

## UNIVERSITY ETIQUETTE AS MECHANISM OF ENHANCING THE ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

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### **Abstract**

*In the current context of higher education, at both national and international level, ethics and academic integrity have become central concerns, and higher education institutions are increasingly seeking effective mechanisms to promote responsible behaviour. In this context, the present article examines the role of university etiquette – understood as the ensemble of norms of civil and ethical conduct within the academic environment – as a mechanism for enhancing the academic responsibility. Drawing on the specialised literature and the current regulatory framework, it analyses the concepts of university etiquette and academic responsibility and highlights the intrinsic relationship between them. It is argued that mutual respect, intellectual honesty, fairness and the assumption of responsibility for one’s own actions are both fundamental ethical principles and concrete expressions of university etiquette, contributing to the prevention of integrity breaches and to the reinforcement of individual and institutional accountability. Furthermore, the article discusses how respectful behaviour in interactions between students and professors, together with the consistent application of university codes of ethics and the introduction of compulsory courses on ethics and academic integrity, helps to create an organisational climate grounded in trust and responsibility. At the same time, it emphasises the need to combine formal mechanisms, such as codes of ethics and ethics committees, with informal ones, such as unwritten etiquette norms and organisational culture, in order to consolidate responsibility among members of the academic community. The conclusion advanced is that university etiquette, when integrated into the organisational culture of higher education institutions, constitutes an essential mechanism for promoting an academic culture centred on integrity, professionalism and responsibility.*

**Keywords:** *university etiquette, academic responsibility, academic environment, higher education, code of ethics*

**Clasificare JEL:** *I23, I21, I28, M14, D73*

### **1.Introduction**

In recent ethical theory the Academic responsibility is understood as the assumption by each member of the university community of the norms of integrity and the obligations arising from the academic role, represents a core principle of contemporary university ethics. **(Matache, I. - C. 2021)** The importance of this principle has become increasingly evident against the backdrop of growing concern for academic integrity at the global level. **[3]** Under these circumstances, cases of plagiarism, academic fraud and unethical behaviour within universities have undermined the trust of both the public and the scientific community, prompting universities and decision-making bodies to adopt more robust measures to ensure ethical conduct. For example, educational authorities in Romania have embraced a “zero tolerance” approach towards breaches of academic ethics, signalling an institutional commitment to strengthening academic responsibility.**[4]** In this context, it is essential to understand and valorise the role of university etiquette – the set of norms governing appropriate behaviour and interaction in the academic environment – as an instrument for cultivating an ethical and responsible climate.

University etiquette can be defined as the totality of informal and formal rules of civilised conduct, intellectual honesty and mutual respect that guide the behaviour of students, academics and researchers in their day-to-day academic life. It encompasses a wide range of aspects, from courteous forms of address and the manner of conducting debates, to observing the rigour of source citation and avoiding any form of plagiarism or deceit. **[12]** Many of these norms are not mere social conventions but rest on a solid ethical foundation. For instance, university codes of ethics

explicitly emphasise “courtesy and respect owed to every member of the university community”, thereby establishing mutual respect as a pillar of academic culture. Such provisions illustrate the way in which etiquette, understood as appropriate behaviour, and academic ethics overlap and reinforce one another.

There is an intrinsic connection between university etiquette and the fundamental values of academic integrity. Numerous analyses underline that integrity in the university environment is supported by five key values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. These values, promoted by international bodies and prestigious academic communities, are reflected both in codes of ethics and in the usual norms of campus behaviour. Mutual respect and civilised conduct facilitate academic cooperation and the free exchange of ideas, while honesty and fairness in teaching and research ensure the credibility and quality of outcomes. Academic responsibility, in particular, may be regarded as the result of the integration of these other values: an honest individual who respects others and acts fairly will also assume responsibility for his or her own actions. In this sense, academic integrity has been defined as “a personal choice to act responsibly and to take responsibility for one’s actions”. University etiquette provides the practical framework for the realisation of these values, through rules of conduct that, when observed, translate abstract ethical principles into concrete and observable behaviours.

In light of these considerations, the present article aims to analyse how university etiquette contributes to the consolidation of academic responsibility.

## **2.The Significance of University Etiquette for Academic Environment**

University refers to the set of unwritten norms and customary rules of conduct that govern civilised behaviour in the academic environment. In many Western universities, student regulations explicitly state that academic etiquette encompasses “the rules or norms related to classes and student life at a university.” The emphasis falls on creating a positive and cooperative learning environment in which students are encouraged to respect standards of conduct.[2] In this spirit, university etiquette entails punctual attendance at classes, responsible participation in discussions, intellectual honesty in coursework, respect for colleagues and academic staff, as well as the use of appropriate language. Although many of these norms may appear elementary, they constitute the civic foundation of university life.

An essential aspect of university etiquette concerns the manner in which discussions and critical debates are conducted. A Romanian publication specialising in academic integrity underscores that academic debate should be an opportunity “to learn new things or, more philosophically, to discover the truth.” In practice, however, participants in a debate risk “playing the role of advocates for their own position, trying by any means to defend it” and thus losing sight of the epistemic purpose of the exchange. University etiquette intervenes at this point through basic rules of decency: courtesy in conversation, attentive listening to interlocutors, and the avoidance of insults or degrading remarks.[9] As one academic ethics document puts it, genuine mutual respect is “crucial when we try to cooperate,” and even in situations of disagreement no one has the right “to belittle others or to prevent them from speaking.” Since academic freedom is a fundamental principle, it must be accompanied by the obligation to exercise it responsibly; as J. S. Mill famously observed, “the freedom of one individual ends where the freedom of another begins.” Consequently, university etiquette places limits on abuses of freedom of expression: for example, misogynistic, racist or otherwise degrading views cannot be tolerated under the pretext of “academic freedom.” In this way, etiquette affirms respect for human dignity, for institutional norms and for honest dialogue, ensuring that intellectual freedom does not become a pretext for evading ethical responsibilities.[7]

In the absence of institutionalised etiquette norms, members of the academic community may develop their own rules of behaviour, which are often inconsistent or even contradictory. Romanian specialist literature notes that the lack of explicit rules of university conduct leads to frequent

tensions. More precisely, the absence of shared education in university etiquette “results in conflicts with administrative staff and in ongoing mutual accusations,” while “insults directed by students at professors and by professors at students poison the atmosphere” and demotivate high-achieving students. These empirical observations reveal the harmful effects of neglecting etiquette: they turn the university from a space of constructive exchange of ideas into an environment fractured by misunderstandings and mistrust. [11] Therefore, recognising and promoting the values associated with etiquette – such as cooperation, respect and honesty in relationships – becomes indispensable for the academic well-being of the university.

### **3.Ethical Principles and Institutional Regulations of Academic Responsibility**

Academic responsibility is the concept that encompasses accepting the consequences of one’s own actions in the fields of education and research, observing the norms of professional ethics and scientific integrity, and fulfilling educational and scientific objectives competently. In a broader sense, it reflects the obligation of members of the university community to honour the public trust placed in them. In national legislation and university ethics documents, responsibility is emphasised as a general obligation; for example, the Framework Code of University Ethics and Deontology specifies that “responsibility for, and the obligation to comply with, the norms of university ethics and deontology lies with all members of the academic community.” [5] This principle establishes that every professor, researcher, student and member of the administrative staff must personally commit to upholding the ethical values of the institution. Moreover, the same code lists among the fundamental principles of university ethics “moral, social and professional responsibility,” thereby underlining that the role of an academic is not only to produce knowledge, but also to serve as a model of public conduct and honesty. [9]

In practice, academic responsibility translates into a series of concrete obligations. For example, with regard to students and doctoral candidates, codes of ethics require them to respect the intellectual property rights of others when preparing academic papers and scientific projects. This entails citing sources accurately, refraining from plagiarism and developing original content in research and assessment tasks. Students are thus responsible for their own learning and for the honesty with which they acknowledge their sources of information. The guidance contained in these codes also stipulates that students must take the necessary steps to build competence in their field of study and to make original contributions, while respecting “the general norms of ethics and deontology of the university community.”[11]

In turn, academic staff and researchers bear responsibility for the proper management of educational and research activities. In line with ethical principles, lecturers must ensure that the assessment of students is based on transparent and fair criteria, that no learner is unfairly favoured or discriminated against, and that they fulfil their teaching duties with professionalism. In relations among colleagues, academic integrity requires that the ideas and data used in research be genuine and reproducible, and that teaching be approached with a strong sense of responsibility. In Romania, the National Council for the Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU), together with university ethics committees, oversees compliance with these standards, with penalties for breaches ranging from warnings to severe disciplinary sanctions. In conclusion, academic responsibility manifests itself as an ethical responsibility: it involves ensuring fairness, honesty and excellence, while maintaining public trust in the work of universities.

### **4.The Relationship between University Etiquette and Academic Responsibility**

The relationship between university etiquette and academic responsibility lies in the way everyday behavioural norms reinforce the framework of scientific integrity. Mutual respect, courtesy and transparency in academic communication create a climate in which ethical standards become the implicit norm. In a community where students and professors listen to one another and voice their criticism in a fair and constructive manner, conflicts are reduced and suspicions of fraud

or favouritism are easier to dispel. [4] By contrast, behaviours described as lacking in etiquette – such as persistent gossip, insults or mutual accusations – damage the academic atmosphere and can generate a climate of mistrust. When some members come to believe that they can violate moral standards without consequences, the example they set through their daily conduct indirectly legitimises the exposure of fraud, harassment or plagiarism. Conversely, when etiquette establishes a shared standard of decency, it implicitly conveys the message that academic integrity itself is taken seriously.

In this sense, university etiquette operates as a mechanism for strengthening academic responsibility in several interconnected ways. First, etiquette encourages personal responsibility. Respect for unwritten rules creates an environment in which each student feels accountable both for his or her own reputation and for the good name of the institution. A student who strives to behave in a civil and cooperative manner will be more inclined to carry out tasks conscientiously, to accept the consequences of possible mistakes and to learn from them. Only in such a harmonious atmosphere do high-achieving students remain motivated and avoid becoming discouraged by unnecessary tensions, as specialised literature has repeatedly pointed out. [6]

Second, etiquette supports collective responsibility. Norms of politeness and upright conduct structure mutual expectations and help to prevent injustice. A member of the teaching staff who treats students with respect, even in difficult situations, generates trust in the fairness of the assessment process. That person will be less inclined to resort to questionable practices, knowing that the community’s normative framework demands equity and transparency. [10] Symmetrically, students who understand that professors are answerable for their pedagogical decisions according to principles of professional responsibility, closely linked to academic freedom, will be more willing to accept the correction of their own mistakes. In short, morally grounded conduct in interpersonal relations complements formal rules, since mutual respect makes institutional sanctions less frequently necessary and more effective when they are applied.

Third, observance of etiquette ensures the cohesion and climate of trust that sustain scientific integrity. When values such as honesty, tolerance and cooperation are cultivated within the community, as also endorsed in national ethics codes, both staff and students experience a sense of belonging to an authentic academic culture.[3] This reduces the perception that there is a grey zone in which the violation of norms can go unpunished. An academic culture built on implicit etiquette tends to reward genuine commitment to fairness; as a result, levels of altruism and acceptance of professional responsibility increase. Put differently, when all members of the community act in accordance with the same benchmarks of appropriate behaviour, the overall level of expectation regarding integrity standards rises accordingly.

Ultimately, the relationship between etiquette and responsibility is one of mutual reinforcement. Etiquette makes it easier for ethical principles to be internalised, while the assumption of responsibility consolidates norms of conduct. In an academic setting that actively promotes civil discourse, the likelihood that someone will resort to deceit or fraudulent practices diminishes, because the moral cost of violating the “unwritten rules of etiquette” is higher. From an empirical standpoint, interdisciplinary studies show that organisations with strong ethical cultures, in which there is consistency between formal policies and everyday behaviour, report fewer incidents of corruption and breaches of academic integrity. Further, according to a more aspirational perspective, etiquette can be understood as adherence to virtues, in the Aristotelian sense, as applied to education: it is that set of “good habits” that supports the formation of the moral character of students and professors alike. [5] Consequently, bringing formal ethics together with the lived practice of university etiquette contributes to an understanding of academic responsibility as an internal norm rather than merely an external imposition, thereby enhancing the moral quality of academic life.

## 5.Promoting University Etiquette through Institutional Instruments

For university etiquette to be effectively integrated into academic responsibility, university communities develop a range of educational and regulatory instruments. First, university codes and regulations often include general guidelines regarding conduct. In Romania, for example, the Framework Code of University Ethics and Deontology sets out fundamental values such as mutual respect, honesty and cooperation, which provide the normative framework for putting etiquette into practice. The same code emphasises that all members of the university are obliged to respect copyright and the originality of academic work, directly linking ethical and legal obligations. [1]

In institutional practice, many universities adopt their own codes of ethics or codes of conduct. These documents set out specific provisions regarding the obligations of professors and students, such as the prohibition of favouritism and the requirement to respect confidentiality in research, thereby reinforcing expectations of civilised behaviour through explicit norms.

In parallel, university ethics committees or councils monitor compliance with these norms and manage conflicts, sending a clear signal that ethical breaches do not go unnoticed. [11] In this context, educational initiatives are equally essential. Universities organise courses, seminars and training workshops in academic ethics. These courses focus on topics such as scientific integrity, proper citation practices and communication etiquette. The European Union and various funding agencies frequently support training programmes designed to raise awareness among students and researchers about good academic practices. In addition, educational materials such as guides, brochures and online platforms include sections devoted to civilised collaboration in projects, effective communication with international colleagues and adherence to academic standards in multicultural contexts. [2] A particularly illustrative example is the initiative at the University of Sydney, where the Office of Ethics and Integrity includes an Academic Integrity Unit that develops codes of conduct for students and delivers courses on academic honesty, citation styles and the avoidance of plagiarism. [5] Such good practices show how training on etiquette can be embedded in the core university curriculum.

Furthermore, creating an institutional support structure for ethics enhances the effectiveness of integrity policies. Universities may establish ethics committees, integrity offices or even comprehensive ethics strategies that define the values and responsibilities of the academic community. These structures provide not only support in cases of plagiarism or falsification, but also preventive counselling, for instance managerial advice in situations of conflict between students and professors, where confrontations can often be avoided by applying the universal etiquette of civil dialogue. Higher education institutions also implement projects aimed at integrating ethical values into student mobility policies and scholarship schemes, in the expectation that clearly communicating these criteria strengthens the culture of responsibility. [3]

Finally, the role of university leaders as rectors, deans and heads of department is decisive: through their own example and their official messages, they can foster academic etiquette. Public statements by universities and awareness-raising events, such as conferences and debates addressing codes of conduct, academic freedom and responsibility, encourage open discussion of these topics. Connections with international networks, such as academic integrity associations, and participation in European projects on ethics provide additional sources of information and benchmarks. In practice, institutional instruments designed to “codify” university etiquette, even in the form of practical guidelines, ensure that academic ethics does not remain at an abstract level but becomes embedded in the daily culture of academic life.

## 6. Conclusions

This article has shown that university etiquette and academic responsibility are not separate notions but rather two sides of the same coin – the ethical foundation on which excellence in education and research is built. The norms of civil, honest and respectful behaviour that govern university life are not mere formalities; they function as living mechanisms through which the values of integrity take on concrete form in the day-to-day reality of the campus. When students and professors adhere to an etiquette of mutual respect, fairness and responsible work, the entire academic community benefits. A climate of trust emerges in which knowledge can advance without moral obstructions, and members of the community feel mutually bound to honour their commitments. In such an environment, ethical violations become isolated deviations, attracting collective disapproval and being promptly addressed through institutional mechanisms. [4]

Throughout the article, it has been argued that university etiquette acts as a bridge between regulations and practices, between declared principles and actual behaviours. At the individual level, etiquette shapes the conscience of both student and professor, leading them to internalise values such as intellectual honesty and respect, not out of constraint but out of conviction. [9] At the organisational level, etiquette intertwines with policies and formal codes to build a solid institutional culture in which academic responsibility is shared by all and supported by clear procedures. The analysis has highlighted the importance of systematic ethical education, through courses and training programmes, as well as the central role of mentors’ personal example in transmitting this culture to new generations. The results of measures such as compulsory integrity courses already indicate positive effects: increased awareness and a decrease in the incidence of unethical practices, suggesting that sustained emphasis on etiquette and responsibility is beginning to bear fruit. [1]

Of course, strengthening academic responsibility through etiquette is an ongoing process. The challenges evolve along with the academic world, from new forms of fraud facilitated by technology to emerging ethical dilemmas in scientific research. This implies that the norms of university etiquette themselves must be continually adapted and reaffirmed. The dialogue about values remains open, as each academic generation rediscovers and reinterprets, in its own context, the meaning of honesty, respect and responsibility. The role of institutions is to facilitate this dialogue and to provide firm points of reference so that the academic community does not lose its moral orientation.

In conclusion, it can be argued that a genuine culture of academic responsibility cannot exist in the absence of university etiquette. As one author notes, “an education lacking solid moral principles cannot move in the right direction,” and future researchers and professors must appropriate these ethical principles and moral values in order to transmit them further into society, thereby “contributing to the spread of the notion of meritocracy, grounded in fairness, professionalism and mutual respect.” University etiquette provides precisely the practical framework through which these principles and values are exercised on a daily basis, becoming part of each academic’s habitus. Investing in ethical academic behaviour – through education, example and regulation – is ultimately an investment in the quality and credibility of the knowledge that the university produces. Only by consolidating integrity mechanisms at every level, from courtesy in the classroom to institutional policies, can we be confident that the academic environment fulfils its noble mission in the service of truth and the public good, earning the respect and trust it deserves.

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