

Swedish Association of University Teachers

ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS (2004)¹

The functions of the university teacher

University teachers can have different roles or functions. They are summarized here in three groups:

- (1) *Researcher*
- (2) *Teacher/supervisor*
- (3) *Administrator/leader*

University teachers may also have different positions or posts, such as professor, lecturer, instructor, or doctoral candidate. The guidelines are designed to apply regardless of what *position* they have, but the emphasis may vary depending on the *function* of the teachers.

Some fundamental values

The fundamental values are chosen because long experience has shown that they promote free scholarship and education. They form the basis of the credibility of teachers and their ability to stand free of undue influence. They are necessary for university teachers to be able to participate in and contribute to an international academic exchange. The values chosen to apply to the work of university teachers have been grouped under four headings:

- (1) *Quality*
- (2) *Consideration*
- (3) *Fairness*
- (4) *Openness*

¹ See the SULF home page

<http://www.sulf.se/upload/Dokument/tycktochtryckt/Rapporter/Etikbilaga.pdf>. This text summarizes the ethical principles of the Swedish Association of University Teachers. It is supplemented by a discursive publication with commentaries and references. Both are included in the publication “Etiska riktlinjer för universitetslärare” (only in Swedish) (SULF:s skriftserie XXVII, 2005).

The following presents a number of examples of what university teachers should bear in mind and be responsible for in each function. The examples have intentionally been made concrete to provide university teachers with solid support in everyday work.²

Quality

The activities of universities and colleges are all about producing and reproducing knowledge. This means that quality is a fundamental value to promote and defend.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE RESEARCHER

- Always to strive for truth in research.
- Strive to see your subject from different perspectives. One-sided elucidation of a problem may detract from the reliability of the findings.
- Try to question your own hypotheses and preconceived notions.
- Do not distort research findings by suppressing items you do not like.
- Make every effort to ensure that the form and content of the presentation of your research represents the state of research.
- When called upon to serve as an expert, make it clear what special knowledge you have—and do not have.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS

- Do not pretend to know more than you do.
- Try to stay informed so that your teaching reflects the latest advances.
- Provide a picture of your field that represents the complexity of the state of research.
- Be a good role model in terms of honesty and conscientiousness in your teaching and supervision.
- Do not take on more supervision than you can deal with in good conscience.
- Inform your employer if you have too many students to guarantee excellence in your teaching.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADMINISTRATORS/LEADERS

- Ensure that all personnel receive the training or professional development they need to do a good job in the function they have.
- See to it that the personnel have easy access to laws, ordinances, and ethical guidelines that regulate their own work.
- Make sure that it is practically possible to pursue activities within the parameters of regulations and ethical norms and guidelines.

² For full exemplification, readers are referred to “*Etiska riktlinjer för universitetslärare*” (only in Swedish)

Consideration

At the very least, everyone, regardless of function and position, should show the consideration stipulated by laws and ordinances.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS

- Factor into your research consideration of anyone who may be affected by your work in the short or long term.
- Do not embark upon deception studies (research that fools individuals) without having discussed the set-up with an ethical board or with external colleagues.
- If your planned study is not obliged by law to undergo ethical review, ask some colleagues who are not directly involved to review your set-up.
- Do not participate in plagiarism of the work of other researchers.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS

- Show respect for the knowledge and competence of students or doctoral candidates. Seriously consider their views and proposals as well as arguments for and against them.
- Within the framework of your professional role, try to put yourself into the situation of your students or doctoral candidates.
- Be sensitive to the student-teacher relationship and do not take advantage of individuals who are dependent on you. Disruptive extra-professional relations with doctoral candidates and students—of a sexual nature, for instance—must not occur.
- In all critical examination, be fair. Criticize untenable arguments, but do not show contempt for those promulgating them. All criticism and questioning should be put forward in a way that allows the persons criticized to defend themselves.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADMINISTRATORS/LEADERS

- Treat all associates with respect.
- Promote a relaxed collaborative environment with an unstressed and friendly atmosphere for all.
- Be sensitive to signals of disharmony, bullying, or other disrespectful discrimination at the workplace and try to deal with it as soon as possible.

Fairness

Fairness means not favoring or disfavoring anyone on non-objective grounds. It also involves impartiality in the sense of not assuming beforehand that a certain party is right.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS

- Acknowledge those whose work is being further developed by your own work.
- Do not distort the views of others by using misleading references or quotations.
- Try to be fair and impartial in assessing the articles of others and in applications for funding or appointments.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS

- Acknowledge those who have provided you with ideas and material for your teaching.
- Listen equally carefully to all points of view, regardless of whether you like what is being said and regardless of who is saying it.
- Be fair in contacts with students and doctoral candidates and when you grade examinations or other work.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADMINISTRATORS/LEADERS

- Respect all branches of activities.
- Be clear and see to it that all employees know what to expect of each other.
- Maintain a professional and proper relationship with all employees.

Openness

Universities and colleges should be places in society where anything can be expressed that does not violate any laws or the constitution and by all persons prepared to present arguments for their opinions and to listen to counterarguments. Openness concerning what transpires within the university or college should also be shown toward the surrounding society.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF RESEARCHERS

- Say what you perceive to be true without considering how opportune it may be.
- Accept that your own theses and findings may be questioned, even though it may be painful.
- Do not suppress the freedom of expression of others.
- Enter into dialog with your detractors and do not try to stonewall them.
- Make public any commercial or other interests that might jeopardize the credibility of your research.
- Be generous to colleagues and associates in regard to your own findings and the contributions of others.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS/SUPERVISORS

- Encourage students and doctoral candidates to call things into question.
- Do not assume that students are wrong if they disagree with you.
- Be gracious when your work is questioned.
- Be generous to colleagues and students regarding their points of view and work efforts.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ADMINISTRATORS/LEADERS

- Work to ensure that all appointments are posted and all recruitment is done openly.
- Work to create an open climate for discussion.
- Defend any personnel who asks justified questions and levels objective criticism.
- See to it that experienced problems are dealt with and not swept under the carpet.
- See to it that research material is archived in such a way that it is possible to reconstruct what was done should anyone be accused of academic impropriety.

These ethical guidelines deal with issues that are not directly regulated by law. Like other human beings, university teachers must, of course, obey laws and ordinances. Ethical guidelines do not set aside laws but serve rather to complement them.