

APPROVED BY  
Decision No. SEN-N-15  
of 17 May 2023  
of Vytautas Magnus University  
Senate  
(Revision of the Decision No.  
SEN-N-3 of the Senate of the  
Vytautas Magnus University of  
28 February 2024)

## CODE OF ETHICS OF VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY

### I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. The Code of Ethics of Vytautas Magnus University (hereinafter referred to as “the University” or “VMU”) (hereinafter referred to as “the Code”) is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the provisions of the Charter of European Universities, the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the laws and other legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania, VMU Statute, VMU Study Regulations, and other internal documents.

2. The Code aims to promote ethical behaviour of the members of the University community, to define its content, to establish a common understanding of ethical principles, to identify typical forms of unethical behaviour, to perform educational and other preventive functions in the field of ethics, to strengthen public trust in the University and its community, and to protect the University’s reputation.

3. The regulatory scope of the Code shall not be limited to academic ethics but shall include general ethics of conduct to the extent deemed relevant in the context of trust in the University and its community.

4. Definition of key terms used in the Code:

**Academic equivalency** shall mean respect for the participants in academic relations, regardless of their pedagogical, scientific or administrative hierarchy.

**Academic relations** shall mean the relations between members of the University’s academic community in the performance of tasks related to research (artistic) activities and dissemination, to studies (teaching and studying), and to activities carried out in the context of studies.

**Academic integrity** shall mean the commitment of the members of the University’s academic community to base research (artistic) activities and dissemination, studies (teaching and studying), and the activities carried out in the context thereof, on the values of openness, trust, respect, and responsibility.

**Discrimination** shall mean the restriction of equal rights and equal opportunities for persons on the grounds of their sex, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, age, social or marital status, religion or belief, opinions or attitudes, sexual orientation or identity, disability, state of health, ethnicity.

**Ethics Commission** shall mean representatives appointed in accordance with the Regulations of the Ethics Commission to carry out educational and preventive activities in the field of ethics for the

University community, to investigate and assess possible ethical violations committed by members of the University community, and to perform other functions assigned to them in the Code and the Regulations of the Ethics Commission.

**Violation of ethics** shall mean any conscious or unconscious conduct or activity contrary to ethical principles, or any failure to act.

**Conflict of interest** shall mean a situation in which a member of the University community, in the performance of his/her official duties or in the performance of an official assignment, must take or participate in the taking of a decision or perform an assignment that are related to his/her private interests.

**Mobbing** shall mean any and all forms of abusive, insulting or other systematic and repeated behaviour of an abusive nature directed against an individual member(s) of the University community that violates the professional, material, social or psychological well-being of the member(s) of the University community or that has a detrimental effect on their mental and physical health, reputation or working capacity.

**Nepotism** shall mean the appointment of persons to certain positions where the main criterion for selecting candidates is family and kinship relations rather than qualifications.

**Good reputation** shall mean the totality of the circumstances attesting to a person's good reputation. Circumstances attesting to good reputation: (1) the person's conduct is consistent with ethical values, principles of academic integrity, intellectual property, and protection; (2) the person has not been convicted of a criminal offence by a final court judgement; (3) the person has not been dismissed from his/her job or current post for gross violation of work-related or other duties; (4) the person does not abuse alcohol or use narcotic, psychotropic, or toxic substances; and 5) the person is not a member of an organisation banned by law.

**Reporting person** shall mean a person who submits a written report to the Ethics Commission in accordance with the procedure established in its Regulations. A report may be submitted by a person directly related or not related to a possible violation of the Code of Ethics.

**Report** shall mean the written submission of information about potentially unethical conduct in accordance with the procedure laid down in the Regulations of the Ethics Commission.

**Harassment** shall mean undesirable behaviour that is intended to violate or violates a person's dignity and/or is intended to create or creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or offensive environment.

**Sexual harassment** shall mean undesirable verbal, written and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature towards a person when such conduct has the purpose and/or effect of violating a person's dignity, in particular by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, and/or offensive environment.

**Students** shall mean persons studying in study programmes or in doctoral studies, including persons who have come to study under study exchange programmes, persons who have entered into a contract to defend their dissertation externally, and unclassified students, i.e., persons studying in non-formal adult education programmes or individual study courses.

**University community** shall mean the academic community of the University, the staff of the administrative and non-academic units, alumni, the communities of the institutions established by the University, and other persons who actively participate in the activities of the University.

**University academic community** shall mean students, teachers, research workers, other researchers, professors emeriti, rectors emeriti, associate teachers or researchers, and other persons who are directly involved in study, research, and artistic activities.

5. The order in which ethical principles and their violations are presented in the Code shall not affect the importance of the principle or violation.

6. The lists of forms of unethical conduct defined in the Code are not exhaustive but are intended to define typical cases of violations of ethical principles.

7. The Code shall be the primary, but not the only, document regulating the ethical conduct of members of the University community. The ecosystem of ethical conduct at the University shall be ensured by integrating other relevant external and internal documents, *inter alia*, VMU Provisions for Assessment of Research Conformity with the Fundamental Principles of Research Professionalism and Ethics, VMU Provisions for Prevention of Plagiarism in Student Written Works, VMU Disability Policy “University of Inclusive Opportunities”, VMU Gender Equality Plan, VMU Description of Procedure for Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence, the Guidelines for Publication Ethics of the Lithuanian University Rectors’ Conference (hereinafter referred to as the “LURC”), the Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Harassment approved by the LURC, and the relevant legal acts, decisions, recommendations, etc. of the Office of the Ombudsperson for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the “RL”), the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson of the RL, and other institutions.

8. The Code shall apply equally to all members of the University community unless otherwise stated in individual sections of the Code. The Code may apply to former members of the University community in relation to continuing awards (qualification degrees, scientific degrees, academic titles, etc.) conferred on them by the University as well as in relation to their research output that indicates affiliation to the University.

## II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

9. **The principle of academic freedom and responsibility.** The members of the University community shall support and foster freedom of belief and expression; the tradition of critical thinking; an atmosphere of academic equivalency; opportunities for open expression of views on the preparation, implementation and administration of the pedagogical, research, artistic and study process; freedom to develop research and artistic activities following directions and methodologies that seem necessary for the researchers themselves; freedom to formulate, refine and publish criteria of scientific truth in their fields of research; they shall pursue socially responsible and high-quality results-oriented research, shall assume personal responsibility for fostering academic culture, and shall avoid unjustified restrictions on students’ freedom to study. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of academic freedom and responsibility:

9.1. disrespect for and intolerance of the opinions of other members of the community;

9.2. disregard or deliberate limitation of the right of community members to express and defend their opinions when making decisions at the University;

9.3. disregard of the right to respond to criticism or accusation;

9.4. conscious spread of false and divisive information, knowledge, data, etc.

9.5. unjustified and disrespectful criticism of the research being done or already carried out and the methodology chosen;

9.6. deliberate obviously biased interpretation of data;

9.7. conduct or initiation of research or artistic activities, knowing or foreseeing that such research or artistic activities cause or are likely to cause harm, taking into account the interests of vulnerable groups in society and the principles of bioethics and animal welfare and protection;

9.8. conduct of research or artistic activity without having assessed and approved its compliance with research ethics, where such assessment and approval is required;

9.9. obvious and publicly expressed disrespect for the chosen or represented specialty or area of science;

9.10. lack of teachers' and researchers' competence and demonstrated unwillingness to develop professionally, which clearly undermines the University's reputation and fails to meet the expectations of stakeholders (students, project partners, etc.).

**10. The principle of ethical relationships.** The members of the University community shall advocate and foster mutual respect, an atmosphere of collegiality and equality, tolerance and respect for human dignity and human diversity, respect for human rights, non-discrimination, impartiality, support for equal rights and opportunities, integrity, and fair competition. The University shall not tolerate any discrimination and shall provide and foster equal opportunities for all members of the community regardless of their gender, race, nationality, citizenship, language, origin, background, age, social or marital status, religion or belief, opinions or attitudes, sexual orientation and identity, disability, state of health, or ethnicity. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of ethical relationships:

10.1. discrimination against a member of the University community;

10.2. humiliation of honour and dignity of members of the University community, aggressive, abusive or offensive actions towards a person;

10.3. actions that have features of harassment or sexual harassment;

10.4. mobbing towards a member of the University community;

10.5. nepotism in the activities of the University;

10.6. use of persons for selfish motives (due to subordination or other social circumstances);

10.7. assignment of tasks or instructions that are inadequate and disproportionate to the person's competence and status;

10.8. one-sided familiarity and/or patronage, manipulation of relationships with those in authority for personal gain;

10.9. initiation and incitement of conflicts, gossip, intrigues, slander, insults among members of the University community, involvement of the community members in these processes;

10.10. expressed disparagement of the abilities, views or personal qualities of a member of the University community that goes beyond the limits of academic discussion;

10.11. a demand for remuneration of any kind when such a demand is associated with (non-)making of decisions, as well as the giving and receiving of such remuneration;

10.12. pressure on another member of the University community in order to receive an undeserved evaluation or to conceal academic dishonesty;

10.13. a desire to stand out undeservedly or to claim exclusive rights;

10.14. competition between members of the University community in violation of the requirements of fair treatment;

10.15. physical touching of another person without a necessary reason or without his/her consent.

**11. The principle of responsibility with regard to the University community.** The members of the University community shall advocate and foster respect for their community, academic solidarity and collegiality, loyalty to the University's mission and values, responsible use of the University's

material and financial resources, and transparency of the University's processes, and, in the event of problems, first of all, shall address them within the University community. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of responsibility with regard to the University community:

11.1. demeaning of the name of the University and its community, damage to their reputation both when performing their direct work functions and when behaving in a corresponding manner in a public (physical and virtual) environment unrelated to work functions;

11.2. public consideration of the University's problems without exhausting all opportunities to address them within the University community and with the intention of damaging the University's reputation;

11.3. involvement in a conflict of interest when entering into agreements, contracts or other transactions and when participating in other activities related to the University;

11.4. conclusion of agreements, contracts or other transactions with persons outside the University community who do not meet the requirements of good reputation because of the source of funding, the reputation of partners or collaborators, the nature of the activity, the result to be achieved, or for other reasons;

11.5. deliberate spread of false information to the University community;

11.6. deliberate concealment of information intended for and/or important to the members of the community or instructing other members of the community not to disclose such information;

11.7. deliberate non-disclosure or concealment of information about possible violations of the Code;

11.8. submission of an unfounded report against another member of the community, when the unfoundedness of the report is obviously known (manipulation of the process of consideration of ethical violations), with the intent to harm, insult, slander or otherwise diminish the image of another member of the community and to degrade his/her honour and dignity, or by deliberately acting against the correct and timely examination of the report;

11.9. obvious and deliberate abuse of rights and procedures provided for in the University's legal acts;

11.10. use of any resources of the University for biased political activities, agitation, private business, or any other interests not related to the University;

11.11. initiation and/or implementation of projects, events, or other activities that conflict with the values of the University;

11.12. damage to or destruction of the University property and waste of the University resources as a result of malice or negligence;

11.13. non-transparent and unfair recruitment of staff that is contrary to the laws of the Republic of Lithuania and the legal acts of the University, including, but not limited to, the organisation of a public competition for the recruitment of academic and non-academic staff, the assessment of candidates, or the assessment and certification of the qualifications of staff;

11.14. disclosure or public consideration of personal or official information considered confidential in accordance with laws or the University's legal acts, as well as making it available to other persons, unless such information is made public in accordance with the procedures established by the University.

### **III. ETHICS OF PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITIES**

**12. Principle of ethical relations between teachers and students.** Teachers and students shall base their relationship on cooperation, mutual respect, goodwill and transparency, avoiding private commitments or ambiguity, i.e., anything that may give rise to a conflict of interest. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of ethical relations between teachers and students:

12.1. a student's or a teacher's pursuit of a private (e.g., intimate, romantic, etc.) relationship with a teacher or a student, respectively, in the context of the taught study course, supervision of research, creative project or other academic relations;

12.2. the direct or indirect (through other persons) solicitation and/or acceptance of monetary remuneration, gifts or favours from students, or the offering and/or giving of such remuneration, gifts or favours to teachers or administrative staff with the purpose of improperly influencing the study process (changing a student's grades, creating exceptional conditions, etc.);

12.3. assumption of the role of a teacher (including the assessment of achievements and supervision of written works) in relation to a family member, a close friend (when having direct, close connections, relationships), or a business partner in cases where there is an opportunity to avoid such a role;

12.4. disclosure of personal information about a student or a teacher or its use for both study and research purposes without the written consent of a student or a teacher;

12.5. public disclosure and dissemination of information about a teacher or a student, their behaviour, the study course being taught, or other content related to the study process when the information provided is partial or distorted and does not reflect the true situation;

12.6. leaking of comments or remarks on a student's written work that has not been or is not being submitted for public defence provided that this is not related to the planned procedures for the preparation or consideration of the work;

12.7. failure to provide students with individual needs arising from disabilities with the most appropriate study conditions to meet their needs, even though such opportunities exist at the University;

12.8. dissemination of materials, information, data or other content related to teaching and/or the preparation of written or creative works in violation of the copyright of a teacher, a student, and the University;

12.9. consumption of cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, drugs or any psychotropic substances (except for prescription medicine) as well as being intoxicated by them or the imitation of such processes (e.g., smoking electronic cigarettes, drinking non-alcoholic beer, etc.) during educational activities.

**13. The principle of ethical assessment of student achievements.** Teachers shall assess students' achievements in a fair and honest manner, taking into account the intended outcomes of the course being delivered and research or study work (or part of it), and respecting confidentiality requirements. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of ethical assessment of student achievements:

13.1. dishonest behaviour of teachers and members of the University community involved in the pedagogical process in the process of assessing students' achievements (direct assistance in the process of copying off, falsification of the results of examinations, falsification of data, etc.);

13.2. ignoring and tolerating cases of students' academic dishonesty (plagiarism, copying off or allowing someone else to copy off, falsification of assignment results, using prohibited aid during assignments, using someone else to do an assignment for oneself or doing an assignment for another student, falsification of data, presentation of another's written work or artwork (or part thereof) as

one's own, earning money by preparing written works or artworks for other students, violation of the copyright of the author(s) of the work, etc.) or deliberately creating conditions for such cases in the process of assessing students' achievements;

13.3. requirement of personal information from a student and using such information in the assessment of achievements;

13.4. linking of the assessment of students' achievements to academic or non-academic services, or to students' participation in activities unrelated to the study course being taught or the written work being supervised (e.g., social, political, or other activities);

13.5. assessment of students' achievements on the basis of personal, ideological, or political attitudes, family ties or other factors that make the objectivity of the assessment questionable rather than on the basis of the quality of the work submitted or a student's academic performance;

13.6. assessment of students' achievements without apparently taking into account the level of learning outcomes they have achieved;

13.7. disclosure of information relating to the assessment of students' academic achievements to third parties without specific grounds (without a student's consent, legal basis, benefit to a student);

13.8. public discussion of students' academic failures, except for those cases when students' appeals or other academic issues are examined in accordance with the University's procedures, the objective resolution of which clearly justifies the discussion of the aforementioned failures;

13.9. deliberate or unjustified failure to provide appropriate conditions during assignments for students with individual needs arising from disabilities;

13.10. deliberate misleading of students when informing them about forms, methods, and tasks used to assess their achievements.

#### **IV. ETHICS OF RESEARCH AND ARTISTIC ACTIVITIES AND DISSEMINATION**

##### **14. The principle of academic integrity in research and artistic activities and dissemination.**

Research and artistic activities and dissemination shall be based on integrity, objectivity and validity of research, and the researcher shall avoid misleading colleagues and the public about his/her own and other researchers' competence or research findings. Research and artistic activities and dissemination must not cause harm to people, communities, the environment, or wildlife. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of academic integrity in research and artistic activities:

14.1. presentation of someone else's work or part of it (including a work or part of a work created by artificial intelligence) as one's own without properly providing citation marks (for example, quotation marks and/or any other form of distinction from the entire text) and/or without indicating the sources on which it is based (plagiarism); fabrication of data, experiments or other significant information in scientific research or related processes and documents, as well as deliberately incorrect citation by presenting statements or thoughts that do not exist in the source (fabrication);

14.2. withholding of the research data or findings (e.g., by reducing the amount of data, omitting data inconsistent with the desired research conclusions, omitting results contrary to the research hypothesis, etc.) or manipulation of the research data or findings (e.g., by agreeing with the respondents on certain answers to questions in the survey) in order to create a misleading impression (falsification);

14.3. use of research or artistic data, original methodologies and/or methods, process details or results for the purposes of research and artistic activities and dissemination without obtaining the consent of co-authors or participants when informed consent is mandatory;

14.4. granting of unjustified co-authorship or not specifying co-authorship, specifying a fake (fictitious) author, as well as unjustified pursuit of co-authorship (gifted, exchange-based, fabricated, coercive, or shadow authorship);

14.5. falsification of information in the descriptions of one's life and research and artistic activities, certificates, reports and other documents relevant to research and artistic activities and dissemination;

14.6. incorrect indication of the institution with which the author of the research or artwork affiliates or omission of information about the institution, deliberate omission or concealment of the intellectual or financial contribution of persons who have assisted in research and artistic activities;

14.7. presentation of misleading information about the research methodology, authorship of the work, contribution to research or artwork, sources of funding, conflicts of interest, or omission of relevant information where necessary;

14.8. falsification or deliberate damage and/or destruction of research data, computer programs, samples of empirical material, artworks, and manuscripts;

14.9. partiality and/or pursuit of personal gain when reviewing study, research and artistic works or projects and evaluating applications thereof;

14.10. deliberately irresponsible use of artificial intelligence in scientific research.

## V. ETHICS OF STUDIES

**15. The principle of academic integrity in studies.** In the course of their studies, students shall be guided by the principle of academic integrity, shall contribute to the promotion of a high-quality study process, shall, by signing the Study Contract, agree to the principles set out in the University's Student Integrity Declaration and the Code, and shall undertake to comply with these principles for the entire term of the Study Contract. The following shall be considered as violations of the principle of academic integrity in studies:

15.1. actions that violate the principle of academic integrity in research activities established in the Code, equating any activity of a creative and/or exploratory nature during studies and assignments to research activities;

15.2. copying off or allowing to copy off, prompting, the use of cheat sheets and other prohibited means or any other dishonest behaviour during the assessment of academic achievements, as well as ignoring and/or tolerating of such behaviour;

15.3. pressure on fellow students or other persons to allow copying off during the assessment of study achievements or to share their written work with the aim of plagiarising it;

15.4. pressure on a teacher or a member of the administration to change the evaluation of learning achievements and/or the criteria for their assessment;

15.5. using another person or participating on behalf of another person in the assessment of learning achievements;

15.6. acquisition of another person's written work or artwork (or parts thereof) for consideration and presentation of such work as one's own;

15.7. earning money or benefiting from carrying out assessment-related tasks for other persons that affect the evaluation;



15.8. submission of the same or very similar written work or artwork in multiple study courses, unless such submission is approved by course teachers;

15.9. falsification of study-related information and data (teachers' signatures, assessment-related tasks, evaluations, certificates, etc.);

15.10. making use of group work or collective creative practices (e.g., making a clearly lesser contribution, demanding or exerting pressure in order to get the same evaluation as other group members).

## VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE

16. The supervision and control of the implementation of the Code shall be carried out by the Ethics Commission, which shall be formed and operate in accordance with the Regulations of the Ethics Commission approved by the University Senate.

17. The Ethics Commission shall cooperate in its activities with other institutions in Lithuania that supervise and promote ethics, *inter alia*, the Office of the Ombudsman for Academic Ethics and Procedures of the Republic of Lithuania, the Office of the Ombudsman for Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Lithuania, the Office of the Inspector of Journalists' Ethics, and the Chief Official Ethics Commission. The Ethics Commission may, in individual cases, recommend that the reporting person contact these or other institutions directly.

18. The investigation of violations related to sexual harassment and gender-based violence shall be governed by VMU Regulations of the Ethics Commission and the Description of Procedure for Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence, which shall take precedence in the event of any conflict between the documents.

19. The area of activities of the Ethics Commission shall include carrying out educational and preventive activities in the field of ethics in the University's activities for the University community, making recommendations and suggestions for improving the Code and other internal documents related to ethics at the University, making recommendations for giving incentives or awards to the members of the University community for fostering ethics in the University's activities, and investigating possible violations of the Code.

20. Having established a violation of the Code, the Ethics Commission in all cases shall assess its substantiality (seriousness) taking into account the impact, damage, extent, repetitiveness, and other features of the violation. The substantiality of the violation and the recommended sanctions shall correlate with each other.

21. Upon establishing a violation of the Code, the Ethics Commission shall adopt a decision stating the violation and shall recommend to the relevant management bodies of the University (the Council, the Senate, the Rector) or to other institutions or officials of the University, one or more sanctions falling within the competence of the respective bodies, *inter alia* (the list of which shall not be exhaustive):

21.1. ordering to stop unethical behaviour;

21.2. issueing a personal warning (given only to the offender);

21.3. issueing a public impersonal warning;

21.4. expelling from the University with the right to return to studies not earlier than a specified period of time after the imposition of the sanction; the period of time shall be determined by assessing the substantiality (seriousness) of the violation and it shall not exceed 10 years;

- 21.5. initiating the procedure for removal from office;
- 21.6. initiating the procedure for revocation of a qualification degree, scientific degree or academic title;
- 21.7. initiating the procedure for terminating an employment contract without notice due to the fault of the employee;
- 21.8. organising an extraordinary evaluation of a teacher or researcher.
- 22. The Ethics Commission shall not impose sanctions on its own initiative.

## **VII. FINAL PROVISIONS**

- 23. Every member of the University community who commences employment, office or studies at the University shall be informed that he/she is obliged to become familiar and comply with the Code.
  - 24. The Code shall be made publicly available on the University's website in Lithuanian and English.
  - 25. The Code shall be approved, amended, and repealed by decision of the University Senate.
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