

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ARMENIAN HEIs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This survey was carried out by “Restart Foundation for Science and Education”. The **goal** of the survey is to assess the state and conditions of academic integrity in the HEIs of the Republic of Armenia (RA).

The survey is based on the “INTES” (integrity of national education systems) methodology. This methodology offers a complex approach aimed at eliminating the factors and personal motives which create favourable conditions for violation of the academic integrity rules. The methodology helps understand the root causes of the problem and improve the system in such a way as to make improper practices impossible and meaningless.

The subject of the survey included four groups of academic integrity violations:

1. cheating and plagiarism;
2. misjudgement of academic achievement;
3. Unnecessary influence on the decisions of appointment and dismissal of the faculty; and
4. politicization of the higher education sector.

The **objectives** of the survey were to:

- identify the main manifestations and value orientations of the attitude towards integrity and integrity violations among students;
- identify the students’ perceptions of the prevalence of the above four groups of academic integrity violations in HEIs, as well as reveal the factors contributing to such violations and analyze their motives;
- assess the degree and impact of actual involvement and influence of students and student organizations in ensuring integrity in HEIs; and
- make recommendations to promote academic integrity in Armenian HEIs and the effectiveness of student involvement in it.

The assessment was based on qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, including:

- anonymous surveys conducted among 383 students of different RA HEIs (both Yerevan and in the provinces); and

- focus group discussions with the participation of students in four towns of Armenia.

As a result of the survey we came to the following **conclusions**:

- In the students's perception, the factors contributing to cheating and plagiarism include the unclear and at times unrealistic assignments by the lecturers, the lack or absence of motivation to fight plagiarism among students, the existence of organizations taking orders of theses / course papers and individual papers, and, lastly, the inconsistency of the lecturers, while the triggers include lack or absence of necessary literature, scarcity of time, and the improper delivery of the topic.
- In the students' perception, the factors contributing to unfair assessment / misjudgement include assessment through the force of custom/tradition, lack of control and accountability, as well as the insufficient willingness to fight the alleged unfair assessment of others, while the triggers include favoritism and dependence on tuition fees.
- According to the students, they do not have a tangible influence on the decisions on hiring, dismissal and promotion of the faculty members, however, their voice becomes heard when they unite and express their position. The students who took part in the survey are altogether unaware of the presence or absence of procedures for hiring, dismissal, and promotion of the lecturers.
- In the students' perception the politicized nature of the HEIs is the least common among the four manifestations of integrity violations under this survey. Partisan student councils contribute to politicization; they continue to do what they were doing before the 2018 political events, because of inertia. Nevertheless, there is a certain connection between a lecturer's promotion and rewards and his/her political views.

The analysis of the data obtained was carried out based on the above four groups of violations. A separate "passport" was created for each group of violations.

As a result of the survey, **recommendations** were made to the RA HEIs and the RA Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (**MoESCS**).

Recommendations to the RA HEIs

1. Cheating and plagiarism

- At the HEIs, teach the rules and requirements of academic correspondence and present the dangers of plagiarism and cheating within the subject "Professional Introduction";
- Establish procedures for combating academic plagiarism and cheating and lability measures to be taken against them, up to and including expulsion from the HEI;
- Create Academic Ethics Committees; and
- Introduce an anti-plagiarism app (like the "Turn-it-in ") or organize a blind review of student submissions.

2. Misjudgment of academic achievement

- Develop clear subject evaluation criteria (rubric) at HEIs;
- Divide the assessment of the subject into several parts, among the assessment methods consider the assignment of individual and group tasks, i.e. essays, situational problems and research; develop credit-based assessment criteria for these;
- Assess the academic progress in the examination rooms of the HEIs in the presence of more than one specialist, including ensuring the presence of an invited specialist and selecting the latter through a computer by random selection; and
- In order to neutralize the phenomena of nepotism and favoritism in the process of assessing academic progress, introduce the tool of written or oral statements of conflict of interest by the examining professors and invited specialists.

3. Unnecessary intervention in the decisions on hiring, dismissal and promotion of the faculty

- Develop clear standards for hiring and filling faculty vacancies in HEIs and increase the transparency of the processes; organize hiring through open competition using the established standards, and ensure proper justification and publicity for dismissal decisions; and
- Organize rewards for and promotion of faculty based on measurable key performance indicators (KPI).

Recommendations to the RA MoESCS

4. Politicization of HEIs

- Legislatively restrict the possibilities for involving persons holding political positions as well as persons holding positions in the governing and supervisory bodies of political parties in the highest levels of governance of the HEIs;
- Restrict involving students with political orientation and party affiliation in the process of forming student councils of HEIs;
- For the members of the HEI governing boards and student council, as well as the faculty, establish requirements and restrictions for political reserve and neutrality, procedures for enforcing them and provide for administrative and disciplinary measures for non-compliance or violations; and

It is recommended to engage students in the implementation of all of the above-mentioned recommendations where possible, taking into account their opinions and perceptions to the maximum extent possible.