

Piotr T. Nowakowski\*

**COOPERATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC WORKERS:  
DEONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ASPECT  
OF POLAND**

**Introduction**

If the Polish public is confronted with the ethical assessments of cooperation among academics, this often happens within the context of publicized irregularities, such as incidents of copyright infringements (Rewera 2011, p. 209-12), nepotism (Hołdyńska 2014, p. A8), defrauding research funds (Filipiak 2013, p. A10), conflicts undermining the academic community ([wap] 2008), mobbing (as indicated among others by Józef Wiczołek 2009), or the problem of feudalization of the Polish academic world (Szadkowski 2015, p. XV), sometimes in the form of a systemic network of fraudulent relations and connections whose prime power – as Jadwiga Michalczyk writes (2004, p. 39) – is “mutual support and concealing chicanery, affairs, and other deceptions”. Referring to the signals pointing to the irregularities in the academic world (“A plagiarism here, some fiction there, with some unreliability or outright lie on top of that”), she asks about the motivation for tolerating dishonesty: “solidarity of community or solidarity of traitors? Demand, maybe? Immorality is not incidental. A single academic cheater would do little harm: if other academics are honest, a single case of deceit would be promptly exposed. Immorality then must be linked to bigger or smaller communities. Therefore, the tolerance of deceit is the most alarming phenomenon bearing the hallmarks of the crisis of academia” (Michalczyk 2004, p. 39). In view of potential irregularities threatening the intra-academic cooperation, it is interesting to take a closer look at how this challenge is dealt with by the ethical codes of universities, but also how the phenomenon is perceived by students, who happen to be critical and keen observers. Hence, this paper is the effect of a thorough preliminary

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study of digitalized academic documents and of surveys aiming at obtaining empirical data.

### From the perspective of deontological documents

One of the reactions to the challenges faced by the academic community is defining by particular universities ethical canons declared as socially accepted in a given community. Based on the analysis of their content, the author selected six sensitive areas for the cooperation between researchers. They are presented in the article and illustrated with quotations from academic codes. It should be added that some aspects appear in several documents, and sometimes they are even worded in the same way, therefore, to make this article well-put-together and clear, the author decided to reduce the number of the sources indicated in the brackets:

- *Respect for the dignity of colleagues.* The ethical codes of universities, among other things, recommend that academic work should be performed following “the principles of kindness and friendliness in contacts with [...] colleagues”, as well as avoid “all forms of inappropriate attitude towards [...] other academics” (*Kodeks etyki studenta i pracownika Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu w Pile* 2017, sect. III.2) and “actions that could hurt people, their reputation, and careers” (*Kodeks etyki pracowników Politechniki Wrocławskiej* 2016, sect. 1.6). In light of this, the authors of *The code of ethics for research workers* emphasize that “all forms of oppression and discrimination against [...] co-workers [...] are reprehensible” (*Kodeks etyki pracownika naukowego* 2017, sect. 4.2) and “the health, safety, or welfare of the community or of co-workers should not be compromised” (*Kodeks etyki pracownika naukowego* 2017, sect. 3.2.5).
- *Concern for good relations in the community.* An academic “acts in a manner helping strengthen professional cooperation and good relations with others” (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego* 2016, sect. 7), “cares about good human relations at the university as well as prevents conflicts in the community” (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego Akademii Pomorskiej w Słupsku* 2011, §21), is driven by “friendliness and loyalty” (*Kodeks etyki pracowników Politechniki Wrocławskiej* 2016, sect. 1.5) and “develops lasting relations, thanks to which one becomes a reliable partner both at and outside the university” (*Kodeks etyki Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Administracji w Lublinie* 2017, p. 4). *The academic code of values* adopted by the Senate of the Jagiellonian University also encourages academics to

“create a good work atmosphere which boosts energy and enthusiasm in all the participants of the academic life, as well as to be free from petty-mindedness”, it also discourages “criticism, competitive haste, and the sham of meaningful activity” (*Akademicki kodeks wartości* 2003, sect. 3).

- *Righteous approach towards colleagues.* It is often emphasized that academics should be distinguished for honesty in relations with their colleagues and the academic community (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego* 2016, sect. 4). They should also, lawfully and in a cultural manner, oppose “dishonesty, unreliability, intolerance, injustice, and other manifestations of unethical conduct among professionals” (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego Wyższej Szkoły Informatyki i Ekonomii Towarzystwa Wiedzy Powszechnej w Olsztynie* 2013, §17). An academic should be “guided by righteousness and objectivism when acknowledging academic achievements of other researchers, colleagues, and predecessors” (*Kodeks etyki pracowników Politechniki Wrocławskiej* 2016, sect. 2.2.6). Finally, when assessing research undertakings, they should follow the academic conscience: “across societal divides, friendships, and any non-professional emotions and feelings, whether personal, national, or those related to worldviews” (*Akademicki kodeks wartości* 2003, sect. 1).
- *Partnership in action.* According to *The academic code of values* of the Jagiellonian University, academic workers should be concerned for a consistent distribution of duties so that those “do not become an excessive burden for one group, being an unjustified privilege for another, usually benefiting from such inequalities in order to undertake additional classes outside their main university” (*Akademicki kodeks wartości* 2003, sect. 4). On the other hand, *The code of ethics* of *The University College of enterprise and administration in Lublin* calls for an academic to participate “in the work of task groups if asked by a colleague, regardless of their position in the organizational structure” (*Kodeks etyki Wyższej Szkoły Przedsiębiorczości i Administracji w Lublinie* 2017, p. 4). In a sense, this category also encompasses calls for “not shirking participation in the works of committee and collegium bodies” (*Kodeks etyki pracowników Politechniki Wrocławskiej* 2016, sect. 1.12).
- *Supporting colleagues.* An academic should “inspire and develop creativity in colleagues [...], support their academic achievements, as

well as provide assistance, using their own knowledge and professional attention” (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego* 2007, §34), also “care for a proper development of the teaching staff and work constantly on enriching and improving their research and teaching skills” (*Akademicki kodeks etyczny Politechniki Śląskiej* 2004, sect. 5). Some codes draw attention to young research staff, calling for an academic teacher to be “a friendly tutor and a teacher [...] to junior research workers” (*Akademicki kodeks etyczny Akademii Górniczo-Hutniczej* 2003, sect. 4), also “a friendly, yet demanding tutor to new academics, who cares about their development” (*Akademicki kodeks etyczny Politechniki Krakowskiej im. Tadeusza Kościuszki* 2003, sect. 10).

- *Obeying the principles of co-authorship.* What this means is a fair division of intellectual property rights between colleagues (*Akademicki kodeks etyczny Politechniki Śląskiej* 2004, sect. 4), including honest principles of assigning co-authorship in a publication (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego* 2007, §35). *The code of ethics for an academic teacher of Pomeranian University in Słupsk* provides the following explanation: “An academic needs to ensure that the recognition of scientific achievements was received by those who are entitled to it. Attributing unjustified co-authorship or attributing authorship of a research work to a different person, accepting waived authorship, and especially demanding that authorship be waived are unacceptable” (*Kodeks etyki nauczyciela akademickiego Akademii Pomorskiej w Słupsku* 2011, §30). As *The academic code of values* of the Jagiellonian University clarifies, this is not only the matter of a “bold adding one’s name to the effects of somebody else’s work”, but also “claiming a co-authorship share which is higher than it actually was” (*Akademicki kodeks wartości* 2003, sect. 8).

Among all the documents, *The ethical code of Karol Adamiecki Academy of Economics in Katowice* (now it operates as the University of Economics in Katowice) relates in the most exhaustive way to the ethical responsibility of academics towards their colleagues. To obtain a wider context and to supplement the above remarks, an extensive fragment of the code is quoted here: “An academic should follow the principles of kindness, loyalty, and friendliness in relations with their colleagues. In professional contacts, demonstrate mutual respect, help with advice and assistance. [...] Through continuous development of their skills and knowledge, an academic aims at improving the professional environment and education quality at

the University of Economics, as well as supports colleagues, especially subordinates, in developing their professional competence. [...] An academic, respecting achievements of their colleagues, when exchanging professional opinions, should use substantive reasoning both in relation to superiors and subordinates. [...] Where wrong action occurs, an academic teacher should react to it. At the same time, academics should not publicly criticize the professional activity of another teacher. It is deplorable to unjustifiably show a colleague in bad light, risking other people losing respect to them, the wronged colleague having their salary reduced, being removed from the office held or passed over for promotion. [...] An academic should adopt the policy of friendly criticism towards other authors' work and conceptions, of self-criticism, also towards own research work. [...] An academic is obliged to be loyal towards their colleagues working at the same department and to refrain from activities that could infringe such loyalty, also after they finish cooperation, as well as react to any cases of violation of ethical principles by their colleagues. [...] An academic must not demand that their colleagues or subordinates violate the code of ethics at the University of Economics' (*Kodeks etyczny Akademii Ekonomicznej im. Karola Adamieckiego w Katowicach* 2009, chapt. 4, sect. 1-6, 8).

### **The students' perspective**

The aim of this section is to analyze how the cooperation between academics is perceived by Polish students. For this purpose, the author used survey answers gathered during the research that has been conducted since 2008 with the use of snowball sampling. In total, more than two thousand respondents have been asked to provide examples – with a short description and justification – of the observed or experienced *unethical and ethical behavior* among academic workers. The survey questionnaire included open questions, the aim of which was to broaden the knowledge about the undertaken issue. The study itself was qualitative as it aimed not so much to establish the frequency of occurrence of individual attitudes, as to classify them, interpret, and evaluate. As a result of the performed survey, the author gained diverse information, regarding its content, on the conduct of academic employees. Most of the data have already been processed and published in scientific journals. The published studies covered the issues of an academic as a purveyor of knowledge (Nowakowski 2010, p. 487-95) or an examiner (Nowakowski 2008, p. 77-84; 2009, p. 103-12), as well as considerations undertaken in wider contexts (e.g., Nowakowski 2007, p. 547-56). The issue of cooperation between academic workers surfaced as a spin-off of the performed research, which does not mean that it was is not important

to the students. On the contrary, although the respondents were not asked directly about it, the issue of cooperation was mentioned by some of them. For better organization, the author first discusses the negative opinions on academics' attitude, then the positive ones.

The problems that are most frequently recalled by the surveyed are: open *challenging the authority* of other academics, speaking about them in a disrespectful manner, making inappropriate remarks about them, making fun in front of students, negative evaluation of their achievements. "Dear Students, there is no point in going to those lectures, it's just a waste of time. This lady has nothing interesting to say" – this is a statement by one of the PhDs who run classes complementing the lectures he was criticizing. This lack of respect for colleagues is bottom-up in the university hierarchy ("a PhD lecturer sneers at his university colleagues and spits before uttering their professor title") or top-down in that hierarchy (a statement by one of the professors: "any little PhD means nothing to me"). One of the respondents noticed that such an attitude leads nowhere and even has a boomerang effect. She illustrated it with an example of a doctor who "questioned other university employees' knowledge. He criticized their work methods, which was negatively received by students. Whenever a student referred to other lecturers' statements, the doctor concerned ironically negated this information. His behavior was so unethical that students did not trust him". Another respondent attempted to summarize the motivations behind this attitude: "A conclusion may be drawn that university teachers have a strong need of proving they are right and highly qualified. To this end, they negate other people's skills and knowledge". Another interviewed person openly declared that she did not like the fact that "the professors involved students in handling their own issues". Yet another student suggested that "comments about their colleagues should not be made in front of students; such remarks should be made directly to the person concerned", which is related to the statement that such behavior *undermines the reliability* of the university: "Even if an academic does not perform well, another lecturer should reprove them in person rather than ridicule them during a lecture. Students have little to say anyway and such behavior leads to an increased dislike of the university" – concluded one of the respondents.

Students also emphasize *an unfriendly attitude towards* the university's non-academic staff. The survey reads: "An academic with a PhD degree made it very clear, especially to the administrative staff, that his position at the university is superior. His approach to the staff was arrogant, and he simply humiliated them". Yet another student's answer relays a story of friendship between two academics, which eventually did not last: "The

two ladies were employed at the same time. They quickly became very close friends. One of them worked in the dean's office, while the other pursued a career. Today the former still holds a MA degree, the latter – a PhD degree. All of the sudden, the doctor is ashamed of the friendship. She starts avoiding her former best friend in corridors. She is upset when the other lady calls her by her first name. She regards herself as somebody superior”.

Another important problem is *impeding research*, especially that conducted by younger researchers. One of the students draws attention to “hindering young academics development and the misappropriation of their achievements by the professors”. Another respondent additionally wrote about “a groundless removal from the department manager position of a person thanks to whom the department has become one of the best developing units in the Institute of Physics”. In one academic institution, a daring diagnosis of the situation was made: “The fight for influence at the university was taking place before students.”.

The surveyed students discussed also cases of putting *unethical pressure* in the environment of academic teachers. Among others, an incident of “a university teacher attempting to intervene in grading a student by another teacher” was mentioned. This situation concerned the apprenticeship supervisor exercising influence on the apprenticeship tutor to lower the student's grade. As the surveyed individual suggested, it resulted from the personal aversion of the staff member to the mentioned student.

However, positive attitudes among university teachers were also mentioned. Students praised the teachers' *friendly approach* to the non-academic staff, especially, administration and maintenance employees. One of the students observed that “the professors who work at the institution treat other people with respect. They do not brag about their position and education. They approach others with respect and there is friendly atmosphere among them”. Another respondent recalls the following to illustrate this type of attitude: “One day, on my way to the university, I saw a professor pick up some papers from the ground and throw them into a garbage. Moreover, he helped the cleaning lady move the garbage bin. That was a nice surprise to me as I had never seen the academics react in such an ordinary human way, help people who are lower in the university hierarchy”. The students also appreciated attempts made by the teachers to *increase the authority of colleagues*, e.g., by “appreciating and referring to other employees' work”.

Another category constituted the cases when an academic *intervened* with their academic colleagues – in the name of properly understood interests of students. One of the respondents mentioned a lecturer harassing

browbeaten female students (groping, suggesting dates). The student wrote: “Our year tutor agreed to help us when we turned to her with the problem. She believed us and not her colleague. She took our side, and, thanks to her, the doctor lost his teaching license”. Another student remembers the reaction of a year tutor who, when informed that a teacher fails his students at tests or exams not because of their lack of knowledge but for some absurd reasons, had a serious conversation with him and emphasized that students are also humans. “They have the same feelings, ambitions, and human dignity as we do, and being a professor does not justify humiliating other people; on the contrary, it gives the opportunity of enriching them” – the respondent quoted the teacher. Undeniably, a situation when an academic takes a student’s side and risks provoking or fuelling a conflict with their colleague is highly uncomfortable. In some cases, however, it seems unavoidable.

### Conclusions

The performed analyses reveal that the deontological documents formulated in the academic environment raise the issue of relations among academic staff, even though less attention is devoted there to this issue than to other issues. Similar things happened in the survey responses of the students, who in accordance with the rule “blood is thicker than water” wrote more about, for example, ethical aspects of how exams or classes are run at the university than the problem of relations between academics. Nevertheless, very concrete words and examples were provided; moreover, those correlate with some theses included in the mentioned codes. This concerns relations prevailing in the academic community, righteous approach towards colleagues, and, primarily, respect for their dignity, which is congruent with the principles expressed in *The academic code of values* adopted by the Senate of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, saying that dignity is not a privilege of a single selected social group. The document reads: “All people: a great and famous professor, a humble assistant, and a student have equal rights to dignity. In the academic community, everybody should be treated with respect: not only a scholar, but also a secretary, a librarian, warehouse crew, or a cleaning lady” (*Akademicki kodeks wartości* 2003, sect. 10).

As far as the codification of the standards related to the issue in question is concerned, the situation of the Polish academic environment is not bad. Regardless of whether academic codes address the issue with just one sentence or a couple of paragraphs, the problem seems to have been noticed. However, if one analyzes the documents from a wider perspective, namely as a collection of not just written-down, but of *actually acknowledged valu-*

es, then the above quoted remarks made by the students should be treated as evidence that some work still needs to be done in this field. How much work? An answer to this question could be provided in further in-depth quantitative and qualitative research. This article is only to indicate the problem. Nevertheless, one very clear conclusion can be drawn from the above analysis: diminishing the authority of one academic by another in front of students, contrary to the intentions of the wrongdoer results not so much in challenging the authority of the humiliated person, but mainly of the humiliating individual. In an even more pessimistic scenario, it contributes to *impairing the authority of the institution*. This truth cannot be learned from the raw text of deontological codes, but from the illustrative narrative of students.

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DEONTOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE ASPECT OF POLAND**

**Keywords:** academic worker, academic community, intra-academic collaboration, academic ethical code, academic deontology.

The author focused on deontological considerations regarding the cooperation between academic workers in the reality of Polish universities. In view of the possible irregularities that threaten this cooperation, it was investigated what solutions to this issue are offered by the ethical codes of universities, but also how this problem is perceived by students, who tend to be critical and keen observers. As far as the codification of norms regarding the issue in question is concerned, the situation in the Polish academic environment is not bad. It seems that the problem has been noticed. However, when those documents are regarded not so much as a collection of written as of actually recognized values, then the quoted student remarks would prove that further work of qualitative and quantitative character needs to be done in this respect. One obvious conclusion is drawn from the conducted analyses. Undermining the authority of one academic worker by another – especially, in the eyes of students – results not only in weakening the authority of the humiliated person, but mainly of the humiliating individual. Moreover, it vitiates the authority of academic workers in general.

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**KWESTIA WSPÓŁPRACY MIĘDZY PRACOWNIKAMI  
AKADEMICKIMI: ROZWAŻANIA DEONTOLOGICZNE W ASPEKCIE  
POLSKIM**

**Słowa kluczowe:** pracownik akademicki, środowisko akademickie, współpraca wewnątrzakademicka, akademicki kodeks etyczny, deontologia akademicka.

Autor przeprowadził rozważania deontologiczne dotyczące współpracy między pracownikami akademickimi w realiach polskich uczelni. W obliczu potencjalnych nieprawidłowości, na jakie narażona jest ta współpraca, przyjrano się, jaką odpowiedź przynoszą w tym względzie uczelniane kodeksy etyczne, ale i jak ten problem jest percypowany przez studentów, którzy bywają krytycznymi i spostrzegawczymi obserwatorami. Jeśli chodzi o kodyfikację norm dotyczących interesującego nas zagadnienia, nie jest w polskim środowisku akademickim źle. Wydaje się, że problem został dostrzeżony. Gdy jednak spojrzeć na

owe dokumenty jako na zbiór nie tyle spisanych, co faktycznie uznawanych wartości, wówczas przytoczone uwagi studentów świadczyłyby, że jest w tym względzie jeszcze praca do wykonania, co wypadaloby pogłębić w badaniach o charakterze ilościowo-jakościowym. Jeden jasny wniosek wynika z przeprowadzonych analiz. Otóż obniżanie autorytetu jednego pracownika akademickiego przez drugiego, zwłaszcza na oczach studentów, skutkuje nie tyle podważeniem autorytetu osoby poniżanej, co przede wszystkim osoby poniżającej, ponadto przyczynia się do nadwyreżenia autorytetu uczonego jako takiego.