

National Policy on Academic Ethics

1. Introduction

Ethical practice is essential in every kind of academic activity. Any violation of basic ethics will affect the value and credibility of the activity being carried out, whether it is teaching or research or administration.

This document lays down broad guidelines and norms to be followed to ensure ethical practices in all academic institutions in the country. Here, “**institution**” includes all recognized universities, colleges and research institutes, as well as government agencies promoting or supporting academic activity. Other academic entities, including high schools, are also encouraged to adopt this policy.

Different areas of academic work, such as work involving human or animal subjects, medicine, engineering etc. may have their own, detailed and specific codes of ethics, but the essence of those guidelines should be aligned with the norms mentioned in this document. These guidelines should be required to be read and accepted by every member of the institution.

2. Policy of ethical conduct

This section states the general principles of ethical conduct which should be followed in different aspects of academia:

(i) Teaching and research -

- ✓ The selection and training of students should involve a just and fair procedure. During tests and interviews there can always be subjective judgements, however they must avoid any considerations unrelated to the student's academic ability.
- ✓ During teaching, the dignity of the classroom/laboratory should always be maintained.
- ✓ Cheating in tests and exams is never acceptable.
- ✓ Through their own actions, mentors must communicate positive ethical values and professionalism to their students. In research projects, the Principal Investigator should monitor the procedures and, if relevant, write down policies for recording data and compiling results. These policies should be made known to all collaborators.
- ✓ Every institution must have fair procedures for proper use and sharing of equipment and facilities.

(ii) Purity of Data -

- ✓ Wherever any kind of experimental or data-driven work is involved, it is essential to present the results correctly and honestly. One must carefully avoid all unacceptable forms of data manipulation, for example adding or subtracting data points at will, editing images to produce a false result, creating images artificially and presenting them as data or using the same figure or table to describe different experiments. The conclusions claimed in a research paper must follow honestly from the data collected.
- ✓ It is understood that data often has to be processed. Details of acceptable/unacceptable processing can be quite complex and will vary from subject to subject. The relevant norms in the given area should be applied in each case.
- ✓ Data fraud should be considered as a very serious offence as it harms the image of the entire community and country. Deliberate falsification of data should attract stringent punishment.

(iii) Publications -

- ✓ The list of authors in research papers, reviews, books, monographs or policy documents should not be manipulated to give undue credit to those who have not contributed (“honorary authorship”), or deny credit to those who have contributed sufficiently. Sometimes a genuine author’s name is suppressed to hide a conflict of interest and the name of a “ghost author” is substituted. Such a practice is unethical for both parties. Also, no one can be made an author of a document without their awareness and consent.
- ✓ In recent years there has been a rise in so-called “predatory journals” which publish papers with minimal or no review, typically for a fee. It is unethical to publish in journals of this nature. However, it is essential to distinguish predatory journals from legitimate open-access journals which may also charge a publication fee. Authors should be cautious of such journals before submitting their work for publishing and authorities should take serious note whenever a candidate for any position or award has publications in proven predatory journals.
- ✓ Plagiarism –
 - ✚ It is the practice of using ideas/words/data from other sources, in a manner that conveys a false impression that they are original. Publishing one’s own results more than once as if they are new, is “self-plagiarism”. Plagiarism is relevant not only for published papers but also project reports, textbooks and grant proposals.
 - ✚ Plagiarism of any kind is unacceptable. The ethical practice is to use only a limited amount of ideas and words by other authors in one’s writing and with proper acknowledgement.
 - ✚ While plagiarism is always wrong, the extent of it can be variable and sometimes it can also be unintentional. Text-matching software can

only alert us that plagiarism might have taken place, but this has to be verified by a qualified human being familiar with the area. Authors are responsible for learning about correct writing practices, and institutes also should impart training in this direction.

- ✚ When plagiarism is detected, it must be corrected by immediately publishing a retraction or revision. Deliberate and/or serious forms of plagiarism should entail strict punishment.

(iv) Safety and Environment -

- ✓ Academic work must not pose a risk or danger to people or the environment.
- ✓ Guidelines and regulations concerning safety must be formulated and carefully followed. This is especially important for handling, storing and disposing of radioactive, toxic or dangerous materials. Clearances and permits/licenses, if required, must be obtained.
- ✓ Wherever relevant, due attention must be given to industrial safety, sustainable development, sharing of intellectual property rights, environmental loading and related issues.

(v) Bias and discrimination -

- ✓ Academic communities are enriched by the presence of people of different ethnicities, genders, religions, castes, tribes, socioeconomic strata, affiliations, backgrounds and sexual orientations. There must be no direct or indirect bias or discrimination against any individual based on the above categories. Members should pro-actively strive to improve the balance of under-represented sections.
- ✓ The nation should aim for the full and equal participation of women in all academic activities. It is everyone's responsibility to support a gender-neutral and supportive environment to achieve this goal. Gender sensitivity should form an essential part of direct ethical training.
- ✓ Sexual misconduct and/or gender-based harassment in the workplace are totally unacceptable. Legal structures and rules regarding how to deal with sexual misconduct must be rigorously followed. There also exist many forms of behavior which may not amount to harassment in the legal sense but constitute gender-based discrimination. Institutions should strive to ensure that their members do not engage in such actions and should pro-actively sensitize their community on these issues.
- ✓ Bullying in the workplace is a form of harassment that usually targets the most vulnerable members. This can include abusive language, frequent use of insults, threatening letters, sabotage of others' work, exploiting juniors to carry out personal errands etc. Such actions are highly unethical and are not acceptable.

(vi) Public interaction and outreach –

- ✓ It is a duty, particularly for publicly funded academics, to communicate the results of their work to the society on a regular basis to educate the public of the fruits of their research and to stimulate the aspirations of young students in schools and colleges.
- ✓ While interacting with the press and members of the public, it is essential for academics to avoid making exaggerated or false claims. Statements made in public should be balanced and professional. As practitioners of rational thinking and scientific temper, academics are encouraged to voice their professional opinions openly and without fear.

(vii) Science administration –

- ✓ High standards of professionalism and objectivity should be shown by leaders and officials of institutions, departments and governmental agencies. This should be manifested in how they handle policy, performance assessment, grants and proposals and hiring.
- ✓ Officials must do their best to ensure that a culture of professionalism permeates the organization. Misuse of power is unethical and must be avoided. When committees are constituted, they must involve members known for their fairness and balance rather than personal loyalties or willingness to be influenced. Committees should be constituted keeping diversity in mind and should have appropriate gender representation.
- ✓ Where policy opinions and decisions are involved, officials must stay clear of commercial, social and political pressures. Conflicts of interest have to be avoided. When potential conflicts are liable to occur, the official must make this known to the concerned colleagues.
- ✓ Infringement of the right to privacy by an academic institution is not ethical. Not only the legal requirements but also more general professional standards for maintaining privacy should apply.

(viii) Role of whistleblowers –

- ✓ Individuals who complain about unethical practices may find themselves in a difficult or sensitive position. A negative impact on their career is one among many possible risks following their actions. It is important to safeguard the interests of the whistleblower against any retaliatory repercussions.
- ✓ On the other hand, deliberately making false accusations is itself highly unethical and must be dealt with.

3. Regulatory Norms

(i) Implementation –

- ✓ It is essential to prevent unethical practices in the first place by suitable ethical training, promoting a culture of professionalism and a clear statement that unethical behavior is not tolerated in the institution. To this end, institutions must create or adopt suitable ethics documents and impart direct ethical training to its staff through lectures and interactive workshops on a regular basis, so that the community is fully aware of these issues.
- ✓ The detailed ethical guidelines for each institution must be made available to all employees and should clearly spell out procedures for grievance redressal at that institution.
- ✓ Despite all this, if ethical violations are found then they must necessarily be addressed on an urgent basis and for this purpose, it is recommended that the institutions should set up a ***standing committee which ensures timely and impartial redressal of all grievances alleged to arise out of policy violations.***

(ii) Handling policy violations –

- ✓ Institutions should employ formal mechanisms and procedures for dealing with allegations of research misconduct, as well as any other kind of misconduct as described in this document, against its staff and students based on the following fundamental principles:

 ***Corrective action –***

If a publication is found to contain plagiarism or manipulated data, the institution must ensure that a correction or retraction is published in the same place as the original paper. On the administrative side, if a decision is found to have been made based on a bias or conflict of interest, then it should be overturned and the process repeated if necessary. In general, every effort must be made to ensure that an unethical action does not succeed in propagating false knowledge or incorrect decisions.

 ***Punitive action –***

This covers not just misconduct involving data and publication, but also harassment, discrimination and other issues covered in this document. Punitive action communicates not just to the violator, but also to society at large, that unethical behavior is unacceptable. The degree of punishment should be carefully calibrated in proportion to the offence. First-time offenders, particularly if the offence is minor or unintentional and the offender is inexperienced, may be let off with a warning. Serious, multiple or repeat offences must be treated with utmost seriousness. Large-scale ethical violations should be met with severe disciplinary action and, if appropriate, dismissal.

Institutions should endorse the following principles when implementing disciplinary procedures:

- The responsibilities of those dealing with the allegation should be clear and understood by all concerned parties.
- Measures should be in place to ensure an impartial and independent investigation and to ensure that interests of those dealing with the allegation do not conflict with these procedures.
- The organization should safeguard the rights to confidentiality of the concerned parties.
- All concerned parties should be informed of the allegation at an appropriate stage in the proceedings.
- Anyone accused of misconduct should have the right to respond.
- A policy should be in place to ensure that no employee who makes an allegation in good faith against another employee shall suffer a detriment, but equally that disciplinary procedures are in place to deal with malicious allegations.
- The allegation should be dealt with in a fair and timely manner.
- Proper records of the proceedings should be kept.
- The outcome should be made known as quickly as possible to all concerned parties.
- Anyone found guilty of misconduct should have the right to an appeal.
- Appropriate sanctions and disciplinary procedures should be in place for cases when the allegation is upheld.
- If appropriate, efforts should be made to restore the reputation of the accused party if the allegation is dismissed.

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This is a draft policy document issued by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government of India. It is intended as a baseline document for scientific and academic institutions to develop their guidelines and implementation programmes for ethical conduct in the work environment.

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