Ethics and Academic Accountability for Academic Staff in the Sri Lankan University System

ETHICS FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

The word **'Ethics'** is defined as a set of moral principles and **"Ethical'** relates to morals especially concerning human conduct (Oxford dictionary). Basic human ethical behavior is acquired from the family environment, relatives, acquaintances, school friends, and teachers. Thereafter, we gradually learn to appreciate ethical issues in everyday life.

Ethics in the Profession

In addition to basic human ethical behavior, we need to respect certain ethical issues and standards inherent to our profession. The purpose of this section is to sensitize University teachers to important ethical issues before they have to confront them. These issues and related standards apply to all university teachers irrespective of their chosen subject discipline.

Ethical Principles in University Teaching:

1. **Content competence:** University teachers should continuously improve and maintain a high level of their subject knowledge, and ensure that it is up-to-date in a rapidly advancing world. They should ensure that the course content is current, accurate, relevant and appropriate to the level of the study programme, and that it covers the minimum requirement defined in the syllabus for each subject.

2. **Pedagogical competence:** University teachers should improve their pedagogical skills through the development their teaching methodology. They should communicate the course objectives to the students at the beginning of the course, and have them aligned to the objectives of the degree programme. They should select the methods of instruction based on research evidence and ensure that such methods of instruction are effective in helping students to achieve the course objectives. They should also be aware of alternative instructional methods or strategies that are more effective in enabling the students to achieve Intended Learning Outcomes of the course.

3. **Dealing with sensitive topics:** Some courses may contain topics that are likely to be sensitive or discomforting to students. In dealing with such topics, teachers should first explain why such topics have been included in the course and then discuss them in an open, honest, and positive manner.

4. **Student development:** Student development is the primary objective of teaching. Therefore, teachers should design their methods of instruction to facilitate learning, encourage autonomy and independent thinking in students. Teachers should always treat each and every student with respect and dignity, and avoid any action that can impede student development.

5. **Dual relationships with students:** University teachers' relationships with students should be based on pedagogical goals and academic requirements. Teachers should not enter into dual-role relationships with students that could lead to actual or perceived favoritism. They should not also engage in activities that are likely to discriminate or marginalize any student.

6. **Confidentiality:** University teachers should ensure that student grades, attendance records and private communications are treated as confidential material. Thus, they should be released only for legitimate academic purposes or only with student's consent. Release of such information should be beneficial to the student or should prevent harm to others.

7. **Respect for colleagues:** Teachers should respect the dignity of their colleagues and work cooperatively with them in the interest of fostering student development. Thus, teachers should maintain professionalism in order to maximize student attainment of degree objectives.

8. **Valid assessment of students:** Since the student performance at Universities is greatly determined by the assessment policies and strategies of degree programs, it is imperative that teachers select assessment techniques that are consistent with the objectives of the course. They should at the same time be reliable and valid as much as possible. It is also necessary that methods are communicated early to students at the beginning of the course.

9. **Respect for the Institution:** University teachers should be aware of and respect the educational goals, policies and standards of the University. They should always share a collective responsibility to work for the good of the University.

Ethical Principles in Research:

All University teachers are expected to conduct research in their fields of specialization. Ethical issues related to funding and conflicts of interest, sometimes, could arise in conducting research. Further, ethical issues could arise in the conduct of human and animal research, genetic research as well as in ethnic, religious and gender studies. The following are situations where ethics need to be considered in research undertaken by University teachers.

1. **Identification and justification of research problems:** After an extensive literature review the proponents of research should be able to highlight the gaps in current knowledge and how the intended study would bridge the gaps. Due reference should be made to all relevant publications. Suppression or non-reporting of literature unfavorable to one's own proposed research is unethical.

2. **Conflicts of interest/funding:** At all times researchers should maintain transparency. The actual outcome of the project should be stated clearly. Self-interests including financial benefits, one's own firm beliefs and other gains in kind should be avoided. Quoting studies that only support the study outcome and failure to include negative results should also be avoided.
3. **Utilization of funds, resources and methodology:** Use of methods that are unlikely to achieve the objectives is not only unscientific but also unethical as valuable resources in the form of time, effort and funds are wasted. Hence, appropriate methodology for the achievement of the objectives should be selected and funds allocated.

4. **Ethical issues in social and biological research:** In biological research as well as research on humanities and social studies where information of an intimate nature are sought, certain guidelines have to be followed. These guidelines may be institutional, departmental, national and international in nature. Some ethical issues also have legal and human (and animal) rights implications.

5. **Reporting of results:** All relevant results have to be reported. Suppression or non-reporting of unfavorable results is unethical. Likewise the non-mentioning of the limitations of the methodology is deemed unethical.

6. **Publication:** Only information that is based on solid scientific principles and ethically conducted research should reach the society at large since scientific research has a social responsibility.

7. **Duplicate publications:** The outcome of research as an article should be published only once. However, duplicate publications occur in different forms such as publishing in another source under a different title, fragmented and published as several separate papers and extending an already published paper by adding data. These publications are unethical and should be avoided.

8. **Authorship:** This is an important ethical issue in scientific publications. Authorship of a publication should be restricted to those who had been directly involved in the study. These involvements include conceptualization, design, collection and management of data, discussion and writing of the paper.

9. **Research fraud:** Intentional dishonesty in research is unethical. These would include fabrication or invention of data, falsification or deliberate distortion of data and plagiarism. Copying considerable amounts of material without acknowledgement could also be included in research fraud.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It is recognized that University teachers should have 'Academic Freedom' to: teach and carry out research without any interference; be open and flexible in their academic activities; and undertake activities outside their employment that enhance their intellect and professional skills, without forfeiting their primary commitments to the University.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop some guidelines on workload and work norms for academics so that they can exercise the above mentioned academic freedom without any adverse effects on their 'Academic Accountability.' These guidelines should take into account the complexities and diversities of activities performed by the academics , which include not only teaching and research work, but also those contributing to University and National Development. It should also be noted that some of these activities are performed outside the regular working hours of the University.

To capture all the above parameters, an 'Academic Performance Index' needs to be developed, considering the workloads and work norms for academics, and incorporated into the duties and responsibilities applicable to their employment at the University.

Workload and Work Norms Model:

This document addresses different aspects to be considered in developing a workload and work norms model common to all the academics in the University System. As such, the mechanism to incorporate aspects such as Teaching, Research and Contribution to University and National Development into this 'Workload and Work Norms Model' needs to be discussed at a wider forum with representation from all academic disciplines and the opportunity for same should be given to all of them, as a part of the development process.

The Workload Formula:

a. **Time as a Unit of Measurement**: It is possible that the formula considers hours/week for a particular activity as the unit of measurement. A Week can be defined as 5 working days and there would be 35 hours/week (7 hours/day x 5 days/week); an academic year would be 40 working weeks /year (with the balance left for examinations, marking and vacations.) Accordingly, the number of annual hours of work would be 1400 hours/year (40 weeks/year x 35 hours/week.)

b. **Baseline Workload**: For the purpose of equity and fairness, all academic staff should carry a minimum workload. Hence, baseline workload for academic staff should be defined.

c. **Actual Workload vs Workload Agreed**: It is possible that some staff would work more than the load agreed for them. In such a situation, it is necessary to know how the additional work would be taken into account.

Different Types of Workload:

Teaching Workload Weights

Weights assigned to the teaching workload should consider the credit value of each course offered by the Academic in a semester. In calculating the above, the following factors should be considered:

(a) Teaching (theory) a new subject/course
(b) Teaching a subject with revision
(c) Teaching a subject with multiple offerings or parallel offerings
(d) Teaching a subject that runs mostly as seminars
(e) teaching a subject in an undergraduate program
(f) Coordinating a subject - less than 50 students, 50-100 students, 100-200 students, more than 200 students etc.
(g) Conducting tutorials/practical (lab or field), design classes, demonstrations, clinical teaching, discussions,
(h) Preparation, marking and consultation of tutorials
(i) Preparation, marking and consultation of practicals, clinicals, field work, design classes
(j) preparation of lecture material including electronic course material
(k) Setting of assignments and examinations and other assessment material
(l) Translation of examination papers
(m) Marking answer scripts and submissions for practical/clinical/field work examinations and design reports
(n) Assessment of student presentations, viva exams
(o) Supervision of undergraduate projects
(p) Assessment of undergraduate projects as a supervisor or examiner

Along with the above issues that would contribute to the teaching workload, the following would have to be considered too:

(a) Number of offerings of the same course by the same teacher
(b) Number of hours spent on preparation for a 1 hour theory or tutorial class (3 hours)
(c) Time period spent on setting an exam paper for a 1 credit unit course (3 hours)
(d) Number of students following a given course/ number of students examined by the teacher
(e) Number of questions marked by the teacher
(f) Time spent on translation of question paper of 1 credit unit (1 hour)
(g) Number of tutorials per course unit
(h) Number of students following the course with tutorials
(i) Number of hours spent on preparation of practicals etc. (5 hour /2 hour practical class)
(j) number of practicals etc. per course
(k) time period spent on setting a practical/clinical/field work/ design examination (3 hours)
(l) Number of groups in such examinations
(m) Time spent on grading a practical/clinical/field work/design examination (1/2 hour per student)

(n) Number of students in such examinations as above
(o) Number of such examinations as above in a course
(p) Time spent on supervision of group projects (1 hour/project/week)
(q) Number of such group projects in a course
(r) Time spent on correcting projects report of undergraduate student (2 hours/student/week)
(s) Number of such project reports corrected
(t) Time spent on computation of course results (5 hour/50 students/course)
(u) Number of students in a course for which results have to be computed

(Teaching postgraduate students should not be taken into account since separate payments are made for those activities).

Research and Development Workload Weights

In calculating the above, the following factors should be taken into account:

(a) Research grants received – number of grants received, grant values, grant duration, nature of donor (national/international), number of research students/research assistants working under the project
(b) Member of research consultants team
(c) Research publications – refereed journals, non-refereed journals, extended abstracts, abstracts
(d) Dissemination of research output – patents, products, innovations
(e) Editor, associate editor, member of the editorial board of reputed journals and proceedings
(f) Editing of collection of essays or books
(g) Organization of research symposia, conferences, workshops etc.
(h) Supervision of research (M Phil, PhD) – full time – 90 hours/project, part time – 30 hours/project
(i) Coordinator of research programs
(j) Reviewer of research proposals and articles for publication
(k) Member of multidisciplinary research team
(l) Member of team of Institutional Linkages
(m) Member of projects of national relevance
(n) Author of books or chapters in books (international/national publisher)
(o) Author of monographs
(p) Author of policy papers
(q) Author of consultancy reports
(r) Software development
(s) Media projects and products
(t) Translation and publication of books and scholarly work
(u) Peer reviewed presentations at national/international conferences

University and National Development Workload Weights

In calculating the above, the following factors should be taken into account:

(a) Development of new courses and degree programs
(b) Resource person at curriculum development workshops and training programs
(c) Contribution to infrastructural development at Department, Faculty, University
(d) Active engagement in Departmental meetings, Faculty Boards, Senate sub-committees
(e) Contribution to student advisory boards, disciplinary inquiry boards
(f) Senior treasurer of student societies
(g) Serving as the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Directors of Institutes, Deans, Heads of Department
(h) Serving as Directors of University Centers
(i) Serving in any position of administrative support such as Proctor/Deputy Proctor/Chief student counselor/Student counselor/Warden/Sub warden
(j) Serving as Coordinators of Faculty/University Units
(k) Memberships of Boards of Study
(l) Serving as Coordinators of international/national conferences/congresses
(m) Serving as Advisors of national development projects
(n) Serving as Country representatives of regional/international bodies
(o) Serving in any Office of professional bodies /societies
(p) Serving as Members of formalized links in outreach activities with private organizations
(q) Contribution to staff development
(r) Contribution to personal and professional development
(s) Contribution to advancement of the profession

In recognition of the academic freedom, it is recommended that the members of academic staff are allowed to utilize 7 hours of the minimum weekly workload for any pursuit of their choice, inclusive of pursuits that result in extra remuneration.

Work Norms:

Since the universal practice adopted for expressing work norms of a university academic is by specification of student contact hours, within the minimum weekly workload of 35 hours, it is recommended that the minimum number of student contact hours per year is reflected in the personal timetable as follows.

Head of Department/Division	180 hours/year
Senior Professor/Professor	300 hours/year
Associate Professor	360 hours/year
Senior Lecturer Grade I and II	380 hours/year
Lecturer/Probationary Lecturer	450 hours/year
Senior ETA/ETA Grade I/Instructor Grade I	480 hours/year
ETA Grade II/Instructor Grade II	510 hours/year

Since student contact hours are mainly utilized for undergraduate teaching and postgraduate research, the contact hours in a week would include time spent on participation and supervision of research, practical and clinical work.