Integrity within the University Community.
Its Ethical Values, Attitudes and Behaviours

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Abstract. The hypothesis, that our paper is based on, is that the university community plays an important role both in the process of shaping the students' professional and transversal competences and in the shaping of their moral dimension. Ethical values, such as credibility, respect, equity, correctness, tolerance, might generate attitudes, such as participative interest, responsibility assumption, moral norms, dialogue willingness etc. The personal and professional development of the students from "Danubius" University of Galati, should be conditioned both by their solid knowledge, their competences of their specialization, and by their interior ethical behaviours. The future graduates should focus their future activity on a professional deontology and on the projection of the possible consequences of their actions and decisions within the individual, social and natural environment they are going to work in. The aim of our paper is to identify and analyze the strategies of ethically shaping the students who will be specialists in communication and public relations. Our paper will demonstrate the importance of the ethical dimension within this specialization which will provide the competences of the social influence. This has multiple outcomes within the social field, having significant ethical implications.

Keywords: ethical values; communication ethics; higher education

1. Introduction

In the contemporary society it is increasingly imposed the fact that the universities have become active social actors more and more involved in the social, economic and cultural development at local, regional, national and global level. The mission of universities has diversified, not only they prepare future professional elite, but they also have a great responsibility on training more and more students to accede to higher education. In this context, the institutions of higher education can no longer be governed only by traditional academic standards, being imposed an assumption of new roles, responsibilities and ethical rules, which will be the basis of a society of knowledge and lifelong learning.

2. Academic Ethos

2.1. The Role of Values that Define Academic Integrity

Higher education is based upon its activity of teaching-learning and training students, and also on the academic community research demarche completed on the free exchange of ideas, creativity and

individual development. Academic culture of universities is complemented by ethical codes that include faith, beliefs, values, norms, practices that emphasize the respect for the dignity and physical and mental integrity of the human being, lifelong learning, quality and continuity of knowledge, etc. (Declaration on Ethical Values and Principles of Higher Education in the Europe Region, 2004).

Rethinking the ethical role of higher education leads to multiple questions covering for example: the science that it produces, its social effects; disclosure and access to this knowledge, which can potentially lead to social inequalities and abusive forms of power; the ethical education given to students; the ethics and deontology of the teaching/research professionals, a crucial aspect of their professionalism; the ethical training of the professors that gives meaning to their scientific, technological and pedagogical training and calls for awareness of collective positions about the new needs in terms of greater social intervention.

The key values of academic integrity must: (a) underlie effective teaching and research of high quality; (b) achieve a balance between the identity of higher education as public good and marketing its services; (c) be the content of university ethical standards; (d) condition, through "ethical audit" the institutional performance; (e) teach students how to become moral agents, inner motivated and they should not limit to their professors' value systems. "Helping students to reflect on and deal with the ethical issues they will face in their careers is an essential part of any vocational training" (Illingworth, 2004).

2.2. The Auto-perception of Ethical Values in University

In order to reveal how academic staff and students from the Faculty of Communication Sciences of "Danubius" University, Galati perceive social responsibility in training and expression of ethics in the societal space, which the higher education has, we applied the following questionnaire to both academic staff and students:

Please rate the statements below by choosing, on a scale of 1-5, for: 1. totally disagree; 2. disagree; 3. neutral; 4. agreement; 5. full agreement: a) higher education has the role of conscience and of critic of the society; b. higher education prepares students for a globalized society; c. Higher education prepares students on managing ethical dilemmas. d. There is a balance between professional training of students and training their ethical behaviour.

After analyzing the responses we observed the following: (a) the majority of responses were *agreement* and *full agreement*, 10% of respondents opted for *disagreement*, (b) 30% of respondents added a text that expresses the importance that this "must" that the universities should have in the configuration of desirable ethical attitudes and behaviours of community members; (c) the management of ethical dilemmas must acquire a higher share in the specialized disciplines.

3. Training Students to Specialize Ethics Communication and Public Relations

The final ethical education of students from Communication and Public Relations specialization, Faculty of Communication Sciences, University "Danubius" of Galati are realized through the following attitudes and behaviours: participatory interest, critical assuming, intellectual curiosity, assuming morality and responsibility; willingness for dialogue, etc.

Prospective graduates must reach to underlie its future activity: on a professional deontology; on the projection of possible consequences of their actions and decisions in the natural, social and individual environment. Professional and personal development of students should be conditioned not only of knowledge, skills and abilities, but also of internal ethical behaviour. "There is one major difference between teaching students how to become inner moral agents, independent and to impose the professor's value systems. There is a difference between moral philosophy and moralization." (Deaver, 2004). Frank Deaver sustains the superiority of moral philosophy in relation to moralizing: moral philosophy has rules and guidelines that are consistent from one case to another, from one rule to another, from one person to another, from what we do to what we say; it also implies thinking, discussing and implementing ethical principles in analytical and cathartic way; it underlies a pluralistic decision-making process, which is important for the functioning of a participatory society; moralizing presupposes to give particular and specific advice, that have no consistently over time or depending on the case or the person; it is dogmatic, pragmatic and consultative, expressing opinions based especially on emotions.

The made decisions in the sphere of communication are more easily defensible intellectually and ethically, if it is based on moral philosophy rather than the simple moralization. Also "there is a danger that an ethical concept, which can be applied to professional groups or government or public interest groups, is more concerned about institutional image and the fact that they rather give account for to someone than the moral development." (Deaver, 2004). Moral philosophy and mature social development determine independent thinking, in critical and general terms; the communicators reach to some kind of autonomy in the quality of moral agents. This is autonomis incorporated into civic life of trained communicator.

In the curriculum of Communication and Public Relations specialization we encounter an explicit course of Ethics and deontology and also objectives for achieving ethical behaviours, set in specialized disciplines.

• scheduling a system of cultural, moral and civic values; the expression of positive and responsible attitudes (*Introduction to social sciences* discipline);

• expression of positive and responsible attitudes towards the studied discipline; promoting a responsible and objective style to achieve a public relations campaign for an organization; active participation to its own professional development as a public relations specialist in an organization (the discipline: *Introduction to Public Relations*);

• respecting the licensed software, stimulating teamwork; adopting an innovative attitude; stimulating a responsible attitude towards the contents of a document; developing the interest in improving the individual training; expressing a positive and responsible attitude for Informatics (discipline: *Editing specialized languages*);

• promoting at all levels of communication, cultural and social values that promote the acceptance of "the other";

• adopting the tolerance and acceptance behaviour of difference (*Communication and imagology* discipline);

• cultivating a scientific environment focused on civic and scientific values to ensure the formation of a specialized language (*Communication Law* discipline);

• promoting a social value system specific to organizations and efficient ways of communication; proving team spirit, cooperation and constructive competition; active participation in its own professional development as member of an organization (*Organizational communication* discipline).

We asked students and academic staff from the Faculty of Communication Sciences to assess on ascending scale from 1 to 10 (without repeating), the following values: commitment, fairness, credibility, courage, dialogue, honesty, reputation, respect; responsibility, tolerance.

After evaluating the responses, we learnt the following: (a) achieving rankings by academic staff and by students is significantly related (b) the hierarchy performed by students show a positive feedback, which gives important clues on setting ethical attitudes and conducts of students from Communication and Public Relations; (c) the hierarchy of ethical values that resulted from assessments made by respondents is: in its uppermost position is the *moral responsibility*, which is the authority of conscience in helping the subject to understand the meaning and social and moral consequences of his deeds, determining him to knowingly take decisions, its status and professional and civic roles, in addressing the quality of its acts; (d) second place is *credibility*, a value which is very important in public relations activity, it is crucial in building the reputation of organizations; (e) *commitment and respect* are tied according to the assessment made by respondents, it includes the first two values, but it does not fully cover them; (f) *fairness and honesty* were positioned at the same level, respondents appreciating the similarity of the conceptual content (g) *the courage* is a value that was less appreciated, being a value that may refer to as part of the responsibility, (h) *the dialogue* has a modest place, which showed the need to be revealed in future educational efforts the positive and constructive valences that they may acquire (i) *the reputation* came in second last place, and *tolerance* in last position; this entitles us to consider that they were assessed by their negative connotations, in judgments values such as: "he has a certain reputation", "something like this cannot be tolerated", "tolerating the mistake is unacceptable" etc.

A careful analysis of the students' hierarchy can help develop appropriate strategies for defining and redefining the examined values (and others), relevant for them to distinguish between possible meanings and contents that can acquire these values.

4. Conclusions

Higher education must be based on civic and academic values, ensuring the promotion of excellence and allowing universities to play a key role in promoting social, economic and cultural development. Ethics education can be achieved: (a) through a pragmatic approach, which is a starting point for the established rules and procedures in order to maintain and enhance the professional standards; (b) through an integrated approach involving also professionalism as a set of behaviours governed by a specifically established code of conduct; (c) through a theoretical approach by which the students acquire their moral concepts, fundamental ethical concepts and principles, and they are submitted to critical evaluation of analysis. By this approach, the students may reflect upon moral issues that they will face in their real careers, as an essential part of the training process.

5. Future Work

The results of this study will provide the prerequisites for future research in which the students will be trained in the third year with: (a) basic ethical approaches in order to influence the public by specialists in public relations; (b) the component of ethical decision at the management level; (c) the extent to which the ethics in public relations comes into conflict with the interests and values of the organization; (d) the extent to which ethical behaviour has a negative/positive influence upon the performance of the organization. The aim of this next step is to assess whether the future graduates have the necessary knowledge and skills to make appropriate decisions in real, tangible situations, which they may encounter across their careers.

6. References

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