

# ACADEMIC ETHICS IN CONDITION OF UNIVERSITY OF ŽILINA FROM STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW

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## Abstract

The current environment puts an emphasis on increasing the quality of university education. It is also connected with the growth of requirements laid on students that also include a strong ethical aspect. With unethical behaviour we encounter not only in business but unfortunately also in the academic sphere where this problem is increasing with the growth of information and communications technology (ICT). The aim of this paper is to determine the extent to which the students are familiar with the Code of Ethics for student of University of Žilina as well as their personal experiences with unethical behaviour of students and teachers. The respondents identified the biggest problems unbecoming, often arrogant behaviour of some students to classmates, associated with defamation not only students but also teachers, cheating on exams and test during semester, perjury and the use of cell phone during classes and also plagiarism not only by semester projects, but also by the bachelor and diploma thesis. Despite the fact that majority of students are aware of what is and is not ethical, many of them unfortunately resort to unethical behaviour. Today's period of growth of information and communications technology 'helps' not only students by the plagiarism but also the faculty in its more efficient detection.

**Key words:** ethics, education, students, plagiarism, code of ethics.

**Classification JEL:** D73 – Bureaucracy, Administrative, Processes in Public Organizations; I23 – Higher Education, Research Institutions.

## 1. Introduction

Childers & Bruton (2016) state following idea: "In the 1990s and early 2000s, as students' use of the internet rose precipitously, plagiarism began receiving increasing amounts of academic attention" (p. 3). Adiningrum (2015) states that ethics and integrity are values expected in higher education (p. 110).

In the environment of University of Žilina also for the above mentioned reasons, based on the results of the project Development of culture quality at the University of Žilina based on European standards of higher education (DEQUA), (see Jankalova et al, 2014) acceded to the creation of the Code of Ethics for student of University of Žilina, which is valid and effective from 15<sup>th</sup> November 2013. Code of Ethics for student of University of Žilina obliges all students of University of Žilina to behave in compliance with its requirements. Their significant infringements, based on the statement of the Disciplinary Commission, solve the deans of the faculties in accordance with the law, statute of the university and study regulations (UNIZA, 2013).

The aim of this paper is to determine, based on a survey among students of one of the faculties of University of Žilina, the extent to which the students are familiar with the Code of Ethics for student of University of Žilina, as well as their personal experiences with unethical behaviour.

## 2. Academic ethics

The issue of ethics and also academic ethics is discussed by many authors from many points of view (Callahan, 1982; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Bussard et al., 2004; Putnová & Seknička, 2007; Friesl, 2008; Olejarova, 2008; Králiková, 2009; Cahn, 2010; Werther & Chandler, 2010; Guicheva et al., 2011; Remišová, 2011; Willinsky & Alperin, 2011; Gluchman, 2012;

*Stecíková & Hrašková, 2013; VanDeGrift, Dillon & Camp, 2016*). There is also a scientific journal – Journal of Academic Ethics (*Springer, 2016*), which: “is devoted to the examination of ethical issues that arise in all aspects of post-secondary education, primarily within a university context. Providing a forum for the publication and discussion of original research, the journal examines ethical concerns in research, teaching, administration, and governance. Moreover, in response to the rapidly changing global knowledge economy, the journal offers sustained inquiry into the values, purposes, and functions of the world’s principal institutions responsible for the creation and dissemination of knowledge.”

The area to which many authors of papers related to academic ethics focus is plagiarism and cheating of the students (*Alt, 2015; Bertram Gallant, Binkin & Donohue, 2015; Halupa & Bolliger, 2015; Heckler & Forde, 2015; Ison, 2015; McGrail & McGrail, 2015; Amiri & Razmjoo, 2016; Bruton & Childers, 2016; Fendler & Godbey, 2016; Gómez-Espinosa, Francisco & Moreno-Ger, 2016; Stuhmcke, Booth & Wangmann, 2016; Wilks, Cruz & Sousa, 2016*). On the other hand, the question of academic ethics is a relatively new one in Slovakia and started to be opened in our universities only in 2000 (*Králiková, 2009: 5*). Academic ethics also deals with the possibilities of emerging causes of ethical problems not only in terms of academics, but also in terms of students (*Jindřichovská & Kocmanová, 2014: 40*).

Brătianu & Nistoreanu (2008) listed the necessity of the presence of ethics in the higher education institutions: For most students, the university is the institution in which they learn to assume passing from tutoring and dependence of parents to freedom and autonomy. For this reason, the role of university experience is crucial in the intellectual, professional, and not lastly, moral maturation. No matter how you look at things, the skills gained during university studies are not just intellectual, they are also linked to the future ethical behaviour in one’s profession, in public life and even in private life. They can learn in a correct institutional culture or in a stained institutional culture and will tend to reproduce the behaviour skills gained in the academic environment. They can learn respect for freedom, autonomy, merit, loyal competition, collaboration, and respect for all direct or indirect participants to the academic act. Or they can learn manipulation, the temptation of fraud, of favouritism, shadow solving of professional problems, clique behaviour, lack of care towards colleagues and institution (*p. 238*).

One of the way to institutionalize ethics into the life of the university is in the form of a Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics fulfils on the universities several functions (*Meško & Remišová, 2013*):

- Regulates the behaviour of employees and students;
- Helps to avoid illegal and unethical conduct;
- Teaches to reflects one’s own moral behaviour and the behaviour of other people;
- Develops moral consideration and conduct;
- Provides a guarantee to everyone in the academic field that others are obliged to behave to them in compliance with the determined moral standards;
- Helps to solve conflict moral situations at the workplace (*p. 14*).

### **3. Method: searching academic ethics in condition of University of Žilina from students’ point of view**

The aim of this paper is to determine the extent to which the students are familiar with the Code of Ethics for student of University of Žilina as well as their personal experiences with unethical behaviour of their colleagues – students but also teachers. To fulfil the aim of the paper, we created a questionnaire for students which contained 16 questions (out of which 3 were open questions). The questionnaire was divided into three parts; the first focused at the faculty and university; the other on students; and the third at the unethical behaviour

of students and teachers. The third part contains also open questions concerning the examples of unethical behaviour.

Respondents were asked answering 'yes', 'no' or 'I don't know', to indicate the answer on a scale of 1 to 5 points, or to comment on the proposed statement. The basic characteristics of the respondents are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. The basic characteristics of questionnaire survey participants (own study)

Participants [Number – % of all – average age]			
136 – 100% – 21.37			
Male		Female	
39 – 28.68% – 21.44		97 – 71.32% – 21.35	
<b>Level of study:</b> Bachelor	<b>Level of study:</b> Master	<b>Level of study:</b> Bachelor	<b>Level of study:</b> Master
27 – 19.85% – 21.37	12 – 8.82% – 21.58	54 – 39.71% – 21.13	43 – 31.62% – 21.63

In the first part of the questionnaire, aimed at the faculty and university, were initially surveyed students' knowledge that at the university is valid *Code of Ethics for students*. The results confirm that most students know about the existence of the Code of Ethics for students: 33.8% of them answered they have not this knowledge and 66.2% of them answered they have this knowledge. Answers were also compared with responses to question on the completion of the course dedicated to ethics. From the students who completed such course (64% of respondents), they were aware of the Code of Ethics by all. From the students who have not passed such course (36%) did not know of its existence up to 94%. This question was highly correlated with the next one: *Is ethics one of your faculty's core corporate principles or business objectives?* Only 51% of respondents answered this question positively, while 36% of respondents were of the opposite opinion (Figure 1).

Next question is linked with internal procedures related to unethical behaviour: *Do your faculty's internal regulations guarantee to the students the right to indicate an abuse report?* Only 25% of respondents think that they don't have such option (Figure 2).

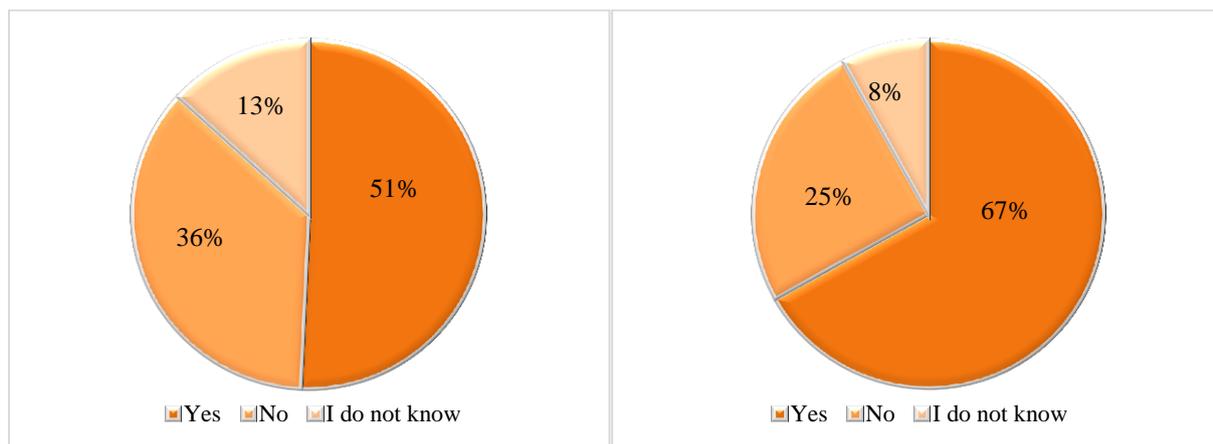


Figure 1. Ethics as one of the faculty's core corporate principles or objectives (own study)

Figure 2. Internal regulations guarantee the right to indicate an abuse report (own study)

Next part of questions was focused on student. In this part of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to state to what extent they agreed with the proposed statement, where 1 meant 'not at all', 2 – 'sometimes', 3 – 'moderate', 4 – 'mostly' and 5 points – 'absolutely'. Only minimum of respondents answered 'not at all' by the question: *I regularly*

*face with ethical dilemmas during my study*, 34.6% of respondents answered ‘sometimes’ and same number of respondents answered ‘moderate’ (Figure 3).

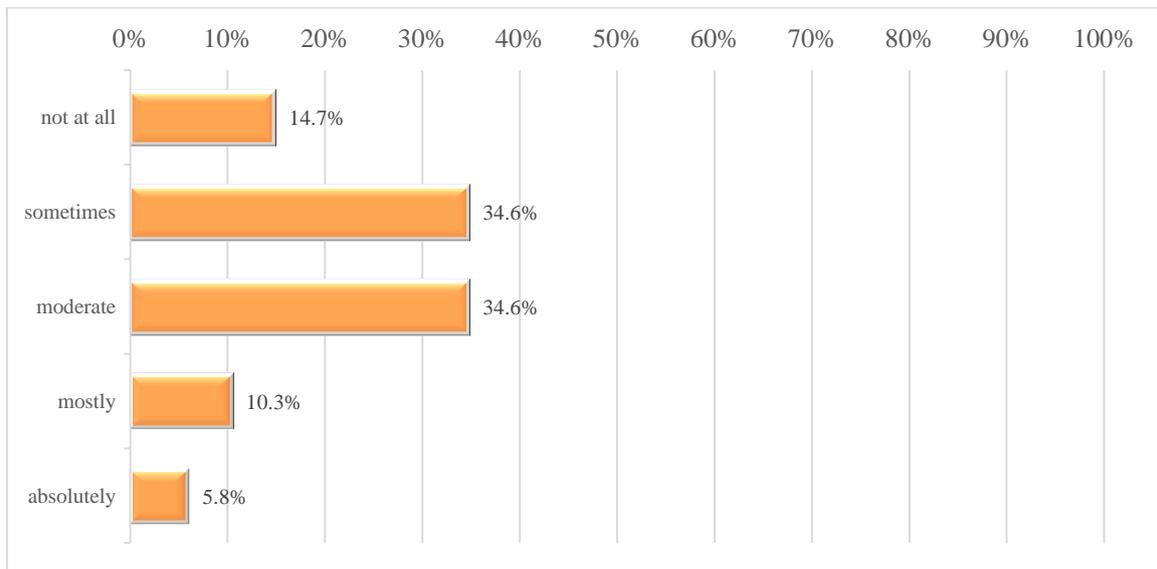


Figure 3. Face with ethical dilemmas during study (own study)

Very interesting are also answers to the question: *It happened already that I behaved in an unethical way during my study (even in minor issues)*, (Figure 4). Only 20.6% of respondents answered ‘not at all’, 13.3% answered ‘absolutely’ and 31.6% answered ‘mostly’. This is together very high number of students, that already behaved unethically.

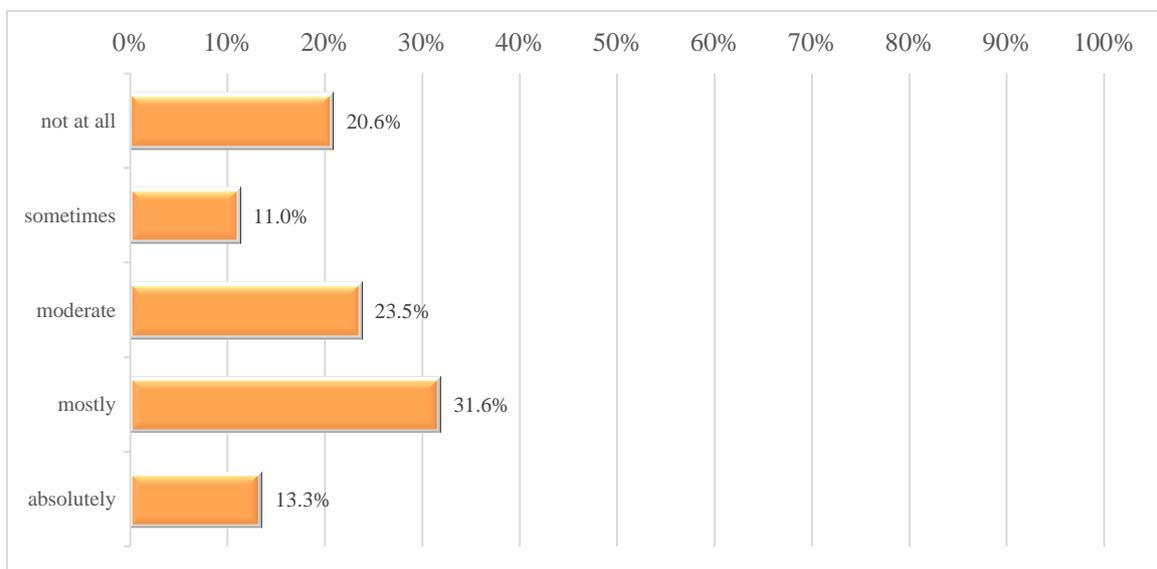


Figure 4. Behaved in an unethical way during study (own study)

To the question: *I am aware of what faculty documents states about unethical behaviour*, answered ‘not at all’ only 5.8% of respondents (Figure 5) and to the question: *It is always clear for me what the ethical behaviour means in my study*, answered ‘not at all’ only 2.9% of respondents (Figure 6), as compared to the above questions is shocking that despite the relative knowledge of what is unethical, so many students have already behaved unethically.

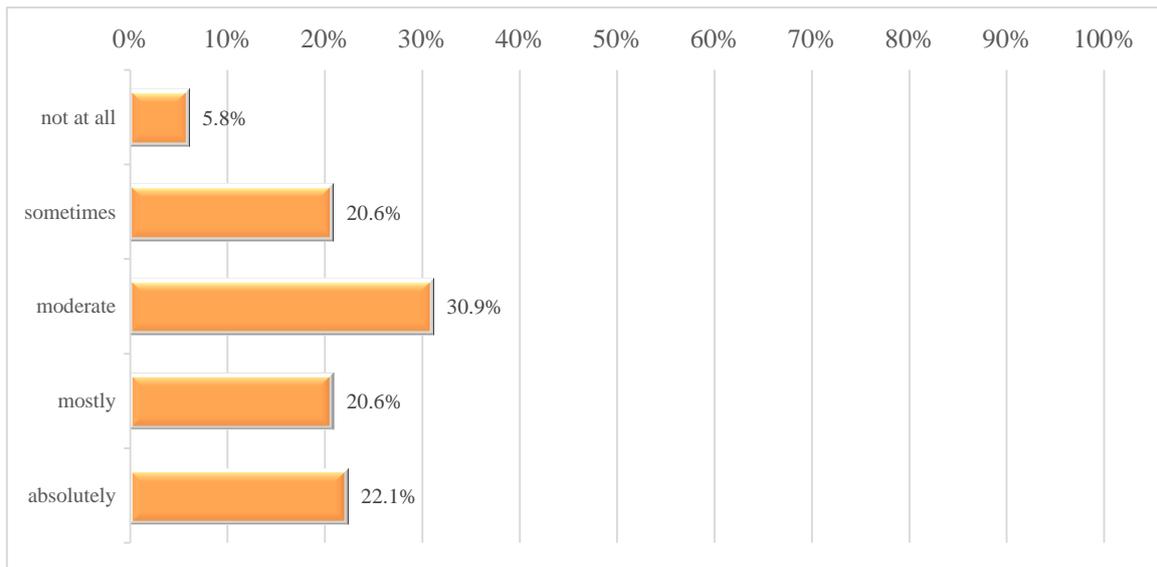


Figure 5. Be aware of what faculty documents states about unethical behaviour (own study)

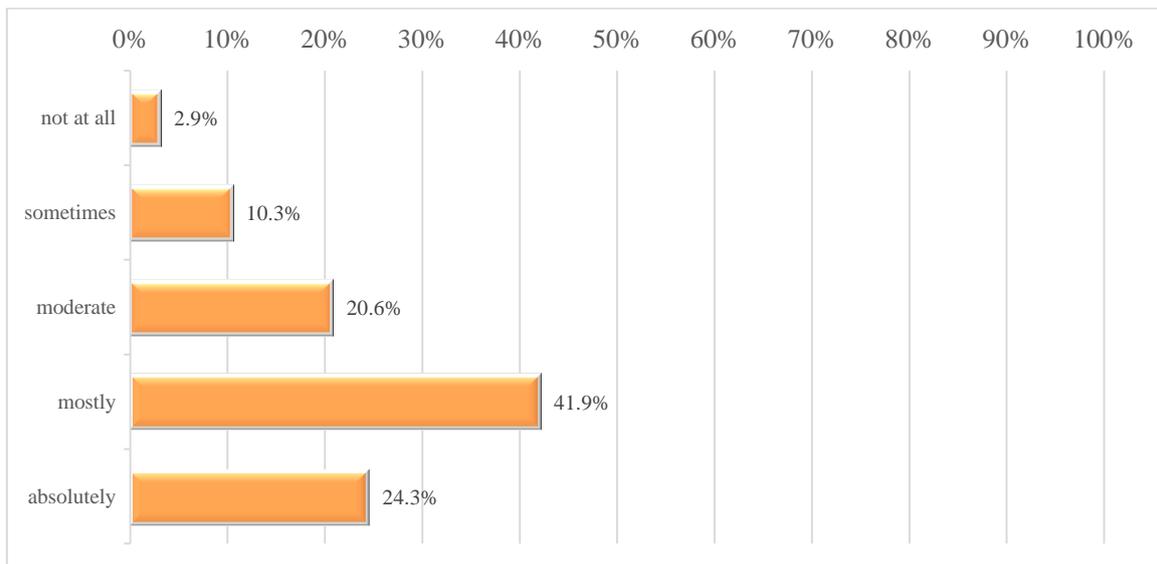


Figure 6. Be aware of what the ethical behaviour means in study (own study)

The third part of the questions focused on unethical behaviour of students and teachers, 21.3% respondents thought, that *unethical behaviour of students is not quite common on the faculty* (Figure 7) and 34.6% of respondents thought, that *unethical behaviour of teachers is not quite common on the faculty* (Figure 8). Is shocking that not only students, but from the perspective of students also teachers behave unethically.

The questionnaire followed by open questions, where students had the opportunity to give examples of unethical behaviour of students and teachers. However, these questions were not answered by all respondents. Examples of unethical behaviour of students reported 62.5% of respondents, examples of unethical behaviour of teachers reported 55.9% of respondents.

From the respondents, who answered the question about the examples of unethical behaviour of students, identified the biggest problems unbecoming, often arrogant behaviour of some students to classmates, associated with defamation not only students but also teachers (65.9%), cheating on exams and test during semester (58.8%), perjury and the use of cell

phone during classes (calling, SMS, MMS...) and also plagiarism not only by semester projects, but also by the bachelor and diploma thesis (9.4%), (Figure 9).

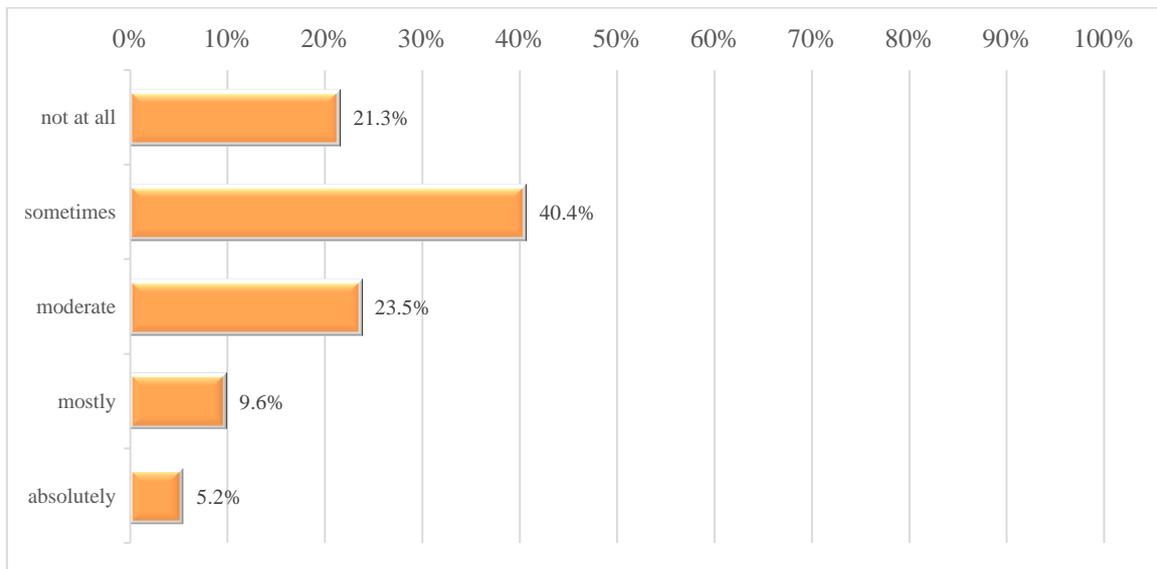


Figure 7. Unethical behaviour of students is quite common on the faculty (own study)

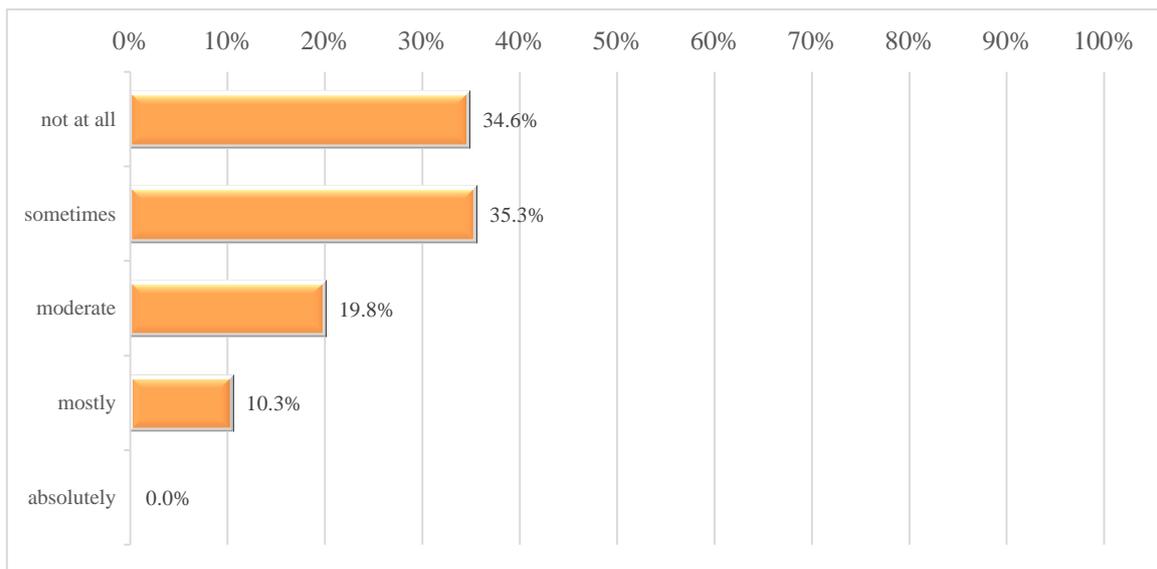


Figure 8. Unethical behaviour of teachers is quite common on the faculty (own study)

From the respondents who answered the question about the examples of unethical behaviour of teachers, 31.6% said that they didn't identified the unethical behaviour of teachers. The problem from the perspective of others was particularly biased, respectively unfair assessment of students associated with favouring of some students (32.9%), followed by non-compliance of assessment criteria during the semester by teachers (21.1%), another problem is the arrogant behaviour of some teachers (26.3%).

Students should also give an examples, when they found themselves in an ethical dilemma, this question answered 46.3% of respondents. Examples of dilemmas were related to *use or unuse* of cheat sheet on the test during the semester or at the exam, respectively, *crib* from classmates on the test during the semester or at the exam (50% of responses), followed

by the cheating by semester projects (18.2%). Some students also mentioned the dilemma if report the unethical behaviour of their classmates or not (9%).

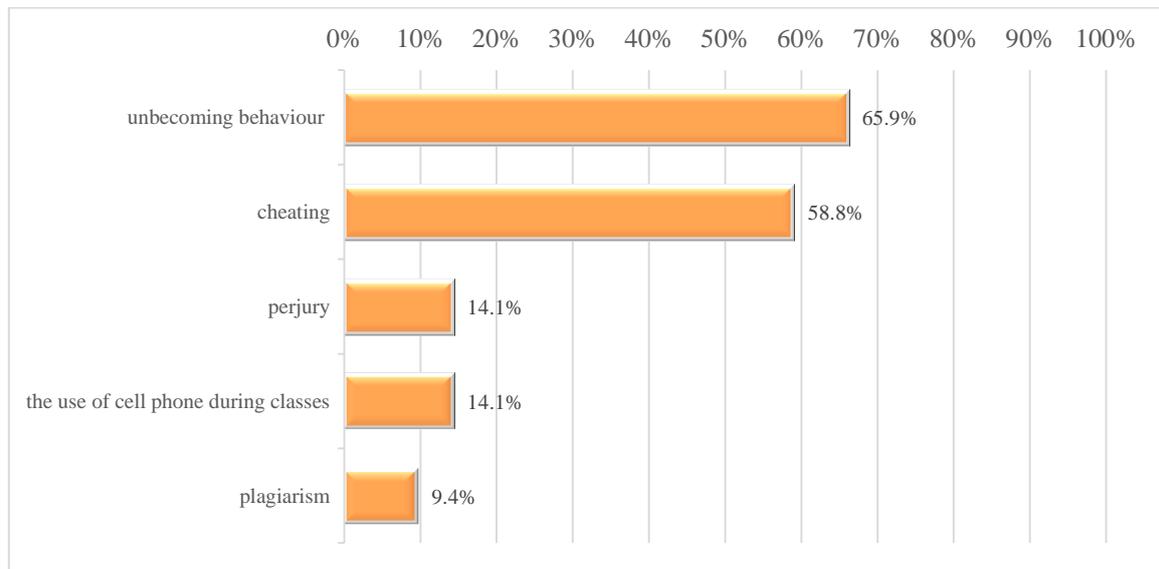


Figure 9. Unethical behaviour of students (own study)

#### 4. Conclusion

From the results of this investigation can be concluded that students actively do not care about their rights and obligations, nor find the rules that define their student life. They mostly rely, that about the existence of their rights and duties, will be informed during their studies.

Despite the fact that majority of students are aware of what is and is not ethical, many of them unfortunately resort to unethical behaviour. Most significant issues, in addition to human relations and mutual respect, is mainly the cheating of the students. When we compare the results with the work of the authors mentioned above, we find that we encounter the same problems. McClung & Schneider (2015) in their paper identified 18 categories of academic behaviour, which includes for example *cheating*, *accessory to cheating*, *plagiarism*, *accessory to plagiarism*, *recycling* etc. (Table 2).

Table 2. Level of employees' and managers' motivation (McClung, E. L. & Schneider, J. K. 2015. A Concept Synthesis of Academically Dishonest Behaviors. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, 13(1): 5–6)

Taxonomy	Definition	Examples
Anti-Whistle Blower	Failure to report known episodes of academically dishonest behaviour	Witnessing students cheating on an exam and not reporting it
Cheating	Initiating behaviours during an exam or quiz to obtain information so as to answer questions correctly	Using cheat sheets Looking off another's test Receiving answers via text messaging
Accessory to Cheating	Helping another student to cheat	Providing answers to other students by allowing them to view your exam Texting answers to other students during the exam
Clarification	To give or receive information, examples, or support to improve clarity and understanding about an assignment or	Asking a classmate to explain an assignment Telling a friend where to locate laboratory

	procedure from someone other than the instructor. The objective is not to get out doing work, but to do it better or correctly	experiment guidelines
Collaboration	When an individual assignment is completed by a group. The objective is to lessen the amount of work or effort necessary to complete the assignment	One student pulls the articles, another summarizes them, and another answers the homework questions.
Editorial Assistance	To give or receive assistance concerning the mechanics of writing	Having your writing edited for writing style and organization Correcting the grammatical errors on a friend's paper
Noncompliance	Failing to follow set guidelines, rules, or stated expectations for assignments, exams, or peer grading	Submitting a paper with larger margins or font size
Perjury	To create or provide false or inaccurate information, to make up or lie.	Falsifying lab results Telling a professor, you are ill so you can take the exam at a later time
Plagiarism	To pass off another's work as one's own; without crediting a source.	Failure to correctly reference a source Turning in a someone else's assignment as if it were your own Having someone else take your exam
Accessory to Plagiarism	Helping another student commit plagiarism	Selling to another student your written work, lab data, or homework Writing a paper or taking an exam for another student
Recycling	Reusing all or part of one's own previous work	Submitting a paper in one course that you wrote in a different course
Sabotage	The intentional destruction of another's property or work	Destroying library or lab materials
Short Cutting	Actions taken to reduce the amount of time spent reading	Reading Sparknotes or watching the film version in place of reading
Slacker	Receiving credit with little or no contribution to group work. Forcing other group members to do more than their fair share	Not participating in a group assignment
Supplemental Learning	To receive or obtain information from someone other than the instructor so as to better understand the topic	Sharing notes with a friend to make sure you both have a thorough understanding of the content
Supplemental Test Prep	Augmenting study preparation	Receiving a previous copy of the test to use as a guide for studying
Accessory to Supplemental Test Prep	Helping other students to augment their studying	Maintaining a test file Providing old copies of an exam to another student
The Hail Mary	A final or last ditch effort made to positively influence a grade even when the likelihood of success is low. When all other options are gone	Marking two answers in hopes of getting half credit Trying to bias a professor by being overly friendly and kind

Regarding the fight against unethical behaviour of students it is needed not only in the form of public education to students with the rules they have to follow also with justification, but also stricter sanctioning of non-compliance. Examples are two detected cases of plagiarism at our faculty last year, when the students, although they did not know the details, wondered about the process and outcome of solutions of these particular cases. Due

to the real punishment of the culprits in the form of a conditional exclusion from the study, respectively admission to take final exams, students are increasingly aware that today's period of growth of information and communications technology 'helps' not only students by the plagiarism but also the faculty in its more efficient detection.

#### Acknowledgement:

The paper was conducted within the project VEGA 1/0916/15 offered by The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

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