

# Problems of academic dishonesty in higher education: ways of its preventing and eliminating

## El problema de la deshonestidad académica en la educación superior: medidas de prevención y eliminación

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### Abstract

The article focuses on the issues of academic integrity which are of current concern at modern universities. The most characteristic and relevant causes of academic dishonesty have been identified. Special attention is paid to plagiarism—the phenomenon typical to all academic strata. There have been defined the ways of preventing manifestations of academic dishonesty modern university.

**Key words:** academic integrity, academic dishonesty, university code of honour, intellectual property, modern university

### Resumen

Este artículo analiza el tema de la integridad académica que despierta interés en las universidades modernas. Se han indentificado las razones principales de la deshonestidad académica. Se presta atención particular al plagio, el fenómeno típico de la comunidad académica. Se han definido las medidas de prevención de la deshonestidad académica en la universidad moderna.

**Palabras clave:** integridad académica, deshonestidad académica, código de honor de la universidad, propiedad intelectual, universidad moderna.

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## 1. Introduction

Modern university is a complex large-scale organization which functions as a center of intellectual enlightenment and as a commercial organization. The functional combination of the mentioned statuses leads to discovering a specific social problem. Firstly, a university must provide future competitive professionals with high quality knowledge, and therefore the mechanisms of academic requirements to students are becoming important. Secondly, as an entrepreneurial organization, a university is intended to provide educational services to their customers (students). In this aspect, its priority should be flexibility in responding to modern students' special needs such as early employment, academic mobility, opportunity to study simultaneously on two programs. The above mentioned students' needs require of the university certain specific organizational measures to be taken mainly to ensure the choice of specific elective courses, distance learning opportunities, possibility of correction of students' individual plans and a mode of study, etc. Consequently, the policy of a modern university should be determined by the balance of requirements to the quality of education and liberalization of approaches to the organization of academic process.

It is clear that in the conditions of diversified models of the organization of the university educational process, the problem of ensuring the quality of student reporting products (tests, course papers, diploma papers) becomes relevant, which not always meet the requirements of academic ethics, culture and integrity.

**Aims.** The aim of the article is to identify the main aspects of ensuring academic integrity in university educational and scientific environment. The main aim of this article is specified in the following tasks: to analyze the representation of the problem of academic integrity in international organizations and projects; to study empirically the involvement of subjects of pedagogical interaction in specific manifestations of academic dishonesty; to analyze the causes of negative phenomena mentioned above; to define the ways of preventing findings of academic dishonesty at modern university.

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## 2. Methods of the study

To cope with the aims of the study the following theoretical methods were used: analysis and synthesis (contemplation of modern research literature, examination of the products of cinema sector, devoted to the problem under investigation, revision of the materials of international projects conformable to the study); empirical methods (inquiry and polling of respondents on their own experience of being involved in situations of academic integrity within the frames of their research work). Total number of respondents – 300 people. They are students and teachers of two universities: G.S.Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University after and O.M.Beketov Kharkiv National University of Municipal Economy. The respondents were divided into three

groups: a) third year students, b) candidates for master's degree, c) post-graduate students and teachers with scientific degrees. The analysis of the ways of preventing academic integrity was performed as a part of education activities while teaching two disciplines: "Ukrainian Language for Business Purposes" (for bachelor's degree seekers) and "Modern Methods of Teaching at Higher School" (for post-graduate students). To summarize and visualize the results of investigation statistical methods were used.

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### **3. Results and their Discussions**

#### **3.1. Representation of the problem of academic integrity in international projects**

The urgency of the problem of academic integrity for modern higher educational institutions around the world is confirmed by the constant attention of the world community to universally recognized global values of honesty, responsibility, trust, respect, justice. Thus, the activities of many international organizations are triggered by the apprehension of academic community for law enforcement in the aspect of intellectual property right, prevention and elimination of corruption processes in higher education. For one, the International Conference on Ethical and Moral Dimensions for Higher Education and Science in Europe (2004) adopted the Bucharest Declaration Concerning Ethical Values and Principles for Higher Education in the Europe Region. The main provisions outlined in this document highlighted the status of modern university as the center, which should contribute strongly to the promotion of the highest moral values and norms that are important for academic, cultural and political development of university staff and students, and also affect the moral face of the society as a whole (Bucharest Declaration, 2004). The actualization of the issue of integrity in academic environment found its continuation in the approval of the Guidelines for an Institutional Code of Ethics in Higher Education conjointly accepted by International Association of Universities and Magna Charta Universitatum (2012), creation of Pan-European Platform on Ethics Transparency and Integrity in Education (ETINED), documents of 7- th Prague Forum "Towards a Pan-European Platform on Ethics, Transparency and Integrity in Education" (2015).

The recognition by a significant part of academic community of the corruption elements existence in education (embezzlement and misuse of university resources, violation of the code of ethics of professional conduct of the teacher, facts of corruption in relations with students, plagiarism in students' qualification diploma papers and dissertations of applicants for scientific degrees, violation of requirements for the quality of education, revealed in conducting the training in terms of the so-called simplified programs, the implementation of which does not allow to prepare a well-trained specialist, etc.) allowed to formulate the main methods of combating these negative phenomena:

- inter-university exchange of information and progressive practices on the issues relating to integrity and transparency in education;
- promoting the formation of an adequate response to the detection of cases of corruption within the academic environment;
- formation of active social position of the subjects of academic communities regarding the creation of ways directed to the prevention of academic dishonesty.

As the issue of integrity in education and research requires solving the issue of preventing corruption and plagiarism, academic communities have initiated the implementation of social and research projects promoting academic integrity. Among them are: American-Ukrainian project “Culture of the Academic Integrity: a Role of Libraries” (2016); Polish-Ukrainian project “Innovative University and Leadership (2015); American-Ukrainian program “Academic Honesty as the Basis of Sustainable Development of the University” (2016); sociological research “Academic Culture of Ukrainian Students: Main Factors of its Formation and Development (2015). Consequently, the significance of the problem of academic integrity for the scientific and educational environment and society as a whole is confirmed by the wide interest of public, academic and scientific organizations, presented through specific programs, projects, discussions.

### **3.2. The analysis of the causes of academic dishonesty**

Recently, the problem of academic integrity has been widely discussed in scientific and social discourse. Among the reasons of dishonesty in academic relations the researchers highlight the identification of social pseudo activity, when the cooperation of scientific and pedagogical workers with students is carried out by following the principle: ‘some pretend that they teach, others pretend that they are taught’ (Melnychenko, 2016). In our opinion, such pseudo activity has recently been demonstrated in the publication activity of young Ukrainian scholars. The reason is inadequate requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science for the number of published papers, which should reflect the results of scientific research. Professional journals registered by the Higher Certification Commission and the analysis of the number of Ukrainian journals, which are indexed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases (only 5), make it possible to conclude that if the journal is published twice a year and approximately thirty research papers can be published in one journal issue then a researcher can write and submit a high quality paper no more than once per two years, provided that there has been a timely consideration of their work by the editorial board. Consequently, we have a new problem the attachment of co-authors’ names to the name of the main researcher.

One of the most commonly recognized forms of academic dishonesty is plagiarism - "the act of taking the writings of another person and passing them off as one's own" (Encyclopedia Britannica). Plagiarism is based on the appropriation of authorship of a particular work or idea, an original method study, etc. It should be noted that the public attitude to art plagiarism is somewhat loyal. In particular, there are quite a lot of examples when certain creative ideas became the basis for creating works similar by content (e.g. borrowing the "Stairway to Heaven" song by Led Zeppelin as a melody variation of the Spirit, American band; the plotline of the comedy "Kommando", directed by Mark Leicester, USA, 1985, used by the authors of the film "Day D", directed by Mikhail Porechenkov, Katerina Pobedinskaya, Russia, 2008, and others). However, unlike the variations of works of art that can be considered as authors' interpretations, peculiarities of artistic vision of the problem, or perhaps as a social and publicistic controversy with the original source, academic plagiarism is a violation of the Copyright Act (in Ukrainian legislation it is The Law on Copyright and Related Rights).

General legislative norms of Ukraine in the field of copyright have also been reflected in the Law on Education, where the notion of "academic plagiarism" is defined as "promulgation (partial or complete) of scientific results obtained by other persons as the results of their own research and / or reproduction of published texts of other authors without an appropriate reference". The problem of academic plagiarism is both a source and a consequence of other social problems (corruption, violation of intellectual property rights). This problem is particularly significant in the aspect of the formation of a new psychological type, which is increasingly not only manifested in the academic environment, but also becomes driving force in personal degradation. The psychological characteristic of a plagiarist, fairly defined in the work of T. Parkhomenko (Parkhomenko., 2016), can be considered quite real. In particular, the author concludes that the plagiarist is an established phenomenon (a sort of man) in scientific environment, a person with clearly defined psychological, intellectual, moral and ethical characteristics. The first characteristic of a plagiarists is their limited intelligence, which does not allow them to perform successfully individual research activities in order to obtain a new title. At the same time, this characteristic is aggravated by vanity that pushes the plagiarists for active action: they are looking for a way to enter the reference group (researches), which they associate with prestige and elite status. The low moral qualities (dishonesty) of plagiarists cause cynicism in their relations with other researches: they steal deliberately concealing the consequences of intellectual theft. The most common technique used is falsification (falsification of original data, attribution of texts to the authors, which do not actually belong to them), which allows to confuse signs of idea and text theft (Parkhomenko, 2016).

The plagiarists who are in an administrative position can cause the greatest damage to academic environment. Their unconscious fear of being accused of intellectual theft or unprofessional performance can lead to the models of mobbing behavior – purposeful discrediting of researches, who constitute a potential threat to the authority of the plagiarist. The result of the above mentioned is the eliminating professionals in scientific

environment, levelling of the status of academic science in society, and in general, degradation of science and education.

One of the reasons for plagiarism vitality as a phenomenon in the academic environment is its close connection with corruption. It becomes a recognized fact that the disclosure of academic dishonesty is increasingly becoming a test for researcher's identification of justice personal courage. At the same time, fear of dismissal or abolition of privileges for those who are put in the condition of the necessity to falsify conclusions regarding the absence of plagiarism, together with the moral degradation of the system of the state control in the field of quality of education, become important factors in the prosperity of this disgraceful phenomenon in the field of national academic environment. It should be noted that tolerance to the phenomena of academic dishonesty engenders another social problem - the lack of progress in combating corruption in education leads to awareness of young generation of a model of cynical social value: "those who get more are those who know how to violate the rules" («Have your say!», 2015)

Thus, the problem of academic integrity becomes a precondition of the existence of science in general and the value of honest scientific research in education in particular. This fact leads to the necessity to analyze the importance of the problem under investigation for various categories of subjects in academic and educational environment.

### **3.3. Investigation of the involvement of subjects of pedagogical interaction in manifestation of academic dishonesty**

Within the research problem, there was conducted a survey, organized at G.S. Skovoroda Kharkiv National Pedagogical University and O.M. Beketov National University of Urban Economy in Kharkiv. There were involved 300 people in the survey, with the question for the respondents being differentiated according to their experience in research work: for third-year students (with the experience of writing a course paper), for master's degree students (with the experience in the defense of a thesis), for postgraduate students and PhD level teachers, and doctors of science. According to the results of the survey, it has been determined that the majority of students realize their own dishonesty because they systematically cheat at tests and exams (72%), buy research papers from other persons (34%), include false results of experiments in their work (diploma and course papers) (12%). In addition, there was found a tendency among the students to pass exams with the help of another person – "I took exam on behalf of another person (9%), "I used the service of a counterfeit " (24%).

In the responses of postgraduate students and young researches (up to 1 year after the defense of PhD dissertation), there was a tendency towards so called optimization of their own efforts while doing researches: 34% of the researchers of this category gave positive answers to questions about falsifying the results of their

work (giving false percentages in the results of surveys or experiment effectiveness); 68% of respondents confessed of making references to the sources that were not used in their works. Additionally, the results of the answers to the question concerning the process of reviewing research work were rather alarming: a sufficiently large number of respondents noted that they were involved in illegal acts with experts, in particular, gave them a reward, so that they would not read their work (57%).

Experienced scholars (Doctors of Philosophy, and Doctors of Science) addressed the issue of dishonesty in the academic environment from the point of view of co-authorship and scientific communication traditions. A large number of respondents (37%) indicated that they were involved in academic writing services, in particular as a doer (12%) and as a customer (25%). In addition, 10% of the respondents noted that they are occasionally involved in writing articles or performing other research texts for those who they depend on administratively. At the same time, 8% of the respondents explained that they agreed to include co-authors in their research work, which they actually wrote individually, and 2% indicated that they gave a positive review of poor quality work being under pressure of "ethical" rules of the professional society.

It should be noted that among this category of researches, the topic when another person takes an exam for somebody was also relevant. At the same time, many people think of this idea when taking a foreign language exam to B2 level. Such tendency of researches towards dishonesty is explained by unreasonably strict requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine regarding the applicants for academic titles of professor and associate professor. In this context, we would like to explain that the ability of a researcher to use the latest developments published in foreign languages is not taken into account, it is just about the exam on language proficiency at B2 level. Thus, one can consider this factor as contributing to the extension of academic dishonesty among a significant part of scientific community.

The results of the survey analysis made it possible to distinguish the reasons for academic dishonesty; the answers of specific groups of respondents to the given question we consider to be of special interest.

**Table 1**  
Results of the survey

Groups of respondents	Reasons of academic dishonesty		
	Lack of willingness to study scientific literature (it's a waste of time)	Lack of skills to create scientific texts ( need for teacher's support)	Willingness to be better than others (to receive a reward for quality work)
Students		+	
Master's degree students/ Postgraduate students	+	+	
PhD level researchers and Doctors of Science	+		+

Thus, on the basis of the data received one can conclude that academic dishonesty depends both on subjectively negative qualities of the individual (laziness, vanity), and the objective necessity of certain changes to be introduced into the training programs of specialists of different levels. Since the problem of academic dishonesty is stipulated by the inability of students and young researches to create academic texts, there is a need to identify ways and means of providing these categories of subjects of educational process with competencies in academic writing.

### 3.4. Identifying the ways of preventing manifestations of academic dishonesty in modern university

In the framework of the problem being studied, we consider it relevant to submit proposals for its solution at the level of implementation of modern universities curricula. Firstly, each training program contains requirements concerning the formation of students' professional language competence that is implemented while studying the course "Language for Business Purposes". Along with introducing types and forms of professional communication, we consider it useful to focus students' attention on the problem of intellectual property as it is, that affects the image of a modern specialist, his/her professional reputation. As a part of experiment there was prepared and held a lecture on the problem of academic integrity. Its results were discussed and the following proposals of students on the traditions of relations between teachers and students in the educational process were put forward:

- to guarantee confidentiality of students who provide information concerning cases of academic dishonesty;
- to provide not only punishment for cheating, but also zero tolerance for it;



- to increase student's motivation for studying, rather than to formally getting a diploma by creating conditions for independent thinking in fulfilling their tasks;
- to enlighten students on legal principles of academic integrity;
- adequacy in assessment of student's individual work (currently the achievements of students who follow the principles of academic integrity are being underestimated);
- the lack of teacher provocation of students cheating
- introducing relations between a professor and a student based on the practice of Western European universities ("guru - student") provided that the academic loading of both participants of academic process is decreased and the role of student counselling is increased;
- dissemination of preventive information among students about cases of academic dishonesty and forms of reaction to them;
- introducing the practice of European universities regarding the temporary deprivation of student's right to attend classes (if the student gets FX (unsatisfactorily) for his/her written work due to academic dishonesty);
- establishing a permanent university structure to deal with the cases of academic dishonesty;
- increasing options (number of variants) of tests to reduce students cheating as far as possible

Secondly, given the fact that the problem of academic integrity is especially relevant to young researchers who actively create and present parts of their own research in professional editions, there has been recognized the role of introducing basic guidelines of researcher's honor code. Moreover, since scientific plagiarism was defined as the most important problem for postgraduate students, the information on types of plagiarism, methods for its detection and prevention was given at practical classes within the PhD educational program. As a result, young researchers came to the conclusion that one should not avoid making references, since a research is considered to be a scientific work provided it contains the revision of other researchers' experience, their achievements, polemics on debating point and, as a consequence, personal conclusions about the analysis of scientific sources.

One of the ways of responding to academic dishonesty has become the development of the **Honor System** in a number of universities, which can be considered as moral guidance for strategic plans for their development. The most popular among the Ukrainian universities is the Honor Code system of the National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute", with its general principles of integrity:

- the principle of legality. The members of university community strictly adhere to the rules of law in their activities, and also encourage others to do the same.

- the principle of mutual trust. The atmosphere of trust encourages free exchange of ideas and information in university environment, promotes cooperation and free creating of new ideas, relieves the fear that the outcomes of their research activities can be stolen, their career can be ruined, and their reputation can be destroyed;
- the principle of honesty and integrity. In their educational and teaching activities, in researches and in practical work the representatives of university community must act honestly, be frank and in any case they must not consciously bring forward false statements.
- the principle of justice. In the relations among the members of the university community it is important to treat each other impartially, be open-minded, demonstrate correct and objective evaluation of the results of educational, research and work activities.
- the principle of responsibility. The students and university staff must take responsibility for the results of their activities, carry out their duties. Being responsible means resisting shameful acts, negative influence of others and being an example for others;
- the principle of mutual respect. Respect in the university environment must be mutual and be shown both to others and to themselves. It is necessary to respect and appreciate different and sometimes opposite thoughts and ideas.
- the principle of transparency. To prevent the abuse of functions by elected or appointed representatives of the university community, all the procedures that relate to educational, research, business and financial activities must be transparent and simple.

However, it should be noted that the fundamental provisions of the university honor code can become valuable criteria of integrity for teachers and students only if they are actively observed, that can be arranged as a constant reference to the principles contained in mentioned above documents, as well as to university self-government body reporting concerning the official reactions on the cases when behavior of particular students and teachers do not meet the requirements of these principles.

It should be emphasized that the data on the cases of academic dishonesty among Ukrainian students correlate with the study of American students' attitude to plagiarism. In particular, the study conducted by B. Naghdipour, O.L. Emeagwali (Naghdipour, Emeagwali 2013), demonstrates analytical data from the survey of 500 US lecturers and students that demonstrates the tendency to display dishonesty in academic activity. When asked, American students often used less radical definitions such as 'acting together, doing group work' to denote academic fraud. According to American students the reasons that justify the acts of dishonesty in academic activity are: difficult learning material and the need to maintain good relationships with classmates. Considering the fact that grade

may become more important for student than gaining knowledge, the researchers are introducing a new concept into scientific discourse – it is "grade inflation". As a consequence the phenomenon of Diploma (certificates) trading has become a smart problem for universities (Naghdipour, Emeagwali, 2013).

It should be noted that the problem of plagiarism in academic texts is controversial. Many of the researchers note that there are types of quotes that cannot be considered as plagiarism, since it is self-citation. Such researchers as A. Hodges, T. Bickham, E. Schmidt, L. Seawright point out that the most widespread cases of plagiarism among professors is self-plagiarism (Hodges et al., 2017) The ambiguous attitude to self-plagiarism led to putting this point for wider discussion. In particular, postgraduate students indicated that among the forms of self-plagiarism in international scientific community little attention is paid to the issue of translational self-plagiarism. This type of plagiarism is used by post-graduate students in cases of limited time prior to the defense of dissertation or to satisfy the mandatory requirement of publishing research paper in foreign journals. Under such conditions one faces a temptation to translate the already prepared (already published in another journal) text, changing its name and keywords. It should be noted that anti-plagiarism programs are not so perfect yet to recognize translation of the research paper already existing in the database. When keeping the rules of academic integrity, researches should pay attention to the fact that when it is necessary to emphasize the logical connection of the text of a new research paper with the own one that has been already published it should be done by references to it, but not coping the parts and installing them into a new text. In addition, the postgraduates' motivation for honesty in self-quoting could be increased by means of information that an author of a cited text benefits from every single citation, as it increases their H-index, and thus self-citation can even become useful for one's own research rating.

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## 4. Conclusions

1. The significance of the problem of academic integrity for the scientific and educational environment and society as a whole is confirmed by the wide interest of the public, and academic and scientific organizations, reflected in given programs, projects, discussions.
2. The empirical study of the causes of academic dishonesty allowed to identify the roots of this phenomenon which are in discrepancy between the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Science to applicants for scientific degrees (titles) and publication opportunities of Ukrainian scientific journals included in the Scopus and Web of Science databases; passive and tolerant attitude of academic community to the cases of plagiarism in scientific research, practical absence of punishment of researchers for plagiarism; practice of non-interference

in the administrative growth of plagiarists and the displacement by them of honest researches from the higher education environment.

3. Investigation on the involvement of subjects of pedagogical interaction in specific findings of academic dishonesty revealed a number of the most significant reasons, which turned to be different for different strata of researchers: ) for master's degree students, postgraduates and young researches - it is the lack of desire to work on research literature; for students and master's degree students the reason is in the lack of ability to create academic texts (the need to be accompanied by a teacher), besides, young researches often express the desire to be better than others (to receive remuneration for quality work).

4. There have been identified the ways to prevent manifestations of academic dishonesty at modern university, among them are: creating and providing conditions ensuring compliance with the principles of the university honor code by all the participants of academic process; adequate reaction of university administration to students' proposals to promote academic integrity in higher education; creating conditions for informing postgraduate students and young researches on the types of plagiarism and models of avoiding dishonest citation in academic texts.

The prospects for further research within the specified topic can be seen in the analysis of effectiveness of the Academic Writing course organized for different categories of educational process: master's degree students, young researchers of a PhD level, foreign postgraduate students.

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