ORIGINAL ARTICLE

CONTENTS ↗

Values of academic integrity in higher medical education

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim is to identify features of theoretical and empirical research of academic integrity as characteristics of the educational environment of medical higher education institution (hereinafter – HEI).

Materials and Methods: A complex of general scientific methods: logical-analytical, dialectical, theoretical-logical, comparative analysis, formalization and generalization, as well as quantitative sociological methods for collecting, processing and analyzing information. The object of the pilot empirical study were domestic medical students of full-time education at the Bogomolets NMU (N=472) and scientific and pedagogical staff who provide teaching of fundamental, specialized and socio-humanitarian disciplines at the university (N=153).

Results: The values of academic integrity are the moral guideline that reveals the latest ethical demands of society and regulates the educational and scientific activities of all participants in the educational process. Opinions on the primary responsibility for compliance with the rules of academic integrity of a student differ between the surveyed scientific and pedagogical staff and students (p=0.000): the vast majority of the surveyed scientific and pedagogical staff tend to evenly divide the responsibility between a teacher and a student, and the majority of students-respondents noted that the student bears the primary responsibility.

Conclusions: Commitment to the principles of integrity motivates both students and teaching staff to act in an academic manner. Therefore, the creation of a methodology for studying the phenomenon of academic integrity in medical higher education institution through the study of attitude of the subjects of educational process to basic values is promising.

KEY WORDS: Academic integrity, values, higher medical education, social research

INTRODUCTION

The current stage of development of Ukrainian society is characterized by existential changes and transformations in almost all spheres of its functioning. They did not bypass the system of higher medical education. On the one hand, this is due to bringing the legislative framework in line with European parameters, on the other – with the formation of a new educational worldview, a new conceptual model of the educational process. Therefore, the phenomenon of academic integrity is of particular importance, as a condition and determining factor not only for the provision of a wide range of quality educational services, but also for the development of scientific and research practices of our time.

Unfortunately, at the level of everyday consciousness, a narrow, simplified understanding of the meaning of the term "academic integrity" was formed. Usually it is associated with such phenomena as "the presence of plagiarism in scientific works", "data falsification", "usual cheating" or "passing off other people's thoughts as

their own", etc. For the most part, it is not so much about academic integrity, but about identifying the facts of its non-compliance, dismissive attitude to clearly defined norms and requirements, academic dishonesty in general. Of course, the identification of the essential terminological features of this phenomenon and the representation of its basic principles is extremely important and relevant. This will avoid in the future emasculation of the very content of academic integrity, substitution of fundamental concepts, misunderstanding of its basic principles and principles of functioning in the domestic educational and scientific space.

At the legislative level, the essence and substantive characteristics of academic integrity are clearly outlined in Article 42 of the Law of Ukraine "On Education" as of July 02, 2023. Here, academic integrity is understood as "a set of ethical principles and rules defined by the law, which should guide the participants in the educational process during learning, teaching and conducting scientific (creative) activities in order to ensure confidence in the results of learning and/or scientific (creative)

achievements" [1]. At the same time, professional ethics and deontology treat this concept certainly in a positive perspective, focusing on the basic principles of academic integrity, which Western science is inclined to call values.

It should be emphasized that the very principles of academic integrity were outlined by the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI) in 1992. In particular, the international academic community implies a commitment to six fundamental values (principles): *honesty, trust, justice, respect, responsibility, courage* that regulate activities and behavior both within the community and outside it, in everyday life [2].

AIM

The aim is to identify the features of theoretical and empirical research of academic integrity as a characteristic of the educational environment of medical HEI.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The choice and application of research methods are due to its interdisciplinary nature. The article implemented a systematic approach using a complex of general scientific methods: logical-analytical, dialectical, theoretical-logical, comparative analysis, formalization and generalization, as well as special sociological methods for collecting processing and analyzing information. The object of the pilot study were domestic medical students of full-time education at the Bogomolets NMU and scientific and pedagogical staff who provide teaching of fundamental, specialized and social and humanitarian disciplines at the University. As a result of applying on-line questionnaire in February 2023, 153 teaching staff and 472 students were surveyed. Information processing was carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package.

RESULTS

Real human relationships have always been the subject of ethical science, they were formed on the basis of morality, existed on fundamental moral principles. In our opinion, the values of integrity are the moral guideline that reveals the latest ethical demands of society and regulates the educational and scientific activities of all participants in the educational process. The origins of the modern understanding of the principles of academic integrity reach philosophical and ethical thoughts of the ancient world, especially Plato and Aristotle. These thinkers paid considerable attention to the comprehension, theoretical content and practical implementation

of ethical virtues that were considered the basis for the existence of not only an integral civil society, but also the basis for the functioning of educational institutions, the creation of a proper academic environment within them.

Plato connects the social good and personal happiness of man with the necessary presence of such moral virtues as prudence, restraint, courage, association and awareness of which leads in the hierarchy to the highest virtue – justice. As Pierre Hadot notes, "the highest form of mental activity is mastering oneself and fair actions implemented through the organization of the community or other institutions. Numerous historians saw in this mention of "institutions" a hint of Plato's founding the school" [3]. Plato's idea is to act; to act justly in public and personal life.

Instead, taking as a basis the Platonic list of virtues, Aristotle forms his own classification. He divides all virtues into ethical (virtues of will and character) and *dianoetic* (intellectual virtues). The first group includes: justice, dignity, sincerity, generosity, courage, moderation; the second – wisdom, knowledge, temperance. The thinker defines the essence of virtues through the concept of measure as a certain harmony between two opposites.

According to Aristotle, "reasonable life" is the greatest virtue of man, his happiness. Rational cognition, work on oneself, exercises in virtue and its practicing will help transforming the natural inclinations of man into conscious dianoetic virtues led by prudence. If a person is a slave to his own passions and does not have natural inclinations to virtues, in such a case, the educational work should be carried out by legislators and the community by adhering the requirements and laws. In Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle calls for legalizing the various aspects of integrity for the education of moral virtues and the provision of opportunities for virtuous life to citizens of cities poleis. The philosopher is sure that virtues are actualized and truly manifest themselves not so much in the being of a particular person as in the life of society, because person is a "political being".

We can say that now more than ever the views of the ancient thinker acquire special significance. Aristotelian virtues ontologically find their manifestation in social associations of people, including the academic community, in particular, they form a framework and support the functioning of a virtuous academic environment. It is appropriate that in modern academic communities, group values and social virtues have been integrated into a single whole – into a system of principles of academic integrity. Representatives of a particular social institution or organization, for example, scientific and pedagogical staff of higher education institutions, taking into account personal beliefs and ideals, usually

are united by an idea, have a common goal, "strive for the realization of some good that is recognized by all participants of the plan" [4]. Knowledge and practical implementation of the principles of academic integrity contributes to the realization of their goals or benefits, while non-compliance with the principles is harmful for the academic community, as ties in the community are destroyed, seeds of distrust are sown among the participants of the educational process, it is impossible to achieve the common good or benefits.

A prominent place in the system of principles of academic integrity belongs to the principle of justice. The problem of the axiology of justice and its role among other moral values is conceptually significant for the formation of a holistic strategy for the embodiment of integrity in the educational and scientific practice of our time. Justice is terminologically defined and is a definition of the highest value, perfect goal, social virtue, moral quality inherent in a person or group of persons, etc. Today, the phrase "social justice" is no longer a metaphor, but is used quite habitually both in scientific discourse and in everyday speech. According to Bernhardt Sutor, justice as a virtue implies the existence of a valid and effective legal order. It needs not a nominal, but a valid law, which also depends on the willpower of people in their attitude to justice. Justice promotes the unification of people, mutual understanding between them; recognizes the Other as a personality with his rights and interests on the principles of equality and human dignity [5].

Often justice appeals to the inner feelings of a person, this is what it is similar to *honesty*. The latter is interested in justice and always reacts negatively to numerous distorted manifestations of justice. Honesty also requires legalization, recourse to some written or unwritten code. It contains the idea of integrity, purity, fairness (honest name) and requires compliance with certain rules. In this case, honesty is correlated with the decency and personal dignity of a person. The most important thing in honesty is the absence of deception, lies and fraud.

Trust is at the same time an internal value that strengthens the moral guidelines of a person and an instrumental principle that has social significance and can benefit a person, a collective, and society as a whole. It greatly increases our ability to cooperate with others and to benefit from that cooperation, although of course we only benefit if the people we trust also cooperate with us (Gambetta 1988b; Hardin 2002; Dimock 2020) [6]. Trust improves relations in the academic community, makes them "easier", strengthens cooperation, which is important for outlining further educational, scientific perspectives. Trust is a sign of

respect, accordingly, distrust is a sign of disrespect. Both alternative judgments are meaningful as long as the trust is worthwhile and therefore justified. Otherwise, respect also becomes irrelevant, its internal potential is devalued. The importance of the principle of responsibility cannot be overestimated, it is considered a powerful motivator and driver of the actions of a person. Thanks to responsibility, a person outlines for himself the criteria by which he makes a moral choice: a clear understanding of good and evil; indifference in relation to others, to the fate of participants of the educational process, their professional successes, victories or failures. On the other hand, responsibility is able to act as a filter, through the prism of which one can observe the presence or absence of a stable system of moral beliefs in the performance of educational activities. Finally, the main beliefs of the representatives of the academic community are able to be broadcast and put into practice through courage. Being courageous means having the courage and inner need to act, in particular, under contradictory circumstances or adverse conditions, sometimes even contrary to authority. The main thing is the objectivity of beliefs, confidence in the correctness of one's own thoughts, ideas, initiatives, their bold advocacy.

When planning social research on academic integrity, a number of problems arise, some of which are related to the difficulty of defining the phenomenon of integrity in general and academic integrity in particular. In order to reveal the importance of higher education students' compliance with the basic values on which academic integrity is based, the respondents were asked to estimate how important it is for them personally to adhere to such values as respect, justice, responsibility, trust and honesty in the process of education (see Table 1). The question about the importance of compliance with such a value as courage was not asked of the students due to their disorientation regarding the meaning of this value, which was revealed during the approbation of a questionnaire.

It is worth noting that the declaration of the importance of compliance with certain values in the learning process does not mean their actual adherence, but rather provides information about the greater or lesser importance of certain values for the respondents – higher education students. Respondents noted the importance of personally comply with all basic values, but it is worth noting that personally adhere to such a value as respect in the learning process is important to the full extent for 82.0% of the interviewed students, and personally adhere to such a principle as honesty is fully important for 56.4%. However, the most common answer regarding the importance of compliance with all

Table 1. Answers to questions: "How important is it for you personally to comply with the following values in the educational process?", % (N=472)

Value	It is important to the full extent	It is rather important	In certain cases it is important, in certain cases it is not	It is rather not important	It is not important at all	Difficult to answer
Respect	82,0	12,3	4,0	0,4	0,6	0,6
Justice	79,2	15,7	3,6	0,0	1,1	0,4
Responsibility	77,5	17,2	3,8	0,4	0,8	0,2
Trust	60,6	26,1	8,5	2,1	1,3	1,5
Honesty	56,4	28,8	12,3	1,1	1,1	0,4

Table 2. Average evaluations of higher education students regarding the importance of compliance with the values of academic integrity at Bogomolets National Medical University

Value	Arithmetic mean	Mode	Median
Respect	4,75	5	5
Justice	4,72	5	5
Responsibility	4,70	5	5
Trust	4,44	5	5
Honesty	4,38	5	5

Table 3. Answers to questions: "Who, in your opinion, is primarily responsible for complying the rules of academic integrity of a higher education medical student?", %

	Scientific and pedagogical staff (N=153)	Students (N=472)
Primarily, the teacher	9,2	1,9
Primarily, the student	18,7	59,7
Teacher and student equally	71,9	35,8
Difficult to answer/refusal to answer	0,0	2,1
Another answer	0,7	0,4

values is the answer "it is important to the full extent". Average ratings of the importance of personally adhering to academic integrity in the learning process were calculated using the SPSS software under the condition that when responding to the importance of adhering to a certain value, 5 points were allocated for the answer "It is important to the full extent", 4 points – for "It is rather important", 3 points – for "In certain cases it is important, in certain cases it is not", 2 points – for "It is rather not important", 1 point – for "It is not important at all". The answer "Difficult to answer" was not taken into account when calculating average values (see Table 2).

A comparative analysis of ideas about the primary responsibility for complying with the rules of academic integrity of two groups of respondents – scientific and pedagogical staff and higher education students – proved to be quite fruitful (see Table 3).

Opinions regarding the primary responsibility for adhering the rules of academic integrity of a higher education students differ among the surveyed scientific and pedagogical staff and students (p=0,000). The vast majority of the surveyed scientific and pedagogical staff

(71.9%) noted that a teacher and a student are equally responsible, while the majority of higher education students who took part in the study noted that a student is primarily responsible (59.7%).

DISCUSSION

It is worth noting that the empirical study of academic integrity through the attitude of subjects of the educational process to basic values and principles has a number of significant features.

Direct questions about the importance of certain values for the respondent personally can be classified as "sensitive" questions, to which the number of "expected" answers increases. In addition, it is worth taking into account the situation of a full-scale invasion, because "...external aggression activates the option of dual perception by people of events and processes: us – them, white – black, good – evil, true – wrong, objective – distorted, fair – lawless" [7].

Therefore, when studying the importance of compliance with certain values, it is appropriate to ask a

question that involves ranking the values of academic integrity by the respondents themselves in relation to the importance of their personal adherence in the learning process. A question that contains a proposal to assess how much the respondent's classmates adhere to basic values in the learning process can also be quite informative.

In addition, in our opinion, the results of questionnaires aimed at studying the issue of academic integrity in a specific higher education institution should be supplemented with results obtained using other methods. The results of focus group discussions on current issues of academic integrity in a particular higher education institution can be quite fruitful.

After the adoption of the new law of Ukraine on academic integrity, the draft of which has already been registered, it seems appropriate to create a methodology for a complex sociological study based on the provisions of the law. Important, in our opinion, when conducting the field stage of this kind of research, is the use of offline questionnaires to collect information, in order to increase respondents' confidence in confidentiality.

CONCLUSIONS

In fact, academic integrity is a multi-level system of academic culture, freedom and responsibility of participants in the educational process, the basis of which is moral rules, value orientations and defined norms of the law. Clearly prescribed ethical norms have a direct proportional effect on the efficiency and quality of the performance of professional duties. The performance of professional activities regulated by ethical standards contributes to the solidarity of members of the academic community, regardless of their social status or academic title.

On the basis of the interpretation of the results of the questionnaire of higher education students regarding the assessment of the importance of compliance with certain values in the learning process, it is possible to pay attention to the consideration of those issues related to values that turned out to be less important for the respondents in the framework of teaching the discipline "Anti-corruption and Integrity", which since 2023/2024 academic year is available for students of the Bogomolets National Medical University as a result of joining the pilot project "Transparent Universities" of the Integrity Office of National Agency on Corruption Prevention.

In the context of studying issues of academic integrity, it is worth paying attention to the readiness of higher education students to recognize the primary responsibility for complying with the rules of academic integrity of the student himself, revealed as a result of the pilot study. The democratization of the education system and the personal virtues of the modern generation of students contribute to the involvement of higher education students as full-fledged subjects of the formation of a virtuous academic environment.

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