

## **Ethics at Higher Education Institutions What is the Value of Ethics in Academic Institutions?**

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### **Abstract**

Ethics at academic institutions- higher education in particular- is considered an important and essential matter. It fosters good conduct, fair evaluation, ultimate academic integrity, students' development and welfare, critical thinking and cultivation of students' sense of purpose and uniqueness, etc. In order to fathom the value and importance of ethics at higher education institutions, the authors have distributed a questionnaire to (20) male and female faculty members at the Preparatory Studies Center – University of Technology and Applied Sciences- the Sultanate of Oman. The findings were amazing: almost all responses show that university teachers should practice ethics theoretically and practically. Discussion, description, and recommendations will be highlighted in detail throughout this article.

**Keywords:** Ethics, fairness, honesty, justice, mutual, respect, sincerity, standard of teaching, values.

### **Introduction**

In the academic arena, the term “Ethics” clearly emerges as a valuable merit that faculty members and staff should boast of. Ethics overpasses providing students with knowledge. Professors, on the other hand, should set a good example in many ways such as sincerity, integrity, and faithfulness in guiding and leading students towards supreme values to become the elite of the society. Moreover, their responsibility in / out of lecture halls should promote academic freedom, creating and cultivating new generations that can develop and explore their inner capabilities of the surrounding environment. This paper highlights the importance of Ethics in higher education institutions and the effect they reflect on creating a healthy and innovational educational environment.

### ***Statement of the Problem***

At higher education institutions, students and teachers should be fully aware of the exact meaning of *Ethics* that saves and protects faculty members, employees, and students' status and keeps all on the right track to get good results with no ambiguity whatsoever.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

This study pursues the following:

1. Identifying the exact meaning of the word *Ethics* at higher education institutions without any vague outcomes.
2. Examining which criterion to follow for understanding and applying the utterance “*Ethics*” and what it includes such as justice, fairness, critical thinking, etc.

### **Literature Review**

Ethics is a word, or term that promotes and emphasizes quality conduct. It highlights and spreads virtue in societies, and considered the ultimate concern for people of virtuous values. “The word “ethics” is inextricably linked to concerns about acceptable behavior in society. “Etymologically, “ethics” derives from the Greek “ethos,” which means “character,” and shows a worry for moral individuals, trustworthy character, and acceptable behavior.” (School of Journalism and Mass Communication, (n.d), Para. 1).

Moreover, *Ethics* is a powerful tool that exists almost everywhere; nursing, offices, schools, colleges, and universities. It reflects individuals’ personality in performing their job in the right way with no prejudice. Recently, some approaches have emerged regarding ethics-- behavioral and applied.

The term ethics often describes the investigation and analysis of moral principles and dilemmas. Traditionally, philosophers and religious scholars have studied ethics. More recently, scholars from various disciplines have entered the field, creating new approaches to the study of ethics such as behavioral ethics and applied ethics. (Ethics unwrapped, (n.d), Para. 1).

Regarding applying *Ethics* in lecture halls, professors should treat all students equally. The following is a student’s verdict about how he/she is treated by the professor in a fair way. It seems that the intellectual place overpasses the comfortable one.

*Legally*, the professor was free to give me whatever grade he believed appropriate. But I knew he would grade me fairly because I could count on his *ethics* as a teacher and scholar. I knew that his classroom was an intellectually safe place—not a comfortable place, not an undemanding place, but a place where I was free to disagree without punishment merely for dissenting (Postrel, 2023, para.8).

Academic institutions should promote a healthy atmosphere that stresses ethical culture that educates students and focusses on useful and essential values needed in life. “Through the integration of ethics and value education into their educational programs, schools attempt to promote a healthy school culture and educate students on the skills and values needed to address moral challenges in life”. (EuroSchool, 2023, para.3). Where should ethics start first?

Ethics usually starts at home during the early childhood and expected to accompany individuals throughout their lives. Moreover, mosques, churches, kindergartens, etc., do play a significant role in fostering good manners.

Most people learn ethical norms at home, at school, in church, or in other social settings. Although most people acquire their sense of right and wrong during childhood, moral development occurs throughout life and human beings pass through different stages of growth as they mature. (David B. Resnik, J.D., 2024, Para. 2)

**Some academic institutions have experienced some ethical violations in the field of education. Here are some:**

### **Bullying and Offensive Behavior**

This normally includes sexual harassment from the side of the faculty member. Sometimes done in order to put students on the spot to give him/her a high mark. Those teachers might have forgotten that universities do have instructions through guides, or prospectuses to show what is acceptable or not. This includes not only faculty members, but also administrators who might trick others, especially officials for promotion or getting higher ranks. Harassment might take different kinds - verbal, physical or behavioral which all lead to unacceptable and shameful sorts of ethics. University teachers should take more care when writing books or research papers.

Ethics at academic institutions might include and take different academic kinds of behavior such as dishonesty while writing research papers or books. Plagiarism is a crime and leads to dismissal from academic institutions. This act should not be committed by what is so called “top of the hierarchy”- professors- who should set an example for their students. Academic theft is a stigma in the history of the faculty member, and it may take different shapes such as taking materials from websites, or any electronic platform, or books. Proper citation should be the key factor in referencing and citations.

### **Ethics and University Faculty Members**

Thinking about Ethics normally leads to considering personal behavior and the right decision-making policy. However, professional code of ethics takes a higher standard code that governs the relationship between individuals in a professional environment that covers the society. For university faculty members, core professional ethics should highlight trust, justice, respect and fairness inside the classroom, not to mention integrity, social responsibility and academic level of freedom.

The term "Academic Freedom" is typically used to refer to the freedom of creating knowledge, conducting research, teaching, and openly debating ideas without fear of reprisal. As a result, instructors should have complete discretion over the topics they discuss with students in a positive and democratic setting, even if they are hazy or contentious. Instead of using their

position and/or rank to force their personal views as a matter of fact, teachers should encourage students to speak freely and openly without any outside pressure.

### **University Teachers and the Ultimate Democracy**

No doubt that education represents a powerful tool in shaping and cultivating generations. And to have an effective influence, a teacher should promote and instill “Critical Thinking” in students. It allows them to play an essential role in shaping themselves and society where they live. Promoting critical thinking means giving students the chance and ability to question, debate, and examine what they are given by teachers.

### **Social Justice is Required as Well**

Faculty members at universities and colleges play vital roles in shaping students’ personalities. They reinforce social justice amongst them by focusing on important matters in the local and universal societies such as human rights, systemic discrimination, class discussion and course content with no prejudice that might occur.

Societal justice is a highly valued matter to highlight as students will need this after graduation and face the real life. It covers almost all fields in the arena of education and majors such as history, economics, law, science, etc. All this will lead to a better change in the society.

In addition to their job as educators, university teachers play the role of local social workers. No progress occurs unless teachers set a good example and apply Ethics practically, not only theoretically.

Social justice should be practiced well by university teachers regardless of race, sex, or any background of students. Faculty members at academic institutions play a very vital role in inspiring students to be aware of fairness and equality and contribute to social change- playing the role of social workers.

### **Student Role**

Lecture halls are not only for teaching or preaching; on the contrary, they are domains where students feel free to express themselves and ask questions, and feel engaged in all matters of concern. This cannot be fully accomplished unless there is a span of mutual respect and active learning. Teachers, on the other hand, should be careful not to impose their *Will* and authority in teaching; there is a priority and importance of establishing clear boundaries and limits in behavior, respect and participation. A sense of open forums and free debate is useful in igniting students’ thoughts in class and might be reflected on the local society. So, students are no more recipients of knowledge, but smart and active contributors to spreading knowledge and education and be beacons of knowledge.

Education should be utilized for teaching and practicing democracy to nurture the future generation who will take part in contributing to the success of their society. All that should be done in a relaxed atmosphere with possible critical thinking, not only taking notes or getting knowledge. Smart teachers should bear in mind that in order to have successful individuals, there should be a tinge of empathy that makes them feel that their teacher cares for their personal and individual growth, as well as their well-being.

Teachers should be aware of their students' backgrounds and capabilities regarding the educational process. From an ethical point of view, teachers should treat students as whole people, not just individuals in a classroom.

### **Methodology**

This study employs a quantitative research design using a survey method to gather data on *Ethics* at higher education institutions. The use of surveys is appropriate for collecting standardized, comparable data across a sample of participants, allowing for statistical analysis of their responses.

### ***Participants***

The participants -20 male and female lecturers- teach at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri in the Sultanate of Oman. They come from different countries-America, South Africa, Iran, Pakistan, India, etc.). They are all experienced, and taught at different universities and colleges.

### ***Sampling Strategy***

Due to logistical constraints, the sample size was limited to (20) participants. A convenience sampling method was employed, as the lecturers were readily available to the researchers at the time of the study. However, the small sample size limits the generalizability of the results and is considered a limitation of the study.

### ***Research Instrument***

Data was collected using a questionnaire created by the researchers that had (15) questions. The survey asked (5 Yes/No), 5 Agree/Disagree), and 5 multiple choice) questions to gauge respondents' opinions on the subject of ethics at higher education institutions, which included empathy, fairness, and communication skills. A pilot study with five lecturers was used to validate the device in order to ensure clarity and reliability, and any necessary changes to the wording were made in response to their input.

### Data Collection Procedure

Surveys were distributed to participants during their free time at the University. Before participation, they were given a detailed explanation about the purpose of the study, informed of their right to apologize any time, and assured of their anonymity. Participants provided written consent, and surveys were completed within (10) minutes during a scheduled session.

### Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical research guidelines. All participants gave their informed consent, and they were promised that their answers would be kept private.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

Table 1

I. Do you agree that "Ethics in Teaching" is a matter of priority?	Yes	No
	19	1
	95%	5%

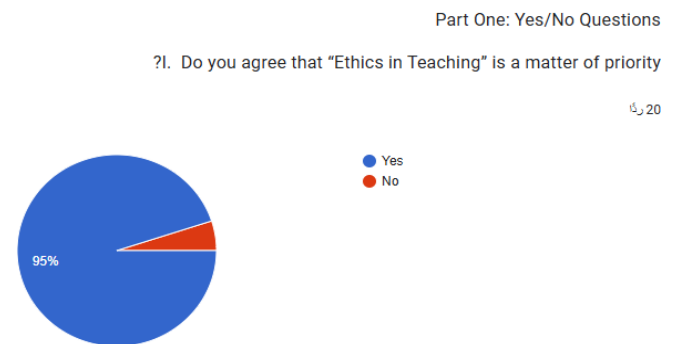


Table 1 illustrates that 95% of participants agree that Ethics in Teaching" is a matter of priority. This is a good indicator of the participants who believe in that. Moreover, it is critical for creating a positive learning environment, promoting student well-being, and influencing future generations.

2. Personally, do you think that some teachers at your organization -on purpose- violate the code of ethics, at least once?	Yes	No
	14	6
	70%	30%

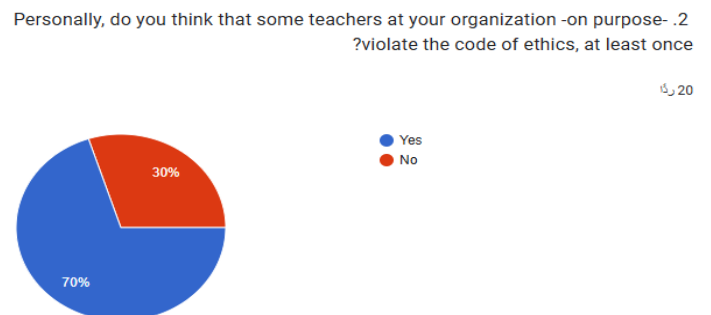


Table 2

The findings indicate that the participants about (70%) believe that some teachers the organization -on purpose-violate the code of ethics, at least once.

7. Your organization should focus on and prioritize ethical behavior.	Agree	Disagree
	19	1
	95%	5%

Table 3

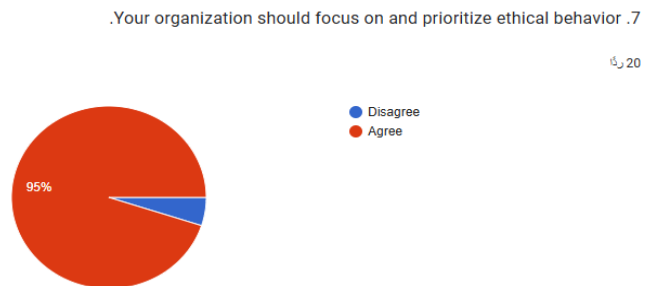


Table 3 shows that the largest group of participants (95%) agree that their organization should focus on and prioritize ethical behavior. Ethical behavior promotes a positive work environment, builds trust, improves reputation, and leads to long-term success.

Table 4

8. Faculty members who witness unethical behavior of whatever, should report that.	Agree	Disagree
	20	0
	100%	0%



Table 4 shows that of the participants (100%) agree that faculty members who witness unethical behavior of whatever, should report that. Reporting is critical to the institution's integrity and the safety of students and colleagues. While specific reporting procedures may differ by institution, the general principle of reporting unethical behavior remains unchanged.

Table 5

12. All employees at academic institutions should be encouraged to report any unethical behavior without fear.	Natural	Agree	Disagree
	1	19	0
	5%	95%	0%

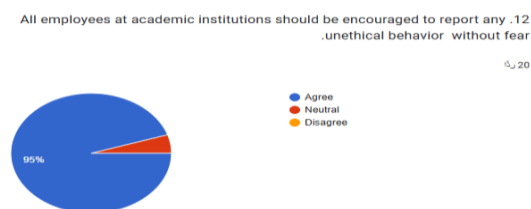


Table 5 shows that of the participants (95%) agree that all employees at academic institutions should be encouraged to report any unethical behavior without fear.

### Conclusion

As previously discussed, faculty members at the higher education institutions have to set an example in ethics for students and society. In addition to being knowledge creators and educators, they spread virtue, democracy, freedom, integrity in the academic arena. All that creates an effective message in leadership and guidance, and bear responsibility and smart intelligence.

To sum, Ethics should be practiced and followed, not done theoretically. Following all kinds of good behavior leads to brilliant academic future.

### Recommendations

University teachers should

- 1.promote ethics practically
- 2.develop themselves as researchers and scholars, and be respectful.
- 3.treat their students equally and assess their achievement appropriately.
- 4.give credit to brilliant and smart students.
- 5.avoid intervening in dishonest activities that are considered improper such as cheating, using rude words, etc.
- 6.be positive models for their students.
- 7.take care of themselves and promote their well-being and academic spirit.
- 8.not reproduce or recycle others' research results without giving credit.
- 9.care about their students and respect their points of view and the appropriate feedback
- 10.promote a healthy atmosphere that stresses ethical culture that educates students and focusses on useful and essential values needed in life.

### Acknowledgement

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### Questionnaire

This questionnaire consists of three parts; (Yes, No), (Agree, Disagree), and (Multiple-Choice) questions, and is mainly geared to teachers. The questionnaire is about **Ethics at Higher Education Institutions.**

**Part One Yes / No Questions.**

1. Do you agree that “**Ethics in Teaching**” is a matter of priority?

(Yes)

(No)

2. **Personally**, do you think that **some** teachers at your organization **-on purpose-**violate the code of ethics, at least once?

(Yes)

(No)

3. The faculty and staff members (i.e., lecturers, colleagues, administrators, deanship, etc.) will reward me when I do something ethical.

(Yes)

(No)

4. I **sometimes** commit unethical actions when it is beyond my control (e.g., Ejada, or when I plagiarize because the academic system emphasizes excellent results).

(Yes)

(No)

5. I have been confronted with **some minor** ethical issues during my **studies at university**.

(Yes)

(No)

**Part Two Agree/ Disagree Questions.**

6. Teachers should very much be **familiar** with the **Code of Research Ethics**.

(Agree)

(Disagree)

7. Your organization should focus on and prioritize ethical behavior.

(Agree)

(Disagree)

8. Faculty members who witness unethical behavior of whatsoever, should report that.

(Agree)

(Disagree)

9. All academic institutions should conduct training sessions and workshops on ethical behavior.

(Agree)

(Disagree)

10. Teachers who are caught- **red-handed-** committing harassment with students should be sacked.

(Agree)

(Disagree)

### Part Three: Multiple –Choice Questions

1. In your opinion, which of the following unethical behaviors have you noticed in your academic organization? (Select all that apply)

- A. Bribery
- B. Harassment
- C. Discrimination
- D. None

12. All employees at academic institutions should be encouraged to report any unethical behavior without fear.

- A. Agree
- B. Neutral
- C. Disagree

13. Have you ever reported any unethical act or behavior you witnessed whether in/out class?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Not interested

14. Personally, do you feel comfortable raising specific concerns about major or minor ethical violations with your Head of the Department?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. Not of my business or concern

15. Does your organization have clear and accurate criteria for dealing with ethical matters?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. I do not know