

11 Apressyan, R. G.; Kubar, O. I.; Yudin, B. G., *supra* note 2, p. 15–16.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

13 *Ibid.*

as an answer to the request of the academic community to regulate this segment of activities in academia.

For post-Soviet academia this problem is only in the process of recognition as an ethical agenda, because there are still no solutions to many serious first-order problems connected, for example, with realization of principles of professional integrity and fairness. But the problematization of the fusion of the functions of the scientist and administrator in our socio-cultural context is not premature, as the practice of this fusion is so widespread that it is common place in the academic community. Meanwhile, distinct understanding of cause-and-effect relations in crisis phenomena in academia and practice of this misconduct is absent in society as well as in professional academic community. Moreover, the way this question is put is not welcomed and suppressed there. Sometimes it is mentioned by academics in private talks, but not in public discussions. It is mainly connected to the fact that the objects of criticism of such academic misconduct are usually the scientists who *de facto* represent contemporary post-Soviet academia.

Many problems of academic activities in post-Soviet educational and research institutions are connected with the synchronism of scientific and administrative careers of their leading actors of academia. Frequently an employee can be granted an administrative position (of a dean, a rector, a vice-rector etc.) only if he/she has certain achievements in research. In such situations there are two strategies for an employee to act.

In the first variant, a person, a scientist/an “academic intellectual” receives the administrative position as an award for his/her scientific achievements. In this case the research activities are usually minimized as bureaucratic work does not leave enough time for creative work and laborious tasks. Of course, there are exceptions. But only exceptionally talented and disciplined scientists-administrators can keep the high level of competence in both spheres of their activities. More common is the situation when talented researchers who were appointed to the administrative position (it is possible that they did not long for it but did not refuse it anyways) do not have the necessary skills of administrative management and, as a result, were not able to cope with the work. Reduction of work efficiency is the least damage caused by such administrators. There are situations when academic departments or laboratories, led by such managers, are liquidated as ineffective.

In the second variant, an applicant for an administrative position tries hastily to make semblance of scientific research, and collects the complete set of degrees and academic titles, needed for appointment to the desired position. It is the case when the scientific career is regarded as means for administrative promotion. This variant can be a serious danger for scientific research and academia in general. Simulation of scientific research is “supported” by subsequent maintenance of the image of scientist. For instance, the participation of such pseudo-scientists in the research projects can come to nothing more than to including their name into the list of researchers. Sometimes the name of such an administrator in the research project authors’ list guarantees financial support to the project. Also, he/she can force productive researches to write in co-authorship, or



exaggerate the scale of research activity by means of replication of identical scientific works and creation of fabricated scientific schools and followers etc. The practice of false co-authorship is more widespread in post-Soviet areas than in the world in general. “The problem of false co-authorship from which, first and foremost, young scientists suffer, is not discussed at all or even hushed up (all the more so because the information comes from young scientists, while those guilty of false co-authorship are elder fellow holding high administrative positions at universities or research institutions).”<sup>14</sup> Such practice is authorized by the fact of its general existence: that is why the academic community is often taken as normal and is rarely regarded as a subject of severe criticism.

It is important to understand that when the academic community turns a blind eye to the causes and ways of receiving academic degrees and ranks by enterprising administrators, it creates future serious problems for itself. An enterprising “man of science” will act in the firm belief that research work is easy and that it does not need laborious data processing. Such an administrator does not understand the real needs of the department he heads. That is why he/ she usually substitutes research activities for bureaucratic work, passing by really problematic questions or procrastinating their solving.

Traditional European academia procedures, such as ethical audit (monitoring) of academic activities, seems to be less effective than is necessary in post-Soviet countries. Such a situation was testified by a special study conducted to figure out the level and content of ethical regulation in post-soviet states. It was conducted by the Permanent Commission of Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the CIS on Science and Education. Experts, with whom distant consultations were conducted, were university professors and professional scientists, high level managers of higher educational institutions, and state functionaries supervising. Among the questions was one about the institutions, which should provide monitoring of practical efficacy of ethical regulation. Some experts were intended to delegate this function to ethics committees under national academies of sciences or at universities and research institutions. Others were ready to depute the right to monitoring to professional scientific associations. “At the same time, the experts mentioned that in existing conditions ethics committees have neither effective instruments to deal with unfair researchers, nor resources for monitoring.”<sup>15</sup> Some experts doubted the efficiency of monitoring by university administrations or by corresponding services at relevant universities and governmental agencies. “Experts expressed their concern regarding administrators’ and bureaucrats’ possible interest in falsification the data, and, perhaps, would use instruments for monitoring to solve non-scientific tasks.”<sup>16</sup>

Today in Western universities there is a tendency to separate research and administrative positions. This practice is not occurring everywhere, but it is becoming more and more popular each year as it favours the creation of more transparent relations

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14 Apressyan, R. G.; Kubar, O. I.; Yudin, B. G., *supra* note 2, p. 19.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 20.

16 *Ibid.*



in universities and allows a professional to concentrate on the sphere of his/her competence and devote oneself to the concerns that he/she understands better.

In fact, the competence of the administrator in solving managerial tasks is not stipulated by his/her achievements on the research field. Quite the contrary, managing a University or its subdivision demands special skills and knowledge that can be received at special departments (educational management). Of course, sometimes there is a problem of the quality of administrators, or more exactly of their ability to manage the research work adequately, as they are not specialists in science. To solve such problems, special courses for administrators can be organized.

Training of administrative staff is not intersected in education of “academic intellectuals” (teachers, scientists). A person who chooses the career of researcher does not do research to receive an administrative position. At the same time, an “academic professional” of course does not have to think about his/her work as a lofty mission of service to Science. But in the process of training it is necessary to create the preconditions for a responsible attitude on the future profession of young intellectuals and/or pedagogical activities. Communication with elder colleagues involved in research, not administrative activities, accustoms students to the scientific ethos. This practice is supported by different job descriptions, administrative documents and rules, codified regulations in normative documents of the University and, more broadly, of the profession. This machinery helps to create ethical motivation in professional activities.

## Conclusions

So, learning of the ambiguous practices of contemporary academia, reasoning concerning them in accordance with existing standards and their development in ethical discourse are the agenda for ethicists. Ethical regulation of academia can be improved in the process of correction and specification of normative contents of documents. Given examples are of academic misconduct, fusion of academic and administrative activities and provocation to improve academia.

Separation of research and administrative activities can give good prospects for transparent careers in the chosen field. It seems that implementation of this model in post-Soviet higher education and research institutions will help raise the level of the professionalism of administrators and will eliminate the practice of double standards in research projects.

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## APIE KAI KURIUOS ETINIUS ŠIUOLAIKINĖS AKADEMINĖS BENDRUOMENĖS IŠŠŪKIUŠ

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**Santrauka.** Šio straipsnio tikslas yra analizuoti etinės reguliacijos klausimus šiuolaikinėje akademinėje bendruomenėje. Siekiant šio tikslo išskirti trys uždaviniai: 1) nustatyti šiuolaikinės aukštojo mokslo transformacijos problemas ir jų etinį kontekstą, remiantis Bukarešto deklaracija; 2) apibrėžti etinės reguliacijos formavimo procesą šiuolaikinėje akademinėje bendruomenėje; 3) pateikti akademinės pražangos pavyzdį ir pasiūlyti jos įveikimo būdą naudojantis etiniais įrankiais.

Dviprasmiškų šiuolaikinės akademinės bendruomenės praktikų svarstymas vertinant jas pagal egzistuojančius standartus ir standartų plėtojimas etiniame diskurse yra etikos specialistų tyrimo objektas. Etinė akademinės bendruomenės reguliacija gali būti tobulinama koreguojant ir tikslinant normatyvinį dokumentų turinį. Straipsnyje pateikti akademinė pražangų, akademinės ir administracinės veiklų suliejimo pavyzdžiai įrodo būtinybę tobulinti akademinę bendruomenę.

Mokslinių tyrimų ir administracinės veiklos atskyrimas gali sukurti geras skaidrios karjeros konkrečioje srityje perspektyvas. Atrodo, kad šio modelio diegimas posovietinės erdvės aukštojo mokslo ir mokslinių tyrimų institucijoje padės pasiekti aukštesnio administracijos darbuotojų profesionalizmo ir pašalins dvigubų standartų praktiką mokslinių tyrimų projektuose.

Administracinio personalo mokymai neturėtų kirstis su „akademinė intelektualų“ (dėstytojų, mokslininkų) švietimu. Asmuo, pasirinkęs mokslininko karjerą, neturėtų vykdyti mokslinio tyrimo tam, kad užimtų administracines pareigas. Mokymo procese būtina sukurti atsakingo požiūrio į būsimą jauno intelektualo profesiją ir / ar pedagoginę veiklą prielaidas. Ne administracinė veikla, o bendravimas su vyresniais kolegomis, dalyvaujančiais moksliniame tyrime, pratina studentus prie mokslinio etoso. Tokia praktika turi būti paremta įvairiais

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*pareigų aprašymais, administraciniais dokumentais, kodifikuotomis normatyvinių universiteto ir, platesne prasme, profesijos dokumentų taisyklėmis. Tokia sistema padėtų sukurti etinę profesinės veiklos motyvaciją.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *etinis reguliavimas, Bukarešto deklaracija, etinis auditas, akademinės pražangos, pseudoautorystė.*

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