Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education

Plagiarism in Higher Education
awareness, threats and consequences

Milica Kavedžić
Deputy Director

Podgorica, 27 February 2024

Plagiarism as a challenge for quality assurance in higher education

- *„Try not to become a man of success, but rather a man of value."* (*Albert Einstein)*

- A diploma itself is not a goal, one should strive to create value - the quality behind a diploma.

- The quality of a higher education system is inseparable from the values of academic integrity that contribute to the improvement of the culture of quality in higher education institutions, as well as among all other stakeholders of the system.

Plagiarism as a challenge for quality assurance in higher education

✓ Promoting academic integrity and combatting academic misconduct, fraud and corruption is not an issue specific to Montenegro. It is a concern to the higher education community worldwide.

✓ Participation in the Bologna Process since 2003 (independent country membership and status confirmed in 2007).

✓ Membership of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) since 2010.

✓ Rome communique (2020) adopted the **definition of academic freedom** as freedom of academic staff and students to engage in research, teaching, learning and communication in and with society without interference nor fear of reprisal.

✓ Montenegro has taken a unique step in passing the Law on Academic Integrity which is both brief and clear. Moreover, within the newest Bologna Progress Implementation Report (to be adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Tirana 2024), it is stated that Montenegro is the unique country that adopted such Law.

Quality Assurance of Higher Education

- The concept of ensuring the quality of higher education in Montenegro is defined by the Law on Higher Education, which recognizes the Agency for Control and Quality Assurance of Higher Education (ACQAHE) as an institution that performs quality assurance tasks in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

- ACQAHE was established by the Government in 2017 and started to operate at full capacity in 2018.

- Legal framework: Law on Higher Education, Law on Academic Integrity, set of standards and by-laws.

- Strategic framework: Strategy for the development of Higher Education in Montenegro (currently in the process of adoption).

QA data overview

- 278 study programs from 8 scientific fields are conducted at 7 institutions: 4 universities and 3 independent faculties
- 1 state university and 3 private universities, 1 state faculty and two private faculties
- The public university conducts 168 study programs at 17 faculties, 1 art academy and 2 research institutes
- 103 study programs are conducted at 25 faculties of 3 private universities
- 7 study programs are conducted at 3 independent faculties
- Average number of enrolled students per year (for the last ten years) in all three cycles: 24,000
- Average number of graduates per year (for the last ten years) in all three cycles: 4,800
- The largest number of all enrolled students for the last ten years begin their studies at a public university: 70% on average.

Quality Assurance of Higher Education

- Quality assurance in accordance with ESG implies the implementation of 3 groups of standards:

1. Standards for internal quality assurance: direct responsibility of higher education institutions.

2. Standards for external quality assurance: direct responsibility of ACQAHE. The external quality assurance procedures include accreditation of study programs, reaccreditation of higher education institutions, accreditation of lifelong-learning programmes, as well as periodic quality assessment.

3. Standards for quality assurance within the Agency: under the direct responsibility of ACQAHE.

- *Mission:* to create the value of higher education in Montenegro equivalent to the European level, through the implementation of European standards and guidelines (ESG), not exclusively for the implementation of standards "per se", but with the aim of solving the problem of mismatch between supply and demand on the labour market.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

- ACQAHE plays a significant role in promoting the values and principles of academic integrity by using the holistic approach.

- Holistic in the sense of accepting academic integrity as a part of external QA, not only when monitoring if the HEI have appropriate mechanisms in place with their internal quality assurance and their strategic objectives, but more importantly to act as a bridge between the Ethics Committee and HEI, to lead by example and to become a moderator of integrity.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

ACQAHE shall become the moderator of integrity on three levels:

- ✓ at the policy-making level,
- ✓ at the external QA level,
- ✓ at the internal QA level.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

At the policy-making level, ACQAHE:

- adopted the Rules for Reaccreditation of HE Institutions (2023) defining sufficient mechanisms to ensure an adequate level of academic integrity and respect among HEIs;
- maintains close relations with the Ethics Committee, acting as a bridge between HEIs and policymakers (round tables in February and November 2023);
- shall continue to collaborate with the Ethics Committee on identifying good practices and promoting excellence;
- shall perform thematic analysis on the implementation of academic integrity principles and shall suggest recommendations for improvement.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

At the external QA level, within the reaccreditation procedures ACQAHE :

• monitors if HEIs' policies support academic integrity and academic freedom, while paying close attention to the possibility of academic fraud;

• monitors if HEIs have policies in place that protect against intolerance of any kind or discrimination directed against students or employees.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

At the internal QA level ACQAHE shall:

- encourage HEIs to incorporate adequate mechanisms and tools, policies, and procedures to advocate integrity, and help them strengthen the culture of academic integrity;

- help educate the academic community and HEIs about external QA expectations regarding academic integrity values.

The role of ACQAHE in relation to ensuring the Academic Integrity in Higher Education

- Originally ESG have foreseen 10 standards for internal QA (self-assesment report).

- Given the fact that Montenegro is the only country within EHEA who has adopted the Law on Academic Integrity, it was the main reason why ACQAHE decided to include additional standard within it's procedures.

- This additional standard was developed within the Project "Quality Education for All" (Council of Europe) and adopted in July 2022.

- By adopting the new supplementary standard ACQAHE started to evaluate the mechanisms of academic integrity and the strengthening of the culture of integrity during the external evaluation procedures of higher education institutions.

Standard 11:
Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

Standard 11: Higher education institutions strive to strengthen the culture of academic integrity of their staff, students and partners. Higher education institutions integrate appropriate mechanisms for detection, monitoring and prevention of all forms of breach of academic integrity and include a risk management approach in self-evaluation procedures and action plans.

Guidelines: Transparency of relevant information, training of all internal actors on the importance of academic integrity, raising awareness, open and clear commitment to the principles and values of academic integrity contribute to the improvement of the quality culture in higher education institutions and among all other actors. Condition monitoring, detection of integrity threats and updated responses to changes must also be included in the institution's self-evaluation process.

The standard consists of 6 criteria that are evaluated according to the level of fulfilment.

Criteria can be: fulfilled (F) or partially fulfilled (PF) or not fulfilled (NF).

All criteria are eliminatory.

Pilot evaluation
Standard 11: Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

Carried out by ACQAHE, the Ethics Committee and the Council of Europe Programme Office in Podgorica from February to September 2023.

Participants:
1. University of Montenegro
2. University of Donja Gorica
3. Mediterranean University
4. Adriatic University (AU) Maritime and Tourism Faculty, Bar
5. AU Faculty of Business Economics and Law, Bar
6. AU Faculty of Traffic, Communications, and Logistics, Budva
7. AU Faculty of Business and Tourism (FBT), Budva
8. AU Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies (FMS), Tivat
9. AU Faculty of International Management in Tourism and Hotel Industry, Miločer
10. AU Faculty of Management, Herceg Novi
11. Faculty of State and European Studies
12. Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature
13. Faculty of Business Management, Bar

Pilot evaluation
Standard 11: Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

HEI	Criteria a The higher education institution has adopted clear integrity policies that are understandable and acceptable to all internal subjects	Criteria b The higher education institution has established appropriate mechanisms and bodies to identify and resolve potential risks, to prevent abuse in the area of academic integrity and to protect individuals	Criteria c As part of the self-evaluation procedure, the higher education institution monitors the compliance of the work with the principles and values of academic integrity	Criteria d The higher education institution educates and trains students and its staff to respect the value of academic integrity and to promote its principles	Criteria e The higher education institution makes an integrity plan in which it identifies risk factors and proposes measures for improvements	Criteria f The higher education institution promotes the principle of zero tolerance in cases of violation of academic principles and values
University of Montenegro	F	F	F	F	F	F
University of Donja Gorica	F	F	F	F	F	F
Mediterranean University	F	F	F	PF	F	F
UA Maritime and Tourism Faculty, Bar	F	F	F	F	F	F
UA Faculty of Business Economics and Law, Bar	F	F	F	F	F	F
UA Faculty of Traffic, Communications, and Logistics, Budva	F	PF	PF	NF	NF	PF
UA Faculty of Business and Tourism, Budva	F	F	F	PF	PF	F
UA Faculty of Mediterranean Business Studies, Tivat	F	F	F	F	F	F

Pilot evaluation
Standard 11: Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

HEI	Criteria a The higher education institution has adopted clear integrity policies that are understandable and acceptable to all internal subjects	Criteria b The higher education institution has established appropriate mechanisms and bodies to identify and resolve potential risks, to prevent abuse in the area of academic integrity and to protect individuals	Criteria c As part of the self-evaluation procedure, the higher education institution monitors the compliance of the work with the principles and values of academic integrity	Criteria d The higher education institution educates and trains students and its staff to respect the value of academic integrity and to promote its principles	Criteria e The higher education institution makes an integrity plan in which it identifies risk factors and proposes measures for improvements	Criteria f The higher education institution promotes the principle of zero tolerance in cases of violation of academic principles and values
UA Faculty of International Management in Tourism and Hotel Industry, Milocer	F	F	PF	F	F	F
UA Faculty of Management, Herceg Novi	F	F	F	F	F	F
Faculty of State and European Studies	F	F	F	F	F	F
Faculty of Montenegrin Language and Literature	F	F	PF	F	F	F
Faculty for Business Management, Bar	NF	PF	NF	NF	NF	NF
TOTAL NUMBER OF FULFILLED CRITERIA OUT OF 13 EVALUATIONS	12	11	9	9	10	11
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTIALLY FULFILLED OUT OF 13	0	2	3	2	1	1
TOTAL NUMBER OF NOT FULFILLED OUT OF 13	1	0	1	2	2	1

Pilot evaluation
Standard 11: Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

- **HEIs fulfilled (or partially fulfilled) almost all the criteria.**

- **Exception:**

- **Faculty of Traffic, Communications, and Logistics, Adriatic University**, didn't fulfil **criteria d** (lack of organised training on academic integrity for students and academic staff), as well as **criteria e** (lack of an integrity plan and the evidence of a risk assessment strategy).

- **Faculty for Business Management Bar** didn't fulfil **criteria a** (no documents or website links were provided as evidence of adoption of the Code of Ethics, and a training plan for staff and students was not implemented), as well as **criteria c** (because questionnaires for students, teachers, researchers, and other relevant subjects were not presented to the evaluators). Non-fulfillment of **criteria d** is similar to criteria a (only Faculty advice and guidance on academic integrity and neither paper documents nor links were provided to the evaluators). HEI didn't fulfill the **criteria e** (since no link to an Integrity Plan was provided.) Non-fulfillment of **criteria f (**lack of any proof that this HEI promotes the principle of zero tolerance in cases of violation of academic principles and values).

Pilot evaluation
Standard 11: Mechanisms of academic integrity and strengthening the culture of integrity

- **Examples of good practice:**

- **All HEIs in Montenegro use plagiarism detection software.**

- **The University of Montenegro (UOM)** contributed to drafting the Law on Academic Integrity and later adopted several documents that define its academic integrity policies such as the Code of Ethics, Integrity Plan, and Development Strategy.

- UOM received a Certificate for Academic Integrity from the International Institute for Research and Action on Academic Fraud and Plagiarism at the University of Geneva (IRFPA) and received a Council of Europe's Certificate of Commendation for best practices in promoting academic integrity (2021).

- All stakeholders of UOM are familiar with the policies in place.

- **The University of Donja Gorica (UDG)** also has a Rulebook on the disciplinary responsibility of UDG students. The process for determining student violations starts at Faculty-level Disciplinary Commissions (at all Faculties) with appeals at the University Disciplinary Commission.

Conclusion

- Almost all HEIs fulfilled the criteria – but in practice we are still facing the isuess.

- The shift in focus– from empasizing the rules to empasizing the Culture of Quality in HE.

- This shift in mentality cannot be achieved overnight - it requires dedication, openness of mind, and willingness to adapt to changes.

- It requires a shift in the paradigm.

„Your beliefs become your thoughts, Your thoughts become your words, Your words become your actions, Your actions become your habits, Your habits become your values, Your values become your destiny."

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Thank you.

www.akokvo.me

milica.kavedzic@akokvo.me