

Survey on

Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and Academic Integrity

from a Student Perspective

WESU EUROPEAN
STUDENTS'
UNION



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Edited by

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1 Introduction

Academic freedom is the most important pillar that underpins and enables a democratic and free higher education sector. Academic freedom is generally associated with the fact that higher education institutions can act independently of outside influences, that members of the academic community are free to learn, teach, and conduct research, and that campuses are free from any form of repression or attack. In the discussion on academic freedom, however, it is striking that this concept has been discussed mostly within a very narrow framework. The concept of academic freedom is often confused with that of free speech. Moreover, the basic rights of academic staff at universities are generally protected by law worldwide, but the rights of other status groups, such as students, are not. Therefore, academic freedom in both academic and political discourse usually revolves around issues of higher education institutions' autonomy and faculty freedoms.

At the same time, events of recent years in the midst of the European Higher Education Area, as well as around the world, show that such a narrow understanding of the concept is at odds with the fact that the majority of repressions and restrictions on academic freedom affect students¹, and that it is mostly students who are affected by repression because of their involvement in civil society and higher education policy. Whether in Belarus, in Turkey, in Russia, in France or in the United Kingdom, attacks on academic freedom are occurring everywhere in Europe, narrowing the democratic sphere for students and student unions in higher education. Europe is in crisis and thus questions of fundamental values are currently discussed amongst all European higher education stakeholders.

Given that the academic and political debate on the concept of academic freedom tends to be one-sided and confined to the needs and experiences of academic staff and researchers, as well as in face of the ongoing attacks on the academic community in Europe, the European Students' Union inquired how European students perceive the current situation around academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity in their national/regional contexts, and how academic freedom is perceived by students and their representative bodies. This report summarises the results of the survey on academic

¹ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/free-to-think-reports/>

freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity conducted by ESU and financially supported by the Open Society Foundation. We hope that this report on student perceptions will enrich current debates as it is a first starting point to explore and address student perspectives on and the need for (student) academic freedom.

2 Method

A general literature review² on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity was conducted prior to creating the questions. The findings were then discussed within a working group consisting of student representatives from a diverse geographic European background. They filtered out which aspects from the literature review seemed essential for a concise survey on the topics of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity at a general level, and which aspects were specifically important to the reality of students or student representatives, thus also identifying gaps in the literature on student academic freedom. A first draft of the structure of the survey was then developed and questions on the various dimensions were subsequently added. It has to be highlighted that some of the questions regarding the academic freedom and the institutional autonomy sections have been adapted from the EUA publication ‘University Autonomy in Europe III: The Scorecard 2017’³ and that the ENAI publication ‘General Guidelines for Academic Integrity (2019)’⁴ served as primary inspiration for the section on academic integrity. The survey is divided into three sections dealing with academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and academic integrity. The first section on academic freedom is divided into subsections on ‘freedom of association,’ ‘freedom of expression,’ and ‘freedom of knowledge.’ The second section on institutional autonomy is divided into the subsections ‘University Governance,’ ‘Financial Autonomy,’ ‘Campus Integrity,’ and ‘Student Organizations.’ The third section on academic integrity follows the five basic

² Main sources include: the EHEA Rome Communiqué, indicators of V-Dem’s Academic Freedom Index, EUA’s University Autonomy Scorecard, publications from European Network on Academic Integrity (ENAI) and the International Center for Academic Integrity (ICAI), the UN academic freedom report, the Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom and University Autonomy, publications by SAIH and Scholars At Risk.

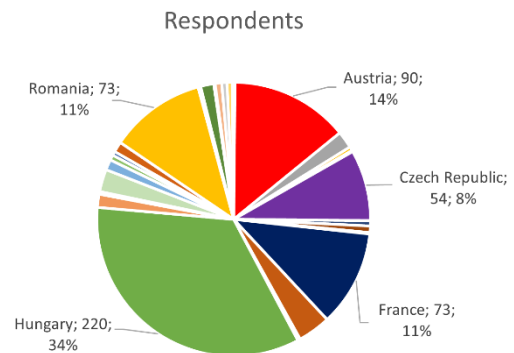
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<https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/university%20autonomy%20in%20europe%20iii%20the%20scorecard%202017.pdf> (p. 14ff.)

⁴ https://academicintegrity.eu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Guidelines_amended_version_1.1_09_2019.pdf

principles widely used in academia, Honesty, Trust, Fairness, Respect, and Responsibility.

Between May and September 2022, the survey was promoted via ESU's social media channels, internal and external newsletters and in some cases through the respective member unions as well as some higher education related partners. 645 students from 30 countries participated, though the majority of respondents, 78%, came from five countries:



Hungary, Austria, Romania, France and the Czech Republic.

52% of the respondents are enrolled in a bachelor's degree or equivalent, 36% in a master's degree or equivalent, 9% in a PhD programme, with the remaining not studying within the current Bologna tertiary cycle system.

53% of the respondents identify as female, 44% as male, 3% opted to tick "other", thus a balance is given. Regarding the age distribution the majority of 63% of respondents are between 18–24 years old, 21% between 25–30 and 16% over 31. The distribution matches the findings of Eurostudent VII⁵ according to which an average of 64% of students in Europe are under 25 years old, 20% between 25 and 30, and 16% above 30.

Limits of the survey

Due to time and capacity constraints pre-tests were not conducted. There have been instances of respondents not understanding questions correctly which became apparent both due to some comments within free fields as well as in regard to some interesting answer constellations. At the same time questions might have also been unclear due to language barriers as well as students who are not part of the student movement or relatively new not knowing about terms, higher education structures and other aspects they were questioned about. Though overall it appears that the vast majority of respondents understood questions or used the 'I don't know/I don't want to say' option. This umbrella option was given in anticipation of students either not knowing answers or not wanting to

⁵ https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/EurostudentVII_poster.pdf

give an honest answer, whether due to political reasons or reasons of not wanting to admit knowledge gaps.

With 645 respondents the threshold of 1000 participants was not reached, and the results are statistically speaking not significant. At the same time, we believe that the participation rate of 645 persons from a variety of backgrounds still gives a valuable and unique insight into what students in Europe think. Hopefully, this report can serve as a starting point to further research and enrich debates about the role, experiences and views of students within the broader topics of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity.

Regarding the geographic distribution the survey is especially significant regarding the five largely represented country groups. There is a slight bias towards students from the European Union, since most of the respondents are studying in EU countries. At the same time the geographic distribution with 3 Central and Eastern European countries as well as two western European countries gives a certain balance, leaving only the Mediterranean and Northern countries underrepresented.

3 Results

In the following, the results of the survey are presented according to the three themes of 'academic freedom,' 'institutional autonomy,' and 'academic integrity'. Within the survey these themes have been further broken down into subthemes, which are presented as follows. In order to ensure that respondents of the survey would complete it, for some questions answer options were provided. Regarding questions of particular interest, the possibility to explain in an open field format was added.

3.1 Academic Freedom

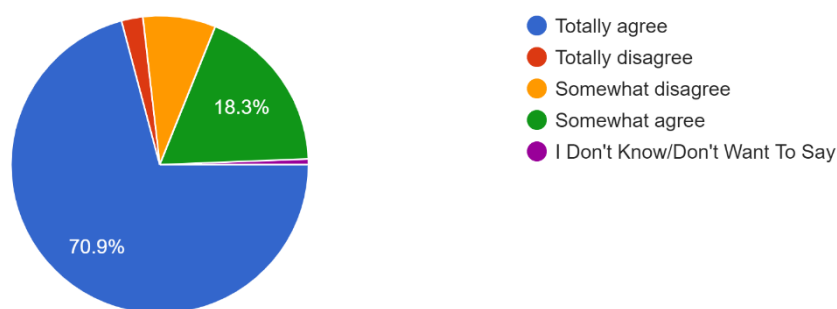
Within the broader concept of academic freedom, questions were developed on the subtopics of 'freedom of knowledge,' 'freedom of expression,' and 'freedom of association.' While the first one relates more to the freedom to gain knowledge through the choice of a field of study, the second one relates to the freedom of personal and academic views within

academia. Student academic freedom only truly exists if both knowledge gaining and knowledge sharing are possible without any constraints. The third aspect, freedom of association, differs from the first two as it is connected to the understanding of students as their own stakeholder group which entails certain rights such as self-governing representative bodies in a democratic higher education system, though this aspect may overlap with freedom of knowledge and expression.

Freedom of Knowledge(-Gaining)

I feel free to choose my field of study:

645 responses



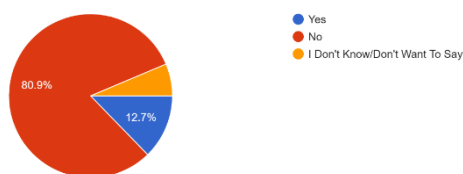
The freedom to choose one's studies without constraints is fundamental when it comes to the freedom to acquire knowledge in a desired field (and thus the freedom to choose a related job later on). More than 2/3 of the students felt completely free to choose their studies. In the categories in which they did not feel completely free, around 20% still agreed mostly and only around 10% of the participating students agreed somewhat or not at all. 185 respondents elaborated on how or by whom/what they felt restricted. Employability and family/societal pressure as well as the negative stigma of certain fields of studies were the most mentioned aspects that influenced the study choice. Respondents elaborated that their parents and teachers pushed them towards certain directions, a few also mentioned gender-based influence. Both in regard to societal pressure as well as self-created pressure, perceived employability of study fields was the main cause of the felt restriction in choice.

In addition, with regard to the individual level, problems of financing studies and tuition fees, as well as the associated possibility of working alongside studies, were mentioned several times. A few students mentioned health problems as a limitation. These aspects indicate that the choice of studies and thus access to education strongly depends on the available services and especially financial support and thus financial security.

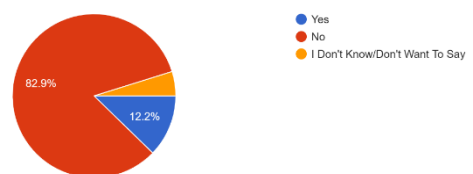
With regard to the restrictions on access to higher education, the lack of sufficient number of study spots in relation to the demand and high requirements were mentioned several times. Admission exams, numerus clausus, school grades and thus access restrictions in general are impacting and hindering students in their choice of studies. In addition, specialisation through secondary school and language barriers were mentioned in some cases.

On a more systemic level, the lack of appropriate programmes was mentioned several times in relation to different aspects. Geographical limitations and a lack of choice/diversity in the programmes offered were mentioned, especially in relation to distance from home and an urban-rural divide. In some cases, the programme available was perceived to be of poor quality. In addition, political restrictions on the existence of degree programmes (e.g. gender studies) were mentioned. Some of the PhD student respondents mentioned problems of finding fitting supervisors as well as the fact that such programs are mostly connected to project money and thus not always easy to find or simply available.

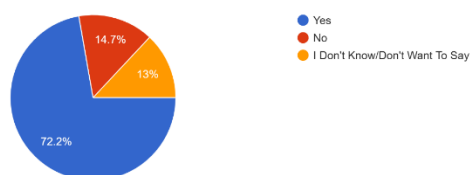
Because of what I study, I have been subject to intimidation from my peers:
645 responses



Because of what I study, I have been subject to intimidation from academic staff:
645 responses



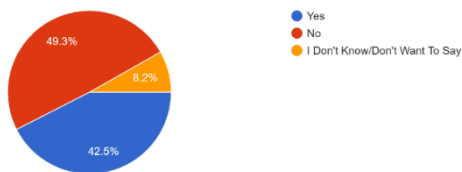
I feel free to pursue my research in any academic fields:
645 responses



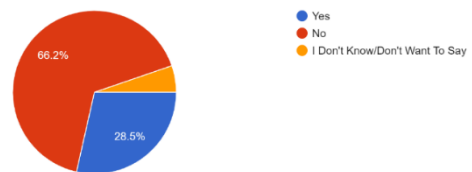
The freedom to acquire knowledge in higher education can also be threatened during studies, especially if students are subject to intimidation or restrictions in their pursued research. While the majority of students have never felt intimidated by peers or academic staff because of their choice of studies, about 13% responded that they have felt intimidated because of their studies – both in the sense of intimidation by other students and by staff. In addition, 15% of the respondents felt that they were not free in their research. As intimidation is related to study choices, research choices and self-censorship, this is a worrying finding and should be investigated further.

Freedom of Expression

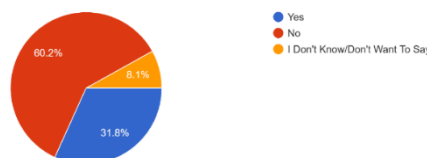
Have you ever self-censored yourself regarding your political views?
645 responses



Have you ever self-censored yourself regarding your academic views?
645 responses



During the course of your studies, have you felt the threat you might face consequences from your institution for voicing your personal beliefs?
645 responses

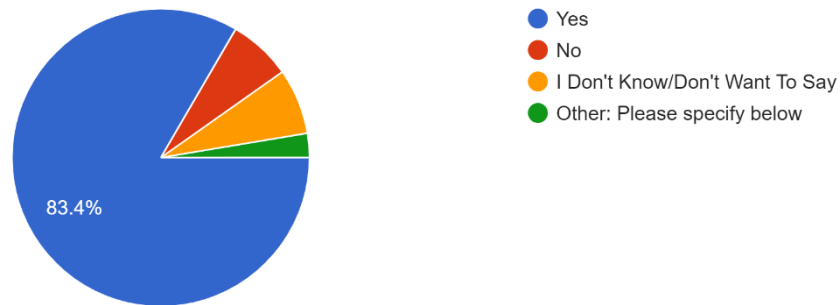


To find out the extent to which students feel their freedom from oppression is restricted, questions were asked about self-censorship and the perceived threat of consequences. For both political views and academic views an alarming number of students reported that they have self-censored their views before, with about 42% of respondents self-censoring their political views and about 32% self-censoring their academic views. A further alarming 32% of respondents believe that they would face consequences from their higher education institution if they expressed their personal beliefs.

Freedom of Association

Are you as a student free to associate (e.g. as student union, student clubs, etc.)?

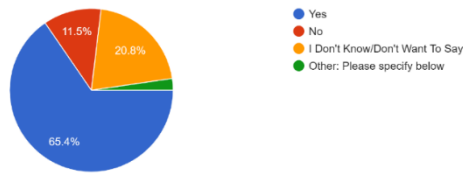
645 responses



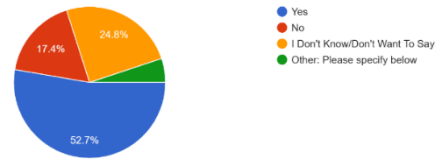
Freedom of association is the third area of student academic freedom that was surveyed. Around 84% of respondents answered that students are free to associate, e.g. in student clubs or student associations. At the same time, 7% answered 'No.' In the 'Yes' responses, respondents pointed to a diverse landscape of opportunities for association, ranging from student unions to political student clubs, music, theatre and sports groups. Of those who answered 'no' or 'other', the most common responses were in connection to restrictions due to political interests of decision-makers and thus associations being permitted if they are pro-governmental. A few times, restrictions on LGBTQI+ student associations were mentioned, especially in Hungary where Gender Studies have been banned by the government. With regard to Bavaria, it was mentioned that it is the only federal state in Germany where student unions/representations are not provided for by law, thus restricting the self-representation of the student body.

A few respondents said that they felt their higher education institutions put obstacles in their way when trying to form new associations. A very small single-digit number of respondents also mentioned perceived restrictions due to racism or pressure not to join conservative (e.g. religious or right-wing) groups openly. It should be noted that both aspects do not represent systematic restrictions of student associations by higher education institutions or governments, which is what the question actually aimed at.

Is your student representational body represented in democratic university structures?
645 responses



Are student representatives part of the decision making processes and overall governance structure of Higher Education Institutions?
645 responses



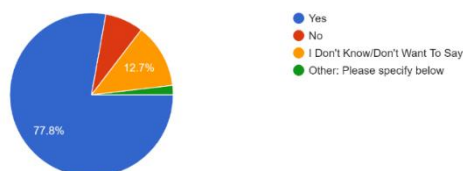
Regarding student representation in higher education, two thirds of respondents believe that their student representation is represented in democratic higher education structures such as senates, faculties and other committees, while more than 12% said that this was not the case at their higher education institution. Among them, it was mentioned that this was forbidden by the government, e.g. in Belarus, as well as that some representatives were not elected and/or that, due to racism and anti-LGBTQI+ resentment, representation was not possible as it should be in a democratic structure. Several respondents stated that although there was representation, it was still questionable because student representatives could not exercise real power.

Since the existence of student representatives in higher education structures does not mean that student representatives are also part of the decision-making processes and the overall governance structure of their higher education institutions, the second question inquired about this aspect. Here, only 53% of respondents answered that their student representatives are part of the overall decision-making process in higher education. Those who used the option to further explain mainly spoke of tokenism, lack of power for student representatives and too few students on committees, especially compared to academic staff and professors. One person replied, 'Officially yes, but in practice they are rarely invited to important meetings where important decisions are made that affect our educational process.' In some cases, the question of who represents what and where was raised, with one person stating, 'We have student groups that are democratically elected, but the class representative (who has all communication with the university) is not democratically elected.' Some respondents mentioned backroom decision-making and representation on decision-making bodies but not on task forces, committees and other bodies that would develop proposals. The lack of representation at national level and negative changes in recent years due to higher education law reforms were also mentioned a few times. At the same time, the Flemish higher education sector was mentioned as a

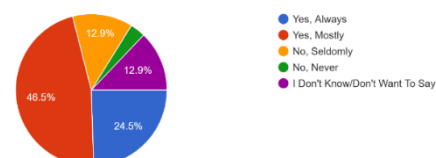
positive example, with the person explaining that the national students' union is respected by the Flemish Ministry of Higher Education as an official student partner and is guaranteed seats in various government and higher education bodies, task forces, etc.

It is noteworthy that for both questions a considerably high proportion of students did not know or did not want to express their opinion (for the first question approx. 20%, for the second question approx. 25%), which could indicate a lack of information about the possibility and the right of students to be represented in democratic university structures. This should be seen as problematic as it means that a high number of students are not familiar with university structures and in particular with their own student representation structures, i.e. higher education democracy. One recommendation from the survey with regard to the lack of knowledge about democratic processes at universities is to promote this more strongly. Another recommendation is to include non-native speakers in decision-making processes and committees, as otherwise the perspectives of international students in particular would be excluded.

Are your student representatives chosen democratically?
645 responses



Do you feel that your student representatives can speak and act freely within your Higher Education Institution?
645 responses

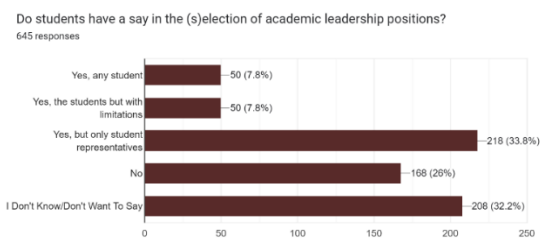
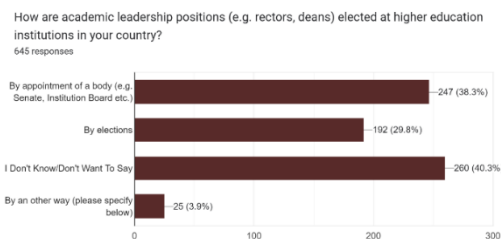


A majority of 77.8% of respondents believe that student representatives are elected on a democratic basis and only a small proportion of 7.6% believe that student representatives are not elected democratically. Some respondents made use of the option 'other'. Some respondents noted that although the elections are democratic, they believe that the voter turnout is low and that students do not know much about the candidates or the role of the elected students. Some respondents also pointed out that in addition to student representative elections, there are also student representative positions that are appointed or selected by higher education institutions. In the case of Belarus, it was mentioned that student representatives are selected by the administration. A few respondents questioned the democratic legitimacy of student elections, pointing to the lack of choice and low turnout.

A quarter of respondents believe that student representatives are always able to speak and act freely in their higher education institution, while half of respondents answer that this is at least usually the case. 16.2% of respondents believe that student representatives are rarely or even never able to speak and act freely, which is worrying in that they believe that student representatives are not able to fully fulfil their representative role. The high number of 'yes, most of the time' responses combined with the 16.2% 'no, rarely' and 'no, never' responses therefore indicates a general perceived dependency and resulting limitations for student representatives.

3.2 Institutional Autonomy

Higher education institution Leadership



Whereas with regard to student representative bodies such as student unions, the answers from people who did not know or did not want to express their opinion already accounted for around 20-25% of the answers, the answers regarding the (s)election of people for academic leadership positions and the students' say in such (s)elections are even higher, with 30-40% who could not give an answer to the question. Here, too, the question of lack of knowledge must be asked in connection with the lack of knowledge of higher education and student representation structures, i.e. higher education democracy.

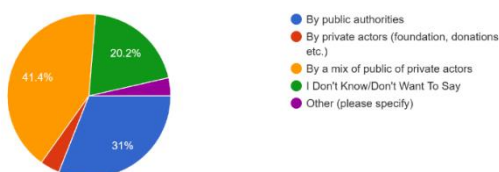
Regarding the election of leadership positions in higher education institutions, about 40% of the respondents did not give an answer to this question. In a question where more than one choice was allowed, 28% of respondents indicated that their academic leadership is appointed by higher education bodies such as senates, faculty councils and the like. 20% indicated that elections take place, without specifying whether through higher education

institution bodies or direct elections. Less than 4% of respondents combined different answers, e.g. 'appointment' and 'through elections' or 'other'. A few specified their answer and stated that the different leadership positions are elected in different ways. Some mentioned that deans are appointed through elections, with the results of the elections usually known in advance, with '[a]ny "inappropriate" (with alternative views) person" not being able to be elected by default.

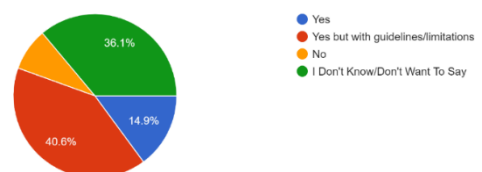
When asked about student participation, the answers again signal the general lack of understanding of higher education structures. While about 32% of respondents did not know or did not want to answer, 7.8% of students answered that every student has a say in the election of academic leadership positions. This indicates a lack of understanding of the question or a lack of knowledge, as direct universal elections of academic leadership positions such as rectors and deans by all members of a higher education institution, in which every student would have a say, do not exist in the countries of those respondents who chose the respective option to answer. Therefore approx. 40% of respondents (the 7.8% combined with the over 32.2.% 'I do not know" answers) appear to not have an understanding of student participation in (s)election procedures as of how these procedures work. A quarter of respondents believe that students have no say at all, while almost 8% believe that students do have a say, but with limitations. 34% of respondents chose the answer option that students have a say, but only through representatives, which is mostly correct for the EHEA.

Financial Autonomy

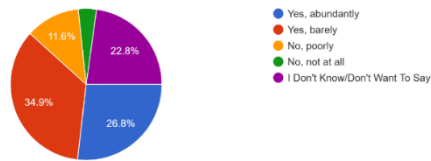
How are Higher Education Institutions funded?
645 responses



My Higher Education Institution can administer its finances freely and independently:
645 responses



The level of funding of my institution is sufficient for maintaining the institution's activities, services and educational programmes:
645 responses



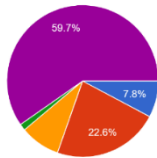
Regarding students' views on the funding of higher education, three preliminary options were presented. Approx. 30% of students believe that higher education institutions in their country are funded by the public sector, approx. 40% believe in a mix of public and private funding, and only a small percentage believe that they are funded exclusively by private actors. Only about 4% made use of the option 'other', indicating other types of funding. 20% of the respondents did not seem to have any knowledge about the issue, which means that 1/5 of the respondents cannot assess the financial autonomy of higher education institutions. In the 'other' option, tuition fees (especially for foreign students), non-transparent endowment funding from state-established foundations (especially in Hungary) and the church, and a general increase in third-party funding were mentioned as observations of how higher education institutions seem to receive revenue.

Having funding does not necessarily mean that a higher education institution can manage resources freely and independently. More than 45% of respondents believe that their higher education institution is largely (35%) or even fully (27%) free and independent in the use of its resources. At the same time, more than 8% of respondents believe that their higher education institution is not free and independent in the management of its finances. The fact that more than 36% of respondents chose the option 'I don't know/I don't want to say' shows that while many are still convinced that they at least know how higher education institutions are financed, more than one third of respondents cannot assess what constraints higher education institutions may have.

When asked if the funding of their higher education institutions seems to be sufficient for maintaining activities, services and educational programmes, more than 60% of the respondents answered 'yes' or 'yes, barely', which indicates that they are satisfied with the services provided and thus believe that the funding is sufficient but that it would leave higher education institutions unequipped in case of crisis. On the other hand, more than 15% believe that their institution is underfunded, while again almost 23% could not properly evaluate the question and chose the option 'I don't know/I don't want to say'.

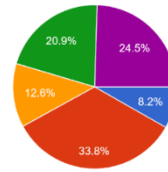
Campus Integrity

Can other state actors besides the higher education institution (e.g. law enforcement, governmental authorities etc.) perform their duty or...ution without the authorisation of the institution?
645 responses



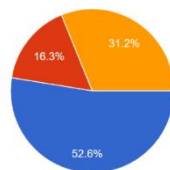
- Yes: They can enter the premises, but cannot carry out proceedings (arresting, detaining etc.)
- Yes: They can enter the premises, and carry out proceedings
- No: The institution's premises can enter only upon authorisation of the institution
- No: The institution's premises are not available for the bodies
- I Don't Know/Don't Want To Say

Does your institution have its own security service?
645 responses



- Yes: It is provided by the state (e.g. Campus Police etc.)
- Yes: It is provided by the campus institution
- Yes: It is provided by a private actor
- No
- I Don't Know/Don't Want To Say

Is there any form of video surveillance on the premises of the institution?
645 responses



- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know/Don't Want To Say

When it comes to student academic freedom, the campus as a safe space for students is of utmost importance. Asked about whether state actors such as law enforcement or governmental authorities could enter the grounds of higher education institutions without authorization by the institution, almost 60% of the respondents did not know. This indicates not only that the knowledge about this is not present to students, but also that students hence do not know their rights in case of such an event that might be connected to them or their peers. Only a minority of students believe that state actors can only enter upon authorization (8.5%) or not at all (1.4%).

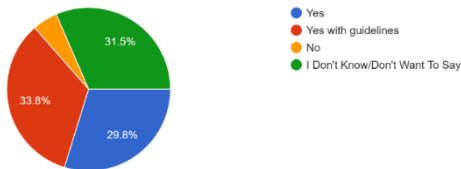
In response to the question asking how security services are provided at their higher education institution, 8% of students believe that these services are provided by the state, suggesting a direct influence of state actors on campus security. More than 45% believe that security services are provided by agents employed via the institution or by private actors, indicating at least a perceived independence of these forces from the authorities. 20% of students answered that there are no security services at all, which seems unlikely and thus indicates a knowledge gap. Another quarter of the respondents made use of the option not to answer. Overall, approx. a quarter of respondents are not aware of the security services on their campus and therefore do not know what their rights are in relation to them.

Regarding the presence of surveillance at their higher education institution, again a very large number of students, more than 30%, said that they did not know or did not want to give any information about it. Only 16% believe that there is no surveillance, while half of all respondents answered that there is surveillance at their higher education institution.

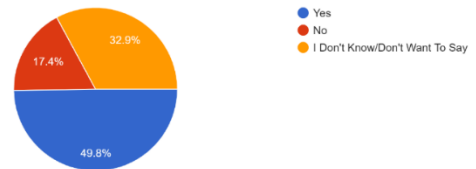
Overall, it appears that students are not well informed in relation to security measures and campus integrity, and it is therefore to be expected that they also do not know what their basic rights are in relation to these measures.

Student Organisations

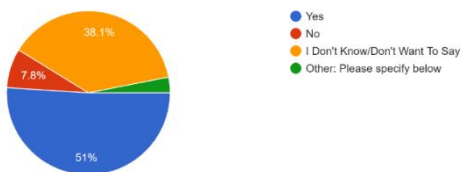
Is your student union free to decide how to spend its funds?
645 responses



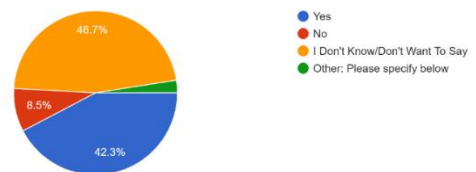
Does your student union operate independently from the institution and its staff?
645 responses



Can student groups other than student unions operate independently?
645 responses



Are these groups free to decide how to spend their funds?
645 responses



For students, as the largest status group at higher education institutions, the right to organise themselves and manage their work freely and independently is directly linked to students' academic freedom. Almost 2/3 of respondents believe that student unions are free to decide how to spend their funds, even if there are guidelines for doing so. At the same time, a very small minority of about 5% of the respondents believe that this is not the case, which indicates a perceived restriction of organisational autonomy. About 31% of the respondents could or did not want to answer the question, which indicates the problem of students' lack of information about student self-government and representation rights. The same number of respondents were not able to answer the question of whether or not their student union acts independently of the higher education institution and their staff. While 50% of respondents believe that student unions operate independently, an alarming 17.4%

answered 'no'. Regardless of whether or not student unions actually operate independently, the very perception that they do not is already a problem, as student unions exist to advocate for student interests independently of other higher education institution stakeholders and, from a democracy perspective, a negative perception impacts the relation between student union and student body.

As far as the independence of other student groups is concerned, the respondents answered similarly to the question about student unions. Only the number of 'no' answers is significantly lower (7.8%), but this may be due to the fact that a slightly higher number of people could not or chose not to answer, as well as some opting for the 'other' option. Respondents indicated that it depends on the group, e.g. interest clubs or event groups may operate independently. Others stated that student groups can operate independently but must follow the rules of the institution and be given permission to operate by the institution. Another interesting comment compares the degree of freedom of student associations and other student groups. It states that student unions, as part of higher education institutions, have less freedom of action than other student groups, but at the same time student unions have more funding for their work. Regarding the funding of student groups that are not student unions, more than 40% of respondents believe that they are free to decide how to use their funds, while almost half do not know or did not want to indicate this. In addition, about 10 % of respondents answered 'no' or made use of the option 'other'. Several people stated that student groups do not usually receive funding and if they have their own budget, it is made up by donations from their activists. It was noted that such groups technically have the freedom to spend their funds, but in reality, they do what the institutions tell them to do. Others mentioned that student associations can spend funds freely, but with some guidelines, and that they should report on how they spend the funds.

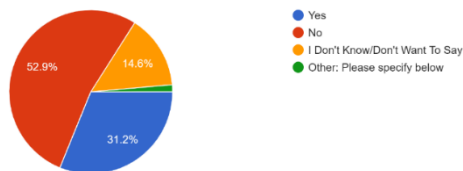
Overall, about one third of respondents do not know how student unions and associations operate at their institutions and how they use their funds. At the same time, there is evidence that student unions and associations are generally free to operate at higher education institutions and are mostly independent in their use of funds and decision-making.

3.3 Academic Integrity

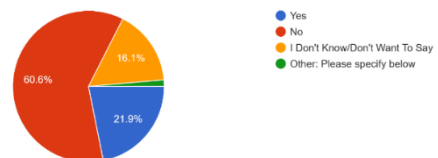
Academic integrity is a topic that has mostly been discussed by academics in the context of academic fraud in research and science, and fraud prevention in relation to potentially cheating students. In terms of academic integrity this survey focused on the five key dimensions of the concept: honesty, trust, respect, fairness and responsibility. At the same time, it should be noted that the questions in regard to those five aspects were developed based on a student point of view.

Honesty

Have you ever witnessed corruption in the academic community (e. g. nepotism, clientelism, etc.)?
645 responses



Have you ever witnessed academic fraud in the scientific research in your Higher Education Institution (e.g., Plagiarism, Collusion, etc.)?
645 responses



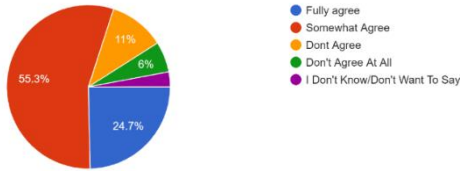
Corruption in academia can come in different forms. When asked if survey participants had ever witnessed corruption, half answered no, while a worrying third answered yes. Over 14% did not know or did not want to answer the question. In the option 'other', a small number of people indicated that they had not witnessed corruption themselves but had heard about it through rumours.

When asked if they had ever witnessed academic fraud in connection with scientific research, almost 2/3 of the respondents answered 'no', with the option 'I don't know/no answer' remaining almost the same. However, over 20% of respondents answered 'yes'.

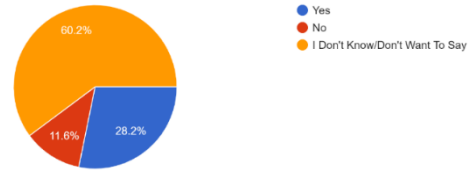
Academic fraud therefore seems to be at least less visible than corruption, although in both cases a considerable number of students have already witnessed academic corruption and fraud.

Trust

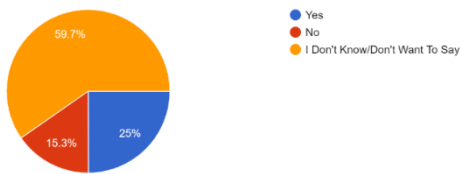
There is a culture of trust between academic staff and students.
645 responses



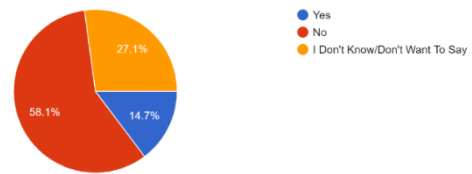
Are proctoring software or other surveillancing measures allowed at your university?
645 responses



Are proctoring software or other surveillancing measures used at your university?
645 responses



Have you ever faced a data breach in your Higher Education Institution?
645 responses



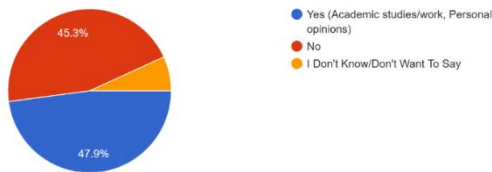
When asked about an existing culture of trust between students and academic staff, a quarter of respondents answered that they fully agree that such a culture exists, and another 55% somewhat agree. At the same time, about 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Regarding proctoring software and other surveillance measures, 2/3 of respondents did not know if they were allowed at their universities, while 1/3 thought they were allowed and almost 12% thought they were not allowed. Most 'no' answers came from people studying in countries like Austria, Germany or France. When asked whether proctoring software or other surveillance measures are used at their higher education institution, the response rate remained almost the same, although slightly more respondents believe that these measures are not used. Most of those who answered 'yes' study in Hungary, although at the same time many of the respondents from Hungary also answered 'no', which shows that the use of such measures is perceived differently not only between but also within countries and thus varies from higher education institution to institution. Overall, it appears that despite the introduction of proctoring and other surveillance measures, especially during Covid, the use is at least not perceived as high by students. At the same time, the high number of responses that were neither 'yes' nor 'no' indicates that students are neither aware of the possible nor of the actual use of such measures and thus probably also not aware of their rights in relation to them.

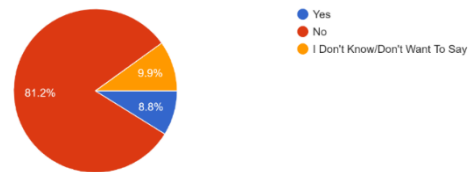
The last question of the section, whether they have ever faced data breaches at their higher education institutions, was answered 'no' by almost 2/3 of the respondents, while almost 1/3 of the respondents gave no answer and almost 15% answered 'yes'. The high percentage of 'yes' answers is worrying as this indicates higher education institutions need to improve data protection due to digitalisation and the fact that they have a lot of data about their students and staff. The high number of 'I don't know/I don't want to say anything' answers also shows that students are not able to evaluate the question, which might indicate intransparency or at least knowledge gaps of students when it comes to digitalisation and the use of their data in higher education.

Fairness

Have you ever experienced any unfair treatment in your experience in Higher Education?
645 responses



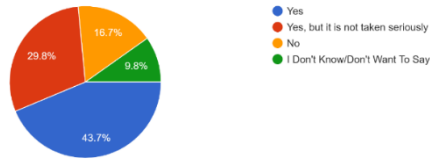
Have you ever witnessed blackmailing in higher education?
645 responses



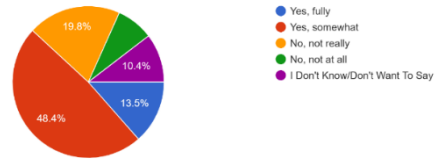
Concerning students' perceptions of unfair treatment, almost half of the respondents answered that they had been treated unfairly before, which is an alarming figure. This even applies to cases where the treatment perceived as unfair by the student may in fact have been fair, as the perception already indicates at least a communication problem, if not more. At the same time, a 50% response rate is too significant and cannot simply be dismissed with the argument that the perception of all these students did not match the situation. Unfair treatment therefore is perceived to be a widespread phenomenon from a student perspective. On the other hand, the vast majority of respondents have never experienced blackmailing in higher education. At the same time, almost 9 % have witnessed blackmailing, which is an alarmingly high figure.

Respect

Can you express feedback towards academic staff without the fear of being a victim of discrimination or retaliation?
645 responses



Are higher education staff aware of the hurdles students can face on a daily basis and do they act empathetically accordingly?
645 responses

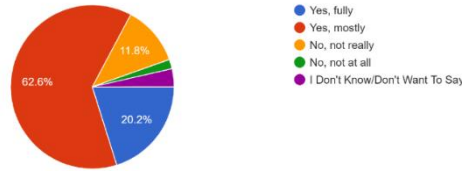


When asked if students feel that they can express their feedback to teaching staff without fear of negative consequences, over 70% of respondents answered 'yes' or 'yes, but it is not taken seriously', which also matches the 80% response rate to the question of whether there is a culture of trust at their higher education institution. The fact that one third of respondents feel that their feedback is not taken seriously gives the impression that academic staff do not care about student feedback. Another almost 17% of respondents said that they cannot freely express their feedback without fear of consequences, which is problematic in terms of mutual respect and a healthy feedback culture in higher education, as it indicates a fear of abuse of power by higher education staff.

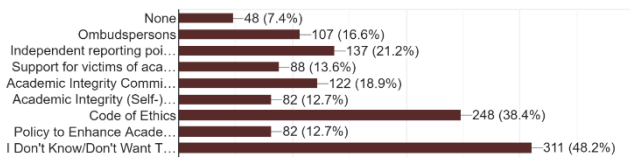
A second question aimed to find out whether students feel that academic staff are aware of the hurdles students face and whether they are empathetic towards students. This question was asked because a culture of trust and fairness and a good feedback culture in terms of respect do not necessarily mean that academic staff also understand students' struggles and act accordingly. Only a minority of almost 14% of respondents fully agreed, although another almost 50% of respondents said that they feel like academic staff understand students' struggles and act accordingly, at least to some extent. On the other hand, one third of respondents neither somewhat nor fully agreed, indicating that they perceive a general lack of empathy from academic staff towards students.

Responsibility

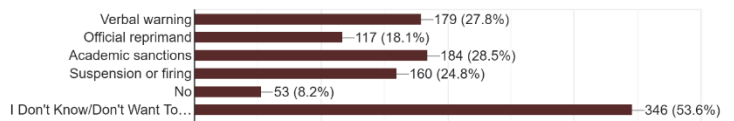
Do professors take their teaching responsibility seriously and design their teaching accordingly?
645 responses



What kind of independent institutional entities exist in relation to violations against academic integrity?
645 responses



Are there consequences for persons who have been reported breaching academic integrity?
645 responses



To the question of whether students have the impression that academic staff take their teaching responsibilities seriously, only 20% of respondents fully agreed, with another 62% mostly agreeing. Almost 14% answered 'no, not really' or 'no, not at all'. So while a significant number of students feel that teaching staff do not take their teaching responsibilities to students seriously enough, most students perceive academic staff to be at least mostly responsible in this regard.

In addition, responsibility is closely linked to accountability, which is why the survey asked about knowledge of institutional bodies in relation to breaches of academic integrity, as well as whether there are consequences for individuals who breach academic integrity. For both questions, there were a number of predefined response options as well as a free-field option. The majority of respondents answered that they did not know or did not want to answer when asked if there was any form of independent institutional body regarding breaches of academic integrity and if there were any consequences. This indicates a gap in knowledge regarding who to turn to when witnessing such violations, and thus a general lack of knowledge about their rights and obligations as members of the academic community.

As far as institutional bodies are concerned, at almost 40% of students believe that codes of ethics exist at their institution, and another 20% believe that independent reporting bodies and/or academic integrity committees exist. Regarding support for victims of

academic misconduct, tools for (self-)assessment of academic integrity and measures to improve academic integrity, only approx. 13% believe that these measures are in place.

When it comes to consequences for reported violations, about one-third of respondents believe there are consequences such as verbal warnings, official reprimands, academic sanctions, or suspension/dismissal, while nearly 10% said they believe there are no sanctions, indicating a lack of trust in higher education institutions to handle reported violations appropriately.

Respondents who used the 'free field' option mostly stated that they were not sure what academic integrity means and/or whether there are mechanisms in place in case of misconduct. Some mentioned that they had tried to press charges but had not received any result; in relation to Belarus political immunity was mentioned and in relation to Germany that the special status of being employed as a professor means that they are basically immune from consequences. One person noted that at their higher education institution there are only reporting forms where sexual and other types of harassment can be reported.

4 Discussion

Regarding all three areas of the survey, the results are rather worrying. In particular, the number of "I Don't Know / I Don't Want To Say" responses indicates that respondents were not able to evaluate many of the questions. For questions related to general knowledge (e.g. most questions on institutional autonomy and governance of higher education), this indicates gaps in knowledge. For questions that related to personal experience (e.g. many of the questions in the sections on academic freedom and academic integrity), knowledge gaps could also be the cause, although it is also possible that participants were unsure when it came to judging whether things were taking place or not, or should be categorised as a particular thing (e.g. misconduct). This distinction of the meaning of the "I Don't Know / I Don't Want To Say" responses should be kept in mind for the interpretation of the results and especially in the case of the personal experience questions, further research should be conducted.

In terms of academic freedom, students feel at least to a small extent pressured about their study choices due to external factors, and a significant number of students have been subjected to intimidation by other students and academic staff alike. A shocking number of students said that they had already self-censored their views and were afraid of the consequences from their higher education institution if they expressed their personal beliefs. Regarding student representative bodies, students are aware of the existence of student bodies such as student unions, but most of them do not know much about the structures, funding, functions and (s)election processes of these representatives. Those who gave clearer answers overall perceive the structures to be democratic, but doubt the embeddedness in higher education governance and the related power of student self-representation. They also problematised constraints in their representational function that representatives might face due to the power relations between academic staff and students.

Knowledge gaps also exist with regard to how the governance and funding structures of higher education institutions work as such, with students not really knowing how leadership positions are (s)elected and how to assess different aspects of funding of their higher education institutions. At the same time, the majority of students feel that funding for higher education is somehow inadequate. In terms of campus integrity, the knowledge gap about surveillance, security services and access to campus by authorities is particularly high. There are also large gaps in knowledge about the institutional autonomy of student organisations. Those students who felt able to assess the questions on institutional autonomy overwhelmingly believe that the university leadership follows democratic principles and acts independently of the higher education institution, although a significant number of respondents believe that there are dependencies.

Regarding questions in the section on academic integrity, corruption and cheating within the academic community was observed by a significant number of students. On the positive side, many students perceive a culture of trust between academic staff and students, although on the other hand there are large gaps in knowledge regarding surveillance measures, proctoring software and possible data breaches. Regarding fairness, almost half of the respondents stated that they had been treated unfairly at some point within higher education. A significant proportion of students feel that they either cannot give feedback to academic staff without consequences or that feedback is not taken

seriously. Academic staff are mostly perceived as empathetic towards students, although a significant number of respondents do not feel this way. Students have the impression that academic staff take their teaching responsibilities seriously. At the same time, most of them do not know what facilities and institutions there are in relation to academic misconduct and what the consequences are in the event of reported misconduct, especially with regard to misconduct of academic staff, with many supposing that academic staff are not really facing consequences for misconduct.

In summary, there is a widespread lack of information within the student body about university governance and democracy, including their own student representative structures. This lack of information also extends to the structures relating to academic misconduct. Students thus seem unable to properly assess academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity, whether from a general or specifically student perspective, which means that they are also unable to assess their rights.

As only a limited number of questions were asked and many of the questions were predominantly quantitative, further surveys of student perceptions should be conducted. One lesson from this survey should be that students lack knowledge in all three areas surveyed. However, if we want students to be able to assess their own rights and the rights and situation of higher education in terms of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and academic integrity, these knowledge gaps need to be addressed collectively through the cooperation of all stakeholders in higher education, as students as largest status groups in higher education and as young generation can only defend the fundamental values of higher education if they are educated about higher education democracy and governance and thus can make informed judgements and decisions.

Survey Questions

1. Academic Freedom

Freedom of Knowledge(-Gaining)

1. I feel free to choose my field of study:
2. Because of what I study, I have been subject to intimidation from my peers:
3. Because of what I study, I have been subject to intimidation from academic staff:
4. I feel free to pursue my research in any academic fields:

Freedom of Expression

5. Have you ever self-censored yourself regarding your political views?
6. Have you ever self-censored yourself regarding your academic views?
7. During the course of your studies, have you felt the threat you might face consequences from your institution for voicing your personal beliefs?

Freedom of Association

8. Are you as a student free to associate (e.g. as student union, student clubs, etc.)?
9. Is your student representational body represented in democratic university structures?
10. Are student representatives part of the decision making processes and overall governance structure of Higher Education Institutions?
11. Are your student representatives chosen democratically?
12. Do you feel that your student representatives can speak and act freely within your Higher Education Institution?
13. During the course of your studies, have you felt the threat you might face consequences from the institution your are studying at for voicing your personal beliefs?

2. Institutional Autonomy

Higher Education Institution Leadership

14. How are academic leadership positions (e.g. rectors, deans) elected at higher education institutions in your country?
15. Do students have a say in the (s)election of academic leadership positions?

Financial Autonomy

16. How are Higher Education Institutions funded?
17. My Higher Education Institution can administer its finances freely and independently:
18. The level of funding of my institution is sufficient for maintaining the institution's activities, services and educational programmes:

Campus Integrity

19. Can other state actors besides the higher education institution (e.g. law enforcement, governmental authorities etc.) perform their duty or tasks on the premises of the institution without the authorisation of the institution?
20. Does your institution have its own security service?
21. Is there any form of video surveillance on the premises of the institution?

Student Organisations

22. Is your student union free to decide how to spend its funds?
23. Does your student union operate independently from the institution and its staff?
24. Can student groups other than student unions operate independently?
25. Are these groups free to decide how to spend their funds?

3. Academic Integrity

Honesty

26. Have you ever witnessed corruption in the academic community (e. g. nepotism, clientelism, etc.)?
27. Have you ever witnessed academic fraud in the scientific research in your Higher Education Institution (e.g. Plagiarism, Collusion, etc.)?

Trust

28. There is a culture of trust between academic staff and students.
29. Are proctoring software or other surveillancing measures allowed at your university?
30. Are proctoring software or other surveillancing measures used at your university?
31. Have you ever faced a data breach in your Higher Education Institution?

Fairness

32. Have you ever experienced any unfair treatment in your experience in Higher Education?
33. Have you ever witnessed blackmailing in higher education?

Respect

34. Can you express feedback towards academic staff without the fear of being a victim of discrimination or retaliation?
35. Are higher education staff aware of the hurdles students can face on a daily basis and do they act empathetically accordingly?

Responsibility

36. Do professors take their teaching responsibility seriously and design their teaching accordingly?
37. What kind of independent institutional entities exist in relation to violations against academic integrity?
38. Are there consequences for persons who have been reported breaching academic integrity?



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