

The Bucharest Declaration concerning Ethical Values and Principles for Higher Education in the Europe Region

Bucharest, Romania, 2-5 September 2004

I. Preamble

Universities and other higher education institutions now play a central role in the development of society, the economy and culture, at every level – global, regional, national and local. In the emerging knowledge society, universities are no longer simply responsible for the generation and conservation of basic science and scholarship; they are also engaged in the translation, transmission and application of new knowledge. At the same time, universities are no longer simply responsible for the formation of future professional, technical and social elites; they now educate mass student populations. Universities have also become complex and large-scale organizations that can no longer be governed and managed solely in accordance with traditional academic and collegial norms.

These profound changes in the mission and structure of higher education and research have raised questions about the traditional 'idea of a university' and have fueled an appetite for furthering their reform. The number and types of university have expanded at an unprecedented rate – and even the most traditional universities have taken on novel and more extensive responsibilities. The number of their stakeholders has also proliferated – and universities now find themselves at the center of increasingly dense networks of 'knowledge institutions'. As a result, a new balance may have to be struck between the university as a public-service institution and as an entrepreneurial organization. However, the growing emphasis placed on the 'market' is only one aspect of this transformation; equally important are the increasingly active 'reform' agendas being pursued in many European nations. The Bologna Process is leading to far-reaching changes in the structure (and, in the longer term, the culture) of European higher education.

All these changes have important implications for a discussion of the ethical and moral dimensions of higher education – which have often been defined and refined in terms of a traditional idea of the university that has now been superseded, or qualified, by its acquisition of new roles and responsibilities. It is very important that consideration of these ethical and moral responsibilities, more crucial in the Twenty-First Century than ever before, should take place with a full understanding of the impact of this radical and rapid enlargement of the university's mission within the knowledge society. For that reason, it is both timely and relevant to the academic world that UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES) convened the International Conference on Ethical and Moral Dimensions for Higher Education and Science in Europe, organized under the high patronage of Mr. Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, and Mr. Ion Iliescu, President of Romania, together with the European Academy of Arts, Sciences and Humanities – Academia Europensis and in collaboration with the United Nations University (UNU) and the Division of Basic and Engineering Sciences of UNESCO, Bucharest, 2–5 September 2004. The participants in the Conference affirm that:

- However important universities have become for the generation of economic wealth, they cannot be regarded simply as 'factories' of science and technology, and of technical experts, within a global knowledge economy. They have key intellectual and cultural responsibilities that are more, not less, important in a knowledge-based society.

- Accordingly, universities cannot be regarded as value-free institutions. The values and ethical standards they espouse will not only have a crucial influence over the academic, cultural and political development of their academics, students and staff, but also help to shape the moral contours of society-at-large. As such, they should accept explicit responsibility and take action for promoting the highest possible ethical standards.
- 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 programmes, but also in terms of their internal governance and management and engagement with external stakeholders.
- In order to achieve the ethical vocation of higher education institutions in line with the highly praised values of academic ethos, the participants in the International Conference call upon policy-makers, academics, researchers, managers and students to strive for the application in their academic pursuits of the following:

II. Values and Principles:

1. Academic Ethos, Culture, and Community

1.1. The academic culture of any higher education institution should promote actively and diligently, through mission statements, institutional charters and codes of academic conduct, those values, norms, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the whole institutional community towards the assertion of an ethos that is based on the principles of respect for the dignity and for the physical and psychic integrity of human beings, lifelong learning, knowledge advancement and quality improvement, inclusive education, participatory democracy, active citizenship and non-discrimination.

1.2. The autonomy of higher education institutions, although essential for effectively discharging their historical responsibilities and meeting the challenges of the modern world, should not be used as an excuse for them to evade their responsibility to wider society, namely, to act consistently for the promotion of the public good.

1.3. It is difficult to sustain high academic and ethical standards in the absence of adequate public funding for higher education. Diminished public funding is likely to erode the idea of a higher education as a public good and may also make it more difficult for institutions to maintain broad access and high standards of conduct.

2. Academic Integrity in the Teaching and Learning Processes

2.1. The values and standards of academic integrity provide the foundation for knowledge development, quality education, and the training of students as responsible citizens and professionals. The academic community must be committed to the promotion of academic integrity and strive actively for its embodiment in the everyday institutional life of its members.

2.2. The key values of an academic community of integrity are honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility and accountability. These values are not only significant in themselves, but they are also crucial for the delivery of effective teaching and quality research.

2.3. The quest for honesty should start with oneself and be extended to all other members of the academic community, avoiding systematically any form of cheating, lying, fraud, theft, or other forms of dishonest conduct that negatively affect the quality status of academic degrees.

2.4. The trust that is mutually shared by all members of an academic community is the backbone of that climate of work and fosters the free exchange of ideas, creativity and individual development.

2.5. Ensuring fairness in teaching, student assessment, research, staff promotion and any activity related to the awarding of degrees should be based on legitimate, transparent, equitable, predictable, consistent, and objective criteria.

2.6. Free exchange of ideas and freedom of expression are based on mutual respect shared by all members of the academic community, regardless of their position in the hierarchy of learning and research. Without such exchange academic and scientific creativity is reduced.

2.7. Responsibility should be shared by all members of the academic community, thus allowing for the upholding of accountability.

3. Democratic and Ethical Governance and Management

3.1. A more efficient and effective operation of institutional governing bodies should be promoted to reflect both their increasing size and complexity and the wider range of roles and responsibilities. However, in relation to entrepreneurial and commercial activities, governing bodies should promote the best possible practice not only in the proper management of such ventures, but also in the upholding the rule of law and of core academic and ethical values. Academics, students, and staff members should make sure that the quest for commercial ventures and increased revenue does not impair the quality of learning and research outcomes, or the intellectual standards of their institutions.

3.2. Reforms in the governance and management of higher education institutions should strike an appropriate balance between the need to encourage effective leadership and management and the need to encourage participation by the members of the academic community, including students, teachers, researchers, and administrators, in decision-making.

3.3. Presidents, rectors, vice-chancellors, and other institutional leaders should be held accountable – not only for the effective management of their institutions and for their successful academic development, but also for providing ethical leadership.

3.4. The institutional decision-making processes should be implemented so as to assert the moral obligations and responsibility of the decision-makers to all stakeholders.

4. Research Based on Academic Integrity and Social Responsiveness

4.1. Intellectual freedom and social responsibility are the key values of scientific research that should be constantly respected and promoted. Instead of being in conflict, these two values reinforce each other within the more open learning and knowledge-generation systems characteristic of the Twenty-First Century society.

4.2. Individual researchers and groups are not only morally responsible for research processes – their choice of topics, methods of enquiry and the integrity of research – but also for research outputs. As such, they should adopt and rigorously respect codes of ethical standards that regulate scientific research.

4.3. Any code of conduct in research should include both ethical standards and enforcement procedures, thus avoiding practices of superficiality, vacuity, hypocrisy, corruption, or impunity.

4.4. Scientific communities should promote worldwide co-operation and build on intellectual and moral solidarity based on the values of a culture for peace.

4.5. Academic staff and researchers, individually and/or collegially, have the responsibility and the right (i) to express themselves freely on the scientific and ethical complexity of certain research projects and results, and (ii) as a last resort, to withdraw from those projects if their conscience so dictates.

III. Supporting the Implementation of Values and Ethical Principles

The implementation of the values and principles mentioned above requires suitable means to:

- ensure a balance in higher education between the public good and commercialization, while preserving the core values of the academic ethos;
- promote a system of governance of higher education institutions that allows for collegiate decision-making;
- ensure that each higher education and research institution functions according to policies and procedures of academic conduct that are consistently implemented and periodically updated;
- elaborate and enforce, at the institutional, national, and international level, codes of ethical standards that are both disciplinary and interdisciplinary in orientation;
- promote international co-operation focused on ethical standards of higher education and research in the Europe Region and in other regions of the world.

IV. UNESCO-CEPES Follow-up

UNESCO-CEPES is called to disseminate and implement – in collaboration with other relevant partners – the present Declaration. Follow-up activities should be focused on the identification of ‘good practice’ examples in the fields of concern, thus providing an informative basis for further debates on the values, principles, and ethical standards of higher education in the Europe Region and for the promotion of best institutional practices.

UNESCO–CEPES. 39 Stirbei Voda,

010102-Bucharest, Romania

Tel: 40-21-3159956

Fax: 40-21-3123567