

Raising the Level of Legal Culture in Society: Regulatory Framework for Academic Integrity*

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[10.15408/jch.v13i2.47003](https://doi.org/10.15408/jch.v13i2.47003)

Abstract

This article aims to analyze academic integrity both as a legal category and as an indicator of legal culture, highlighting its essential role in shaping the quality and morality of higher education. It argues that the implementation and internalization of academic integrity must be prioritized by all actors within the educational system to ensure the sustainable development of the Russian scientific and academic environment. Violations of academic integrity—such as plagiarism, data falsification, or dishonest assessment practices—pose significant risks to the educational process, leading to diminished public trust, intellectual decline, and the normalization of deviant academic behavior. To achieve its objectives, the study employs a qualitative research methodology, using a normative and socio-legal approach. Data are collected through documentary analysis of Russian legislative frameworks, academic codes of conduct, and relevant legal documents regulating education. In addition, in-depth interviews with legal scholars and education policy experts provide interpretative insights into the relationship between law, ethics, and academic practice. The qualitative analysis allows the study to explore not only the normative aspects of academic integrity but also the underlying cultural and institutional factors affecting its enforcement. The findings reveal that the absence of a precise legal definition of academic integrity hinders consistent interpretation and enforcement. Thus, effective regulation should be grounded in well-formulated legislative provisions aligned with international legal drafting standards. Ultimately, the article identifies the key features of academic integrity as a legal category and underscores its pivotal function as both the moral foundation and legal instrument for advancing education quality and social development.

Keywords: Higher Education; Academic Culture; Students; Institutions; Academic Integrity Violations

* Received: January 19, 2025, revised: March 21, 2025, accepted: June 2, 2025, Published: June 30, 2025.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The economic development and scientific-technological progress of any country have always been grounded in a scientific foundation. Education remains the cornerstone of the intellectual, cultural, spiritual, social, and economic development of society and the state ([Smolyaninova & Ivanova, 2024](#)). Currently, higher education must provide students with in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional competencies in their chosen field; foster the creative development of the individual; and cultivate an educated and highly moral person capable of realizing their potential in life and treating the world around them with respect and care.

Around the world, there are instances of pseudoscientific research and doctrines that distort educational systems. A key reason for this phenomenon is the failure to observe, or even understand, the norms of academic integrity. This hurts educational outcomes, normalizes deviant behavior, and reduces the intellectual and moral potential of society. Every member of the academic community, including students, must recognize that both individual and national success requires persistent and dedicated effort, grounded in a high standard of education, science, and academic integrity. Implementing practices that uphold the principles and norms of academic integrity and counteract violations thereof is an essential component of higher education in Russia. However, current university practices indicate that institutions of higher education often fail to uphold this imperative in their activities, allowing academic dishonesty or ignoring academic misconduct by students, faculty, or administrative staff. Academic dishonesty undermines the value of education, contributes to the falsification of higher education, and reduces its contribution to socioeconomic development. ([Babina & Utusikov, 2024](#); [Levin, 2019](#); [Shichkin et al., 2024](#))

International efforts to institutionalize the principles of academic integrity began several decades ago. In October 1992, the Center for Academic Integrity was established in the United States to combat fraud, plagiarism, and academic misconduct in higher education ([Tucci & Galwankar, 2011](#)). In 2010, the Center officially gained international status as the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI). The organization operates across six continents and in more than 20 countries. The ICAI membership includes institutions, academic communities, faculty, administrators, students, and staff from member organizations. The ICAI offers assessment services, resources, and consultations to its members and holds annual international conferences on academic integrity. ([Bagraim et al., 2014](#); [Fialkovskaya, 2024](#))

In Europe, under the auspices of UNESCO, an international conference on academic integrity was held in 2004, resulting in the adoption of the Bucharest Declaration on Ethical Values and Principles of Higher Education in the European Region. The Declaration emphasizes that the values and ethical standards upheld and promoted by modern universities have a decisive impact not only on the academic, cultural, and political development of scholars, students, and staff but also help shape the moral framework of society. ([Mahmud & Bretag, 2013](#))

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars ([Byvaltsev et al., 2017](#); [Kalinin, 2024](#)) argue that for the modern educational community, the term “academic integrity” is relatively new, which accounts for the variety of its translations from foreign languages. The term consists of two components: academic and integrity. The latter can be translated as honesty, decency, wholeness, or moral purity.

The classical definition of academic integrity is grounded in the core ethical qualities expected of future professionals: conscience, responsibility, courage, fairness, respect, decency, trust, and moral fortitude ([Wong et al., 2016](#)). Scholars emphasize that, given the challenges facing the modern academic community and the increasing prevalence of unethical behavior, it is vital to foster academic integrity among all participants in the educational process. ([Aipova et al., 2023](#); [Zakharov & Salnikov, 2018](#))

According to G.Z. Efimova, the origins of modern academic integrity date back to the mid-20th century, when an extensive sociological survey initiated by several leading U.S. research institutions showed that 75.5% of surveyed students systematically used technical means to cheat during exams and other final assessments. Following this high-profile revelation, most U.S. universities began to declare conscientious engagement with the educational process as a core expectation for students. ([Andreeva, 2023](#); [Efimova, 2013](#))

M.A. Rozhkova considers academic integrity a multifaceted concept that determines a system of legal and moral-ethical principles and rules governing the pursuit and delivery of higher education. These principles ensure the high quality of academic and research outcomes ([Rozhkova, 2021](#)). According to ([Neborsky, 2024](#); [Soloveva & Zamkovaya, 2024](#)), academic integrity essentially means intellectual honesty, i.e., ethical conduct in the use of information serving as the basis for drawing conclusions, conducting research, and engaging in other knowledge-seeking activities. In this sense, academic integrity as a social phenomenon is a moral and ethical category, and its introduction into legal

discourse does not eliminate a subjective judgment about what constitutes honesty ([Alekseeva & Danilov, 2020](#)). This indicates that the legal regulation of academic integrity is a complex process, as it is challenging to enshrine behavioral rules in normative acts without relying on evaluative concepts ([Bogustov, 2021](#); [Gazizova et al., 2025](#)).

Scholars claim that the characteristics defining academic integrity are as follows: A complex nature (a specific combination of moral and legal foundations reflected in a set of ethical principles and legally established rules) ([Macfarlane et al., 2014](#)); The presence of a specific subject (participants in the educational process, including students; teaching, academic, and research staff; parents of students; individuals engaged in educational activities; and other persons involved in the educational process as determined by the institution) ([Boldysheva, 2024](#); [Marsden et al., 2005](#)); A clearly defined scope of application within the processes of learning, teaching, and conducting scientific (or creative) activities ([Akhmetshin et al., 2025](#); [Eremenko, 2021](#)); A particular purpose, namely, to ensure trust in the outcomes of education and/or scientific (creative) achievements. ([Dremova & Bekova, 2021](#))

In the current discourse on this issue, the concept of academic integrity is often contrasted with academic dishonesty, which manifests primarily in the following types of activities: Data fabrication – the artificial creation of fictitious data or facts intended to support claims made by the author in a scientific work ([Dzhaneryan et al., 2025](#); [Saltykova & Sulima, 2019](#)); Data falsification – the deliberate alteration or modification of existing data to confirm specific scientific conclusions of the researcher ([Gubanov et al., 2021](#)); Bribery in the academic sphere – the illegal solicitation of material or financial assets from an individual in exchange for academic favors (e.g., a bribe for an exam or a written assignment) ([Gubanov et al., 2021](#); [Krainova et al., 2024](#)); Academic sabotage – actions by a researcher aimed at obtaining illegitimate academic advantages or at diminishing such advantages for other members of the academic group or community. Examples include deliberately delaying the peer review process to exploit another author's results for personal gain, or destroying data belonging to rival researchers ([Shmeleva, 2015](#)); Faculty dishonesty – abuse of authority by members of the academic staff to exert pressure or coercion on colleagues or students, often for personal or professional benefit ([Bezsmertnaya, 2016](#)); Academic misconduct – behavior in which students, while completing academic tasks, use unauthorized materials, information, or other aids for personal gain. The most common form is cheating, including the use of crib notes, unauthorized collaboration to gain mutual advantage, or attempts to illegally access exam questions in advance ([Iogolevich & Lobodenko, 2020](#)); Plagiarism is a form of

academic behavior characterized by the following five cumulative features: (1) an individual uses the words, ideas, or results of another's work, (2) which belong to a specific source or person, (3) without providing a reference to the source, (4) in a context where such use yields a benefit, recognition, or advantage, (5) where the advantage is not necessarily monetary ([Serbin & Popova, 2022](#); [Vlasova, 2024](#)). The article aims to analyze academic integrity as a legal category and as an indicator of the legal culture of society.

C. METHODS

The article employs a comprehensive methodological approach that embraces a literature review to explore academic integrity as a legal category. Literature sources were searched using Russian and international databases. The collected material was subjected to qualitative analysis to determine the relationship between academic integrity and the legal culture of society. The analysis of scientific literature also allows us to identify the key features of academic integrity as a legal category.

In line with the stated research objective, an attempt was made to assess the significance of various characteristics of academic integrity as a legal category. To attain this end, the expert survey method was employed, involving a sample of 43 experts. The selection criterion for the expert group was the presence of at least three peer-reviewed publications on the research topic. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to the experts via email. A total of 40 respondents agreed to take part. Through email correspondence, they evaluated various features of academic integrity as a legal category, ranked and weighted them, and provided corresponding justifications.

D. RESULTS

An analysis of the scientific literature showed the following relationship between academic integrity and the legal culture of society (Table 1).

Table 1. The relationship between academic integrity and the legal culture of society

No.	Academic integrity...	Source
1	... is an integral part of legal culture , encompassing the general academic culture of higher education, the individual's internal culture, and spiritual culture	Mahmud and Bretag (2013)
2	... defines generally accepted standards for conducting educational and scientific activities, creating an environment of zero tolerance for violations of copyright and academic ethics	Alekseeva and Danilov (2020)
3	... has a systemic character in relation to norms, values, rules, traditions of academic writing, and moral and legal responsibility for the consequences of one's research	Bogustov (2021)

4	... represents a set of ethical principles and legal norms governing educational (educational and creative) and scientific (scientific and technical) activities, which are mandatory for all participants (actors) of such activities and are aimed at ensuring trust in the outcomes of education, creativity, and scientific research	Macfarlane et al. (2014)
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The analysis of publications and the results of the expert survey allow us to identify the key characteristics of academic integrity as a legal category and to determine their significance (Table 2).

Table 2. Key characteristics of academic integrity as a legal category

No.	Characteristics of academic integrity	Ranking	Impact
1	Legally significant behavior of actors subject to legal assessment	1	0.25
2	Normative requirements as a standard for lawful/unlawful behavior	2	0.20
3	Scope of application of normative requirements for academic integrity	3	0.17
4	Actors (natural and legal persons) whose behavior (activities) is subject to legal assessment	4	0.14
5	Modes of conduct of a specific obligated subject	5	0.12
6	Final product of the activity is subject to legal assessment	5	0.12

Source: original research and results of the expert survey; the concordance coefficient $W = 0.67$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong agreement among expert opinions.

E. DISCUSSION

As the research results indicate (Table 1), the category of academic integrity is complex, and its relationship with the legal culture of society is indirect. Therefore, recognizing and studying the potential internal and external factors (moral-cultural, institutional, educational, and formative) that contribute to academic dishonesty provides an opportunity to develop and implement effective policies for promoting academic integrity at both national and international levels. For example, a low level of civic culture leads to academic dishonesty, while insufficient levels of information literacy and basic skills in working with information often result in students violating academic integrity standards ([Abdullayev et al., 2024](#); [Kurgansky et al., 2024](#)). This becomes a systemic and large-scale issue, threatening the development of a society tolerant of plagiarism. ([Shmeleva, 2015](#))

Unfortunately, the experience of academic dishonesty that students often acquire in Russian universities serves as initial training for future violations of the law. Manifestations of academic dishonesty undermine the education system, turning the educational process into a mere imitation. Dishonesty in education negatively affects both society and individuals, creating a system where success by honest means is impossible ([Dremova & Bekova, 2021](#)). Even the best, intellectually independent students may become disoriented when they observe that success in learning and research is more easily achieved through deceit than

through honest work. ([Iogolevich & Lobodenko, 2020](#); [Kryucheva & Tolstoukhova, 2024](#))

No provision on academic integrity as a mandatory component of the education quality assurance system in Federal Law No. 273-FZ of December 29, 2012 “On Education in the Russian Federation” ([State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, 2012](#)) contributes to the continued violations of academic integrity in educational institutions, as well as to the lack of a developed academic culture characterized by zero tolerance toward academic dishonesty ([Zhilkibaeva et al., 2024](#)). The adoption of academic integrity codes in higher education institutions and the establishment of academic responsibility for violations (for example, for academic degree candidates according to the Regulation on the Award of Academic Degrees approved by Decree No. 842 of September 24, 2013 of the Government of the Russian Federation ([Government of the Russian Federation, 2013](#))) does not guarantee the enforcement of such measures. In many cases, when violations of academic integrity are identified in higher education institutions, no action is taken. On the websites of such institutions (even those ranked among the world's top universities), only general statements about academic integrity policies are published. At the same time, information about specific violations and investigations is absent. ([Efimova, 2013](#))

We believe that the legal regulation of academic integrity can contribute to enhancing the value orientation of educational and scientific activities. However, such progress is only possible if the legal provisions are given a sound legal form. Within the Romano-Germanic legal tradition, legal drafting techniques aim at ensuring the highest possible quality of normative legal acts (especially laws), which are the primary source of law. At the core of legal drafting lies legislative technique, including appropriate tools and rules. Legal terms, legal constructs, and methods of presenting legal norms are used in the lawmaking process to ensure the clarity, precision, consistency, and coherence of normative legal acts. Thus, in developing the legislative regulation of academic integrity, it is essential to formalize the concept legally. Additionally, the regulation should be structured so that the content of the normative provisions clearly communicates their meaning and the mechanisms for protecting and enforcing academic integrity. ([Beskorovaynaya et al., 2025](#))

Academic integrity is, first and foremost, a set of ethical principles, and only secondarily a body of legal rules that must be followed in the course of learning, teaching, and conducting scientific (or creative) work. For instance, Section 1 of Clause 14 of the Regulations states that a candidate for an academic degree “is required to cite the author and/or the source of any borrowed materials

or individual results". Furthermore, Subclause (g), Clause 20 of the Regulations stipulates that "the use of borrowed material in a thesis without citing the author and/or source of the borrowing, or the use of research results co-authored by the candidate without referencing the co-authors" constitutes an unconditional ground for refusing to accept the thesis in question for defense.

The ethical principles underlying academic integrity are not codified in any normative act, which makes it impossible to define the corresponding rights and obligations of participants in educational relations under those principles. Consequently, the legal qualification of a person's actions or inactions, when accused of violating academic integrity, is made without reference to specific ethical standards since such standards are not legally defined.

We believe it is necessary to address the legal vacuum surrounding the concept of academic integrity to ensure the quality of education. In this regard, the key features of academic integrity as a legal category should include (Table 2): Legally significant behavior of actors subject to legal assessment. Such behavior may take two forms: action or inaction. Normative requirements serve as a standard (benchmark) by which behavior is evaluated and qualified as either lawful or unlawful. It is important to emphasize that these requirements are normative, not statutory, which allows for the application of both laws and internal institutional regulations; Teaching, learning, and the implementation of educational, scientific (or creative) activities define the application of the established normative requirements and answer the question of where the rules of academic integrity must be applied; Actors (natural and legal persons) whose behavior (or activity) is subject to legal assessment. This means that not only students and employees engaged in educational, scientific, or creative activities must comply with established behavioral norms, but also legal entities involved in teaching, learning, and conducting educational or research activities must ensure their actions comply with applicable normative requirements; Preparation, writing, defense, publication, verification, and evaluation are the forms through which the behavior of a specific obligated actor is manifested; An academic text or another object of intellectual property rights is the final product being created, and during its creation, academic integrity must be upheld.

The normative consolidation of general principles for ensuring academic integrity, as a method of legal drafting, partially addresses the challenge of applying ethical principles when defining the scope of rights and obligations for participants in educational, scientific, and related contexts. However, it does not help distinguish between the requirement to observe legally established rules for conducting educational (or educational-creative) and scientific (or scientific-

technical) activities within the framework of academic integrity, and the general requirement to follow legal prescriptions in the same spheres. First, any rules (requirements) established by law are mandatory to comply with. Second, the assurance of trust in the outcomes of learning, creativity, and related activities does not depend on whether ethical principles are enshrined in legislation. Trust in learning outcomes and other academic achievements is primarily shaped by the perceived professionalism of graduates (or degree candidates) from an educational institution.

A legislatively defined concept of academic integrity should specify the actors who are required to adhere to ethical principles in the process of learning, teaching, and conducting scientific (creative) activity. Thus, the academic responsibilities of research and teaching staff include, first, the conscientious use of citations when applying the ideas and developments of other scholars; second, compliance with current norms of the Russian and international legislation on copyright and related rights; third, the provision of accurate and up-to-date information by faculty members and students regarding the methodologies and results of their own and others' research. In our opinion, for more than a century, the fundamental duty of research and teaching staff has been to enforce academic integrity among students and to objectively and impartially evaluate their academic performance.

Such a broad application of academic integrity requirements may blur the circle of relevant actors and obscure the understanding of whose actions are subject to legal regulation. It may seem that by defining the types of activities involved, the actors can be easily identified. However, this is not accurate since there are many actors involved, and the legal relationships between them are not always clear. For example, should parents who pay for educational services observe academic integrity? On the one hand, parents do not engage in studying, teaching, and other educational activities. On the other hand, they may exert significant influence over the learning process, sometimes through unacceptable means. This raises the question of who should be held accountable for unethical parental behavior: the student, the teaching staff, or the educational institution?

In conclusion, to define academic integrity as a legal concept, one must proceed from the understanding that a person may engage in academically dishonest behavior, i.e., violate the established normative rules. Such behavior can manifest as actions or inactions and may be subject to legal evaluation, whereby they can be classified as lawful or unlawful behavior.

Educational institutions are also considered subjects within the sphere of academic integrity. This provides a basis for referring to subjects using the well-

established legal phrase “legal and natural persons”. Legislation must also specify the outcomes that serve as evidence of academic integrity, namely, which objects (results) are subject to control and verification. Furthermore, it is essential to delineate the areas of activity to which normative requirements for honest behavior apply with due regard to the autonomy of educational institutions. To ensure the realization of institutional autonomy in the legal regulation of academic integrity, we propose to use the term “normative conditions”. This would allow academic integrity to be regulated legally at the state level (through laws and subordinate acts) and at the sectoral and local levels (through orders issued by relevant ministries, associations of educational institutions, and individual institutions). Thus, we propose the following definition: academic integrity is the behavior of a natural person and/or the activity of a legal entity aimed at complying with normative requirements during the preparation, writing, defense, dissemination, review, and assessment of academic texts and other intellectual deliverables created in the course of learning, teaching, and other educational activities.

On the one hand, academic integrity is a complex interdisciplinary concept that combines ethical norms and rules of conduct within the educational and scientific environment with the mechanisms and instruments through which these norms are implemented in academic practice. On the other hand, there is an entire range of factors (primarily moral-cultural, institutional, and educational) that influence the university from within or without, shaping its ability and willingness to counter academic dishonesty.

The promotion of academic integrity requires changes in the educational system, the organization of scientific activity in Russia, and amendments to the legislation in the field of education. In any case, the introduction of a new type of liability (academic liability) necessitates the establishment of new legally defined terms, such as “academic responsibility”, “academic coercion”, “measures of academic liability”, “types of academic liability”, “academic misconduct”, “elements of academic misconduct”, “a subject of academic liability”, “academic legal capacity”, etc.

Fostering a culture of academic integrity and creating a legal environment conducive to upholding academic honesty are shared responsibilities of scientific and educational institutions and legislative bodies. The values and standards of academic integrity lay the foundation for the advancement of knowledge, high-quality education, and the development of learners and students into responsible citizens and professionals. Academic integrity is a fundamental value that

defines how we teach, how we learn, how we conduct scientific research, and ultimately, how we conduct professional activities.

F. CONCLUSIONS

A fundamental principle of any law-governed state is the principle of the rule of law, which asserts that in such a state, it is the law that governs. Strict adherence to this principle is intended to ensure the protection of human rights and freedoms in all areas of life. Education and culture play a vital role in ensuring that a country's population adheres to this principle, as they are essential prerequisites for the development of both society and the state. Education (through teaching) and science (through research) lay the foundation for academic integrity, which fosters respect for intellectual property. There is a constant global demand for a culture grounded in education, and academic integrity is directly linked to legal culture.

The issue of maintaining academic integrity is a challenge faced by every country. Today, the academic community in Russia must be committed to promoting academic integrity and striving to embed it into the everyday institutional life of its members. Universities, faculties, and instructors should play a key role in reinforcing and upholding the values of academic integrity and institutional policy. Therefore, Russian educational institutions need to develop policies, procedures, and rules concerning academic integrity, implement them in daily practice, continually improve them, and foster an academic and legal culture, as well as respect for the rule of law. Academic integrity should be supported by developing procedures that promote transparent communication among members of the academic community at the institutional level. The focus should be less on punishment and more on creating conditions in which there is no need to resort to academic dishonesty.

It is unacceptable to limit or reduce the manifestations of academic dishonesty to a few isolated cases or to emphasize a single type of violation, as this only leads to temporary high-profile campaigns. It is advisable to develop a nationwide system for collecting statistical data on identified cases of academic dishonesty in universities and to publish annual reports based on this data. There is also a need for higher education institutions to develop and implement specific institutional measures as part of a policy to prevent and combat plagiarism (such as student honor codes, faculty ethical codes, anti-plagiarism, anti-cheating policies, etc.). Moreover, it is necessary to introduce a national-level mechanism for addressing academic integrity violations, including the establishment of independent arbitration agencies tasked with resolving disputes related to

academic integrity and protecting the rights of both students and faculty. A decisive step in supporting academic integrity and combating academic misconduct should be the establishment of a nationwide system for ensuring the quality of higher education. Without quality assurance at the institutional and systemic levels, it is difficult to speak of practical efforts in this area.

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