

“Fairplay and Equal Chances at Higher Education Institutions – Diverse Perspectives from Georgia, Germany, Moldova and Ukraine”

What could bring together twenty young professionals from Georgia, Germany, Moldova and Ukraine on the Campus of the University Duisburg-Essen might you ask? A ten-day workshop saw a group of academics and education practitioners engage in heated debates on academic integrity and dishonesty, ethical dilemmas encountered in the process of higher education and focus on honor codes as viable solutions for their respective countries. During several hot July days, we discussed the importance of codes of conduct and the processes associated with them: elaboration, adoption, development of rules of procedure for violations, establishment of honor committees and the essential role communication plans play in the dissemination of relevant information on campus and beyond it.

Funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) within the program “East-West Dialogue”, a dedicated mixed organizing team from the Chemistry Department of the University Duisburg-Essen, the [German-Ukrainian Academic Society](#) and [the Interdisciplinary Corruption Research Network \(ICRN\)](#) (Oksana Huss, Oleksandra Keudel, Dr. Viktoriya Sokolova and Prof. Dr. Matthias Epple) made “[Fairplay and Equal Chances](#) at Higher Education Institutions – Diverse Perspectives from Georgia, Germany, Moldova and Ukraine” workshop possible. The participants, who were highly trained professionals from diverse backgrounds, put together a resolution recognizing the commitments of the respective countries to take effective action against corruption and ensure equal access to high-quality education as a final output of the event.

The comprehensive agenda of the event included a visit to the European Research Council Executive Agency where participants learned about the efforts employed by the institution to improve the situation of European research with highest impact, which currently lags behind that of the United States of America. The discussions also addressed such issues as challenges posed by Brexit for the European academic scene and the prevalence of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) focused research grants in comparison to those for Social Science and Humanities. The selection procedure was also covered in great detail so as to provide examples of existing and functional transparent and fair procedures for research and academic excellence funding.

Another organization which welcomed the participants of the workshop was the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) in Brussels. The speakers focused on the specifics of OLAF’s activity, which is mandated by the European Union to protect its financial interests. They mentioned the stages of an investigation procedure and involved stakeholders stressing the financial, judicial, disciplinary and administrative actions the institution can ascribe in cases of fraud, official misconduct and corruption acts. Although OLAF has no law enforcement power its recommendations ensure that misused or improperly distributed funds are returned to the European Commission. Between topics of intellectual property and support of frontier research in all fields of science and humanities, workshop participants

enjoyed the opportunity to engage in interesting discussions bringing their own background and perspectives into the equation while in the capital of Belgium.

After an official and inspiring welcoming to the University of Duisburg-Essen, the group was immersed in ethics and honor codes related topics learning from already existing examples and practices while catering to each one of the represented country specifics. In the following days the participants learned about explanations granted by behavioral psychologists for reasons why human beings are inclined to lie or cheat in the first place. Using recent research and experiment results, Postdoctoral researcher, Mr. Nils Köbis (University of Amsterdam) talked about human traits that are not always in line with honor or ethics codes. Mrs. Muriel Poisson and Mrs. Katja Hinz, International Institute for Educational Planning-UNESCO experts, shared their inputs on design and effective use of teacher code of conducts using international experience models and examples. They also spoke about ETICO: a web-based resource platform focused on issues of ethics and corruption in education, encouraging the participants to access and share this comprehensive and accessible tool. In addition, the Honor Codes elaborated as an outcome of the USAID Fair Justice Project were identified as valuable guiding material for any institution looking into formalizing its ethical matters and the way these are tackled.

The final days of the workshop were dedicated to a practical role-play exercise developed by Mariia Symonova and Artem Shaipov, where participants acted through a breach of honor code case to better understand the relevant procedures as well as thoughts and actions of all parties involved and the finalization of the [resolution](#) which was completed with concrete case descriptions and recommended solutions for each country (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

Workshop participants were also introduced to some background specifics of the host University and the region where it is located as they met with Prof. Dr. Barbara Buchenau, recently appointed Vice-Rector at the University. Dr. Buchenau proudly mentioned the titles of European Capital of Culture and European Green Capital that Essen received in 2010 and 2017 respectively.

Everyone who attended the workshop is now slightly more acquainted with the topic of Honor codes and their implementation as well as equipped with a concrete list of guidelines, which set the ground for fairer, more ethical and equitable higher education institutions interested in providing a corruption-free environment for their students, academic and administrative staff, regardless of the country they are in.

Ana Moraru (Moldova)

Participant in the “Fairplay and Equal Chances at Higher Education Institutions – Diverse Perspectives from Georgia, Germany, Moldova and Ukraine” workshop

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