Preventing corruption by eradicating academic corruption

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Studies conducted in the course of the past two decades have shown that individuals, regardless of whether they are members of the political elite (Mancuso, 1995; Allen, 2008; Pelizzo and Ang, 2008) of public service (Bruce, 1994; Bruce, 1995; Bruce, 1998) or society at large have a wide range of often conflicting ethical attitudes and preferences. Studies conducted in this line of inquiry have consistently shown that ethical people, people with ethical values, are more productive (Bruce, 1994), that ethical people are less likely to engage in improper, unethical or corrupt conduct (Bruce, 1998), and that providing people with training on ethical issues is quite effective in reducing their risk that they will engage in improper conduct (Bruce, 1998).

While this evidence suggests that universities can promote good governance and contribute to fighting corruption by offering courses and modules on ethics and anti-corruption, studies on academic corruption have shown that there is a second way in which universities can promote ethical values, the principles to good governance and integrity—that is by eradicating academic corruption and by providing students with a corruption-free environment where they can pursue their academic path and can be socialized in a culture of integrity.

In fact, it has been documented that the beliefs, the belief-systems, the values and the choices of students who are directly exposed to various types of academic corruption are deeply and possibly permanently affected by their experience of corruption (Rumyantseva, 2005). Students who experience corruption directly have greater tolerance for corruption, are more likely to consider corruption as an appropriate modus operandi, and are more likely to engage in unethical if not blatantly corrupt behavior in their post-graduate life.

Empirical analyses have, unfortunately, revealed that academic corruption in its various manifestations - gifts, bribes, grade change, grade bias, disclosure of confidential information, sexual exploitation, private use of schools funds (Heyneman, 2007) - is pervasive and that extremely high percentages of university students, in the course of the academic studies, make a direct experience of corruption.

In Nigeria 54 per cent of the population believes the education system to be highly corrupt (Kigotho, 2013). In Ukraine 33.2 per cent of the students reported to have direct experience of corruption and an additional 29.1 per cent reported to have heard about corruption from people with direct experience (Kvit, 2012). In a comparative analysis of corruption in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe, Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva (2008) showed that 60 per cent of Bulgarian students, 62 per cent of Croatian students, 66 per cent of Serbian students and 80 per cent of Moldovan students were aware of bribes being paid in exchange for grade changes. Furthermore, these authors reported that other forms of academic corruption were also quite common. The evidence presented by Heyneman, Anderson and Nuraliyeva (2008) revealed that more than one-third of respondents thought that the official selection process could be
bypassed and that faculty members and/or administrators in charge of students admission would fraudulently change admission scores. Worse, significant percentages of students (4 per cent in Serbia, 5 per cent in Croatia, 7 per cent in Bulgaria and 28 per cent in Moldova) reported to have paid to pass examinations. Finally, in one of the most comprehensive analysis of academic corruption in the world, Johnson (2008) documented instances of academic corruption in Australia, China, Italy, India, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, and Zimbabwe.

Academic corruption is pervasive, takes many forms, and provides corruption with a fertile soil in which it can flourish.

Over the years, several studies have explored the causes of corruption and have formulated various recommendations as to how corruption could be reduced and possibly eliminated. Insufficient attention was paid to either the relationship between academic corruption and corruption or to what universities can do in the anti-corruption fight.

The key implication of the studies discussed above suggests that universities can play a significant role in curbing corruption. By teaching ethics modules, by contrasting academic corruption, by providing students with corruption-free academic settings, universities can make a lasting contribution to promoting ethical values and preventing corruption.

References


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