



OBSERVATORY

MAGNA CHARTA UNIVERSITATUM

# **core university values - how to practise them?**

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- first some background thinking ('philosophy')
- then some specific cases ('applications')

- all universities exist on the basis of a social contract
- a *culture or mind set* implicitly and a *legal and political framework* explicitly stating expectations on purposes and processes of a university
- this determines both the potential and the limitations of a university

- the social contract (in legal and/or political terms) may allow a university
- a high degree of *independence* it needs to make its own choices
- or *steer* its modus operandi to a high degree
- and anything in between

- usually we are more keenly aware of limitations that are new or *unfamiliar*
- while *familiar* limitations may not be seen as limitations at all
- this becomes evident in international comparison and when engaged in cross border relations in higher education
- universities are different

## no university is an island

- we tend to forget that the social contract (in terms of *culture*) also is a *bridge* between university and society, an enabler
- university and society must share ‘a language’ to enable sensible interaction
- also this becomes evident in international comparison and when engaged in cross border relations in higher education: what is acceptable or not differs from one setting to another, so do priorities, like with any institute defined by culture

- *an independent, open and forward looking community of scholars* is what universities are and should be (this is why universities exist to begin with)
- on this they must base their style, to this they should be truly faithful, not out of self protection and as a privilege, but rather *as a duty, a service to the benefit of society*
- regular maintenance is crucial

- a research university knows 3 work processes:
  - (1) teaching & research (*primary* processes)
  - (2) *development of academic discipline & professional quality of academics* (often underrated)
  - (3) coordination, stimulation, general budgeting and other matters of general interest to the university (*leadership, support staff & services*)
- the core values should be at home in all 3



- what does this **value profile** imply for university strategies and practices?
- *in terms of virtues* (in institutional and individual terms, like integrity & social responsibility)
- crucial to not just preach the norms and pretend to stick to them, but *discuss* real dilemmas and mistakes made, and *exercise* individual and group attitudes and decisions

- in terms of *values*
  - in-house *shared* beliefs about what is important and acceptable, and what not
  - as a base for role and responsibilities in society as well (mission and position)
- will we only serve the ‘best’ (excellence paradigm), reward competitive spirit (winners mentality) or *also incentivize community building, social innovation* etc?
- also in international relations: *constructive co-operations in stead of reputational climbing*

values count, not only *in  
extremis*

- in extreme cases (in case of extreme misconduct or flagrant injustices) we know what to think, how to judge and act
- there are, however, many slippery slopes and graduated scales of ethical issues
- which stresses the need for active value awareness *tout court* for Higher Education

- what does this value profile imply for university strategies and practices?
- in terms of *trust* [cannot be bought, must be given]
- the road to trust starts at respect [for institutions acting with integrity and truthfulness]
- within society at home, but also in international relations [acting respectfully]

- few universities , if any, live up to these ideals to the full
- quite a few are bound by social contracts that do not allow them to do so
- or fail to use the opportunity they have
- universities worldwide should co-operate to optimize their performance in terms of core values and/or support positive developments

“*Accreditation*, both academic and institutional, can only serve its purpose if the accrediting body is totally *independent* from government control, particularly as far as government-owned universities are concerned, a situation that is being resisted in many places since it could expose the defects of the current system”

(Hosram Badrawi, Magna Charta Observatory 2007, on HE in Egypt)

- *student* admission and graduation are very sensitive operations requiring transparent regulation and honest execution
- yet decisions on access may be fouled, not merit-based and/or led by favoritism
- likewise the examination processes may not be impartial and the results may be for sale



[http://issuu.com/transparencyinternational/docs/global\\_corruption\\_report\\_-\\_educatio/1?e=2496456/5037959](http://issuu.com/transparencyinternational/docs/global_corruption_report_-_educatio/1?e=2496456/5037959)

## Global Corruption Report: Education

**TRANSPARENCY  
INTERNATIONAL**



- Grant McBurnie & Christopher Ziguras  
*Transnational Education: Issues and Trends in Offshore Education* London: Routledge Falmer  
2007
- Jacques Hallak & Muriel Poisson 'Academic Fraud and Quality Assurance: Facing the Challenge of the Internationalization of Higher Education' in Gudmund Hernes & Michaela Martin (eds)  
*Accreditation and the Global Higher Education Market Place 2008, 190-206*

- good *leadership* requires a base of trust & support within the institution
- open & fair elections are a robust way to guarantee this
- yet such a process may be thwarted
- or the results may be disregarded by the authorities

“People of India are deeply concerned about the form and extent of corruption in almost all walks of life.

What is particularly alarming is the conspicuous corruption in higher education undermining the foundations of society. It has become so pervasive, making it difficult to assess the root causes.

The general perception, however, is that the increasing degree of political interference in higher education is a dominant factor.”

- academic independence implies *freedom* to teach and research within the realm of professional peer standards
- and the related *protection* by peers
- however, external powers or interests may directly or indirectly interfere and even apply far-reaching sanctions
- based on a wide range of convictions, *from infringing political correctness & reputational damages to endangering state security & harm to industry interests*

- one would like to think that the academic community of teachers and researchers were *accessible* on the basis of merit alone
- in reality, however, traditional preferences and/or positions often play a crucial role in the selection of faculty
- NB 'my traditional preferences may not be yours'

- *assessment* of academic performance (individually as well as institutionally) ought to be *balanced* and *inclusive*,
- reflecting a broad range of fields and criteria (in stead of ranking based upon bibliometrics and funding successes)
- including responding to (international) societal needs

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- quite a few are bound by social contracts that do *not* allow them to do so
- or fail to use the opportunity they have
- universities worldwide should co-operate to optimize their performance in terms of core values and/or support positive developments and colleagues in distress



## common & continuous efforts

- Magna Charta Observatory tries to find ways to promote serious thinking, talking, working on university values and virtues
- *creating & promoting ethical awareness and peer solidarity*
- *monitoring and exposing actual misconduct and structural negligence & repression of core values*
- MCO cannot, however, do this alone