

## STEP BY STEP TOWARDS NEW ACADEMIC CULTURE

The concepts of integrity, transparency and responsibility have taken center stage in the Ukrainian society. Europeanism, intentionally chosen by Ukrainians as aspiration to join the family of modern, developed democracies, encompasses these critical features of modern developed state where people are the greatest asset and value. Integrity in education plays a paramount role, since education as a system and educators and its conductors are responsible for nurturing and educating citizens of the future who would carry values and practice values in day-to-day life and work.

Defining academic integrity as a “corpus of ethical principles and legally established rules that should guide actors in the education process in their learning, teaching and scientific (creative) endeavors to ensure trust in learning or research outcomes” (cited from the draft Law on Education) has become a decisive move forward towards achieve the goal – reforming the Ukrainian state and educating citizens who would carry and embody new values.

Throughout 2016, the Strengthening Academic Integrity in Ukraine Project (SAIUP), partner organizations, public authorities and dedicated citizens were working hard to turn *academic integrity* from a foreign, somewhat exotic concept into a commonplace notion used to qualify sound education and robust science.

### Academic integrity is here to stay

After the Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science set the direction towards promotion and implementation of academic integrity and identified the main shortcomings of Ukrainian higher education, science and research. Academic fraud,



plagiarism and bribery had become shameful attributes of the Ukrainian education system in the eyes of foreign partners, employers and educators. The need for urgent change was re-affirmed upon launch of the Strengthening Academic Integrity in Ukraine Project: significant interest to its plans and

applications from educators, university administrations and civil society activists immediately after the press-conference that marked the kick-off and announced the Project Mission and Goals confirmed the need to join efforts for change.

The press-conference took place on 24 February 2016 and the key speakers Inna Sovsun, the then First Deputy Minister of Education, Conrad Turner, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, and Taras Tymochko presented the main highlights of project activity during its four years of implementation and the key expected outcomes (see the video of press-conference via <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPZilhdplZs>).

The project engages 10 higher education institutions in Ukraine, representing both the geographic diversity (East, West, North and South of the country) and diversity of portfolio and profile – classical universities, medical schools, economic and technical institutions. Ideas of academic integrity were brought across and promoted in each university during guest lectures, seminars, formal and informal discussions. Thus, close collaboration with these universities, including students, faculty and administrations, coupled with the support of academic integrity cause by the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv enabled already in the first months to build a strong team of like-minded individuals committed to driving change on the ground by implementing new approaches to teaching and learning, new communication mechanisms, etc.



The Project also engaged in broad outreach efforts, organizing conferences, meetings with journalists and awareness campaigns in universities to highlight again and again that quality education may be attained only through honest efforts and never by cheating, fraud or corruption. Moving forward step by step, engaging committed individuals and partners, the Project was able to convince the academic community that academic integrity is a permanent value and each citizen should take ownership.

## Building bridges



Building communication and support network for the Project have become a key objective for the team and partners throughout the year. Presentations at universities, continuous cooperation with Ukrainian Students Association and Student Anti-Corruption Agency provided the possibility to meet students and faculty from more than 50 Ukrainian HEIs. Both students and faculty members offered their views on main deficiencies of the country's higher education system that present barriers to academic integrity, i.e. obsolete curricula, tolerance to breach, at times overlooking even the main goals of higher education – provision of quality education responsive to the labor market demand. It was important not only to voice these and other problems, but also to find constructive solutions. Importantly, the Ministry of Education expressed its readiness to assist with this cause, and thus a Sub-Committee on Academic Integrity was established at the Ministry, bringing together leading educators and education experts who currently work on recommendations to address these issues. These recommendations will feed into the draft Law on Education that uniquely includes an article on academic integrity that would regulate internal institutional obligations and nationwide rules for compliance with the academic integrity standards.



Universities participating in the Project took strong ownership for the cause: they designed their own activities intended to consolidate academia and engage them in the academic integrity discourse. Important contribution was made by partnership with the Active Citizens Projects (British Council in Ukraine)



– Active Citizens and SAIUP carried out a joint marathon training on strategies for planning and implementing mini-projects at participating HEIs. During three days, university teams were simultaneously working on social action projects aimed to promote academic integrity in universities,

bring together like-minded people and engage student community. The next phase – a

competition for SAIUP mini-grants to implement projects proposed by students and faculty – impressed by the spectrum and diversity of ideas: ranging from lectures, poster contests, quests and debates to setting up Academic Writing Centers and online course on academic integrity. It provided great impetus for active educators to develop and implement their ideas on the ground.



Setting up and developing academic integrity groups in universities during the first year of Project activity laid a solid foundation for further change. Moreover, it demonstrated to academia and other universities how joint efforts could bring revitalization through constructive decisions that strengthen credibility and

education quality at universities.

The nationwide student competition of social video clips “Integrity Starts With You” (accessible on YouTube via [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZWbvfmP-](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZWbvfmP-Z9FAx5qdSBPvJciXzcKvdgID)



[Z9FAx5qdSBPvJciXzcKvdgID](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZWbvfmP-Z9FAx5qdSBPvJciXzcKvdgID)) somewhat served as a creative summary of the year’s inputs and efforts. Participants included 97 teams, or about 300 students, from different Ukrainian HEIs who presented their own understanding of academic integrity and why it is essential to reform the higher education system

stressing the principles of integrity, transparency and responsibility. Project partners, including the Ministry of Education, Microsoft Ukraine, anti-plagiarism company UpPlag.com, and School of Journalism at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy identified 6 winners and are committed to not only bringing academic integrity to the widest possible audience, but also encouraging them to become ‘change agents’ driving modernization of higher education. More than 44 thousand viewers who watched competition videos shared their impressions by clicking ‘like’ YouTube on and thus voting for the winner of the Audience Choice Award. (Competition photos are available at <http://www.saiup.org.ua/novyny/chesnist-pochynayetsya-z-tebe-studentski-talanty-zarady-zmin/>).

Such nationwide events and activities have brought on the desired result – majority of Ukrainian universities started to have conversations about academic integrity. Moreover,

this concept has become a ‘quality label’, and those who promote academic integrity and inspire by modeling academic integrity, either students or faculty, are held as an example, their opinion and advice are sought for, and expert conclusions are highly regarded by teachers and peers.

## Working towards change

An important phase of activities in the first year of the Project included creation and successful launch of the educational video “Learn with Dignity and Responsibility!” (accessible online on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1B2vJko0Cqw&t=1s> ). It has come to service as an introductory guide for school leavers and those who are going to take external standardized tests and seek university admission. In an accessible and amusing



form, the authors managed to create an engaging story of what constitutes academic integrity and what are the consequences for those who choose to comply or not comply. It has become an important attempt of the Project to build relations with secondary education. Today’s high school students will populate universities tomorrow; therefore, active involvement with high schools, teachers and their students, will help not only prepare candidates

for honest attainment of knowledge at universities but also develop zero tolerance to cheating and dishonest behavior which is not solely confined to academic domain.

Academic integrity is a concept that unites universities all over the world. In all continents, educators are implementing new teaching methods and guiding activities for students to



emphasize time and again the importance of honest attainment of education, through learning not cheating. With this in mind, drawing on the experience of foreign colleagues and external perspective are at least as important as detailed study of national practices. Thus, with the initiative and inspiration of the alumni of the

U.S. Embassy exchange programs, and with SAIUP support, a manual *Academic Integrity as Foundation of University Sustainability* was published and disseminated (accessible online

on <http://www.saiup.org.ua/resursy/akademichna-chesnist-yak-osnova-stalogo-rozvytku-universytetu/> ).

The manual includes essays and analytical articles of university leaders who observed implementation and compliance with academic integrity in leading universities during study visits to the United States. The authors and SAIUP team conducted over 25 presentations in various Ukrainian HEIs and also at Lviv Library Forum within Lviv Book Fair, engaging in the discussion not only educators but also university libraries. Active participation of librarians has become an additional leverage that effectively helped lay the ground for further Project activities (in 2016 the Ukrainian Library Association implemented the project *Academic Integrity – Role of Libraries* that included a series of seminars and workshops for librarians, awareness building and outreach in school and university libraries, etc.).



Professors Kathryn Nantz and David Schmidt at Fairfield University (Connecticut, USA) shared American experience in various aspects of academic integrity with Ukrainian teachers and students. They came to Ukraine twice, delivering workshops and seminars for teachers, and organizing discussions for students, to share their practices and observations, and help develop implementation strategies for academic integrity policies in Ukrainian HEIs (information about these visits is accessible online on <http://www.saiup.org.ua/novyny/profesory-universytetu-ferfild-prochytaly-lektsiyu-pro-akademichnu-dobrochesnist-dlya-studentiv-ternopolya-ta-vinnytsi/>).

Joint formulation of ‘rules of the game’ by students and faculty should make sure that these rules work, and persuade the academic community to respect these rules. A set of such rules could be presented as an Honor Code, based on the desire to ensure the rights of students, faculty and administrations, and their commitment to the standards of academic integrity community. Guidelines designed by the Project to support writing and implementation of Honor Codes have brought some initial results – Zaporizhia National University has become the first participating university to launch its work on designing own Honor Code.



Outreach and educational component are also of central importance. The first step has been to design the *Basic Academic Writing* course. Being still unique in Ukraine, the course is aimed to equip students and teachers with necessary tools that would be helpful in writing academic works. On the broader scale, it would help build skills required from modern citizens as regards writing motivation letters, composing CVs and project proposals, public speaking, defending one's position, analysis and critical thinking.

A path towards change can never be easy. Educators are not always willing to change, and sometimes they do not understand the need and urgency of measures or innovations. Throughout 2016, SAIUP worked on mobilizing public support to change that should ultimately lead to a new academic culture in Ukrainian universities. Each participant of the Project has become a 'change agent' and must prove by their actions and decisions that academic integrity is a quality label of the education system. Success stories of participating universities will service as guidance and example for those who choose to join this path of change.