



**CODE OF ETHICS FOR ACADEMIC PEERS  
RESPONSIBLE FOR EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS  
FOR HIGH QUALITY ACCREDITATION**

**Version updated with Resolution 02/2020**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

When developing and applying its high quality accreditation model, the National Accreditation Council was inspired by the axiological statements contained in the Preamble and in Title 1 of the Colombian Political Constitution, and in Law 30/1992. Therefore, it commits to the mandates of the Constitution regarding the right to education and culture, and to the great objectives established for higher education.

By means of Resolution 02/2020, the National Council of Higher Education (CESU, for the Spanish original) updated the high quality accreditation model, establishing a framework of reference based on a series of guiding principles to guide to high quality accreditation process. These principles are considered the general ethical guidelines that serve as framework for the assessment process carried out by the different actors of the accreditation process, including the academic peers.

In their capacity of external evaluators, the academic peers are responsible for the assessments for high quality accreditation, and consequently they must be exemplary members of the academic and scientific community. As exemplary and renowned members, the academic peers must be recognized by the way in which they carry out their tasks of their field and of their assessment work, among other aspects.

Due to the above, the National Accreditation Council and society in general expect that the academic peers, in fulfilling the responsibility assigned to them by the state, in addition to strictly observing the general regulations regarding public ethics, will put into practice the principles of the accreditation model and will promote respect for the values and universal standards that comprise the academic ethos.

However, considering the responsibilities and the social effects of the academic peers' work, it is necessary to reiterate and specify in detail the ethical guidelines that must guide their behavior in their relations with the institutions and programs during assessment processes in which they are the main agent.

Pursuant to article 58 of Chapter VIII of CESU Resolution 02/2020, the National Accreditation Council has updated the Code of Ethics for Academic Peers.

## **2. ACADEMIC PEERS<sup>1</sup>**

The academic peers are qualified individuals with recognized academic and/or professional characteristics, of high moral and ethical standing, who are in charge of performing the external assessments of the academic programs and institutions. They are in turn members of a team that issues a rigorous report on high quality based on the

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter VIII of CESU Resolution 02/2020 establishes provisions related to the academic peers involved in the high quality accreditation process, and such aspects have been incorporated in this update of the Code of Ethics for Academic Peers.

assessment of both universal and specific dimensions of quality in the respective context.

The academic peers who provide support and assist in the assessment process are committed to verifying the existence of superior standards that are consistent with high quality in the institutions and/or academic programs, and to making available to the institution their education and pedagogy so as to carry out a well-coordinated and collaborative process.

### **3. OBJECTIVE OF THE CODE OF ETHICS**

The objective of the Code of Ethics is to reiterate the behavioral principles and guidelines that guide the performance of academic peers who participate in accreditation processes, to encourage ethical behavior by the actors of the National Accreditation System.

### **4. PRINCIPLES OF THE COLOMBIAN ACCREDITATION MODEL<sup>2</sup>**

The principles provide a framework of reference that guides institutions, academic peers, the National Accreditation Council and the academic community in the development and implementation of a shared culture of high quality, in line with the objectives of higher education in Colombia and based on international standards of high quality assurance. The guiding principles of high quality, which allow exercises of self-assessment, self-regulation and assessment based on a common understanding, are the following:

- a) **Suitability.** The capacity and qualifications of the institution or the academic program to implement the institutional mission in the institutional education project and in the educational project of the academic program, or the plans serving as such, and to provide the community with a high-quality service.
- b) **Universality.** The quality of education as a practice that is based on knowledge historically accumulated in the multiple fields in which the educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities are carried out.
- c) **Consistency.** The degree of effective consistency between what the institution and the academic program state in their mission, in the institutional education project and in the education project of the academic program, or the plans serving as such, and what they actually do, in accordance with their identity, mission and type.
- d) **Relevance.** The uniform, convenient, consistent and appropriate action to the social, cultural and environmental conditions and demands of the context in which the academic programs and institutions carry out their educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities.

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<sup>2</sup> CESU Resolution 02/2020.

- e) **Integrity.** The fulfillment of the value proposition of the social role of higher education set out in the institutional mission, the institutional education project and in the education project of the program, or the plans serving as such, to carry out the educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities, making human development possible from an ethical perspective.
- f) **Objectivity.** The quality of the decisions and actions that, based on qualitative and quantitative reasons and supported by precise and impartial evidence, support the judgments on the high quality of the academic programs and of the institution asserted by the actors that make up the National Accreditation System.
- g) **Transparency.** The willingness of the actors of the National Accreditation System to disclose, in a timely, truthful and valid manner, the results of the operation and management of their roles, through accountability and access to information.
- h) **Accessibility.** The dimension of the individual right to education that allows for admission to the educational system under equal conditions.
- i) **Diversity.** The recognition of the distinguishing and unique particularities of the institution and the academic program, as opposed to its reference peers, that enrich the higher education system without affecting quality and high-quality standards.
- j) **Inclusion.** The capacity to ensure the right to a universal education that adapts to the needs of the academic community, breaking down the barriers that limit the educational process or the educational, academic, teaching, scientific, cultural and extension activities, in accordance with its legal nature, identity, mission and type.
- k) **Equality.** The criterion used to assess, allocate and distribute the rights and obligations of the actors of the National Accreditation System, taking into account the differences and needs of each of the actors according to their merits.
- l) **Adaptability.** The capacity of the actors of the National Accreditation System to respond to the changing dynamics of the environment and to ensure that measures have been adopted to ensure student learning, addressing their diversities and needs.
- m) **Innovation.** The capacity of the institution to introduce substantive changes in its processes to create added value to meet the changing demands of job performance, demographic characteristics and the educational process of students, technological changes and financing conditions.
- n) **Synergy.** The capacity to act with other institutions in order to enrich the institutional mission and impact educational, academic, scientific, cultural and extension requirements in a highly changing context.
- o) **Effectiveness.** The measure that demonstrates the correlation of the essential activities in the institution governance, through their efficiency and effectiveness for the fulfillment of the institutional mission.
- p) **Responsibility.** The commitment of the actors of the National Accreditation System to the fulfillment of their roles and powers, within the framework of the Constitution, the Law and the standards related to high quality, promoting the shared value of higher education in society.
- q) **Sustainability.** The capacity of the institution and its academic programs to anticipate and ensure high quality, through activities and actions aimed at the long-

term fulfillment of its institutional mission, the institutional education project and the education project of the academic program, or the plans serving as such.

## **5. DUTIES OF THE ACADEMIC PEERS**

During the visits and in reports on the visits, the academic peer shall display the following conducts:

- a) Base their considerations on objective and true reasons, setting aside any preconceptions or stereotypes regarding the activities of the institution and/or academic program.
- b) Respect the legal nature, identity, mission and type of the institution.
- c) Engage in respectful relationships with the individuals they interact with at the institution and promote communications aimed at mutual understanding.
- d) Contribute their expertise and knowledge for the assessment of the academic program and/or institution.
- e) Use the assessment instruments and guidelines provided by the National Accreditation Council.
- f) Manage the information they receive with due care and maintain absolute confidentiality of the information they become aware of in their capacity as academic peers.
- g) Respect and abide by the constitutional, legal and regulatory limits established by Colombian law.

## **6. BEHAVIOR OF THE ACADEMIC PEERS**

In addition to the principles that inspire the High Quality Accreditation Model and the ethical standards that apply to those who perform public duties, the academic peers who carry out external assessments for the effects of High Quality Accreditation shall observe the following guidelines on behavior:

- a) Demonstrate an attitude of service to society in general and to higher education in particular.
- b) Perform their assessment duties acknowledging and strictly respecting the institution's autonomy.
- c) Contribute their knowledge and experience to benefit the higher education institutions, respecting their autonomy and right to privacy.
- d) Assess the programs and institutions in accordance with the guidelines defined by the National Accreditation Council, and abstain from giving tips or guidance other than those provided by the council.
- e) Act with independent academic criteria in the assessment and accreditation procedures in which they participate, without representing any interests other than those of the National Accreditation Council, no matter how legitimate they may be.

- f) Maintain strict confidentiality of information on the program or institution in the documents delivered by the National Accreditation Council and of the opinions that the team of academic peers issues as part of its assessment work.
- g) Refrain from disclosing by any means any information related to the institution and/or academic program under evaluation.
- h) Avoid actions that would imply any advantages for the assessed higher education institution or academic program.
- i) Report to the National Accreditation Council in a timely manner any actual or apparent conflicts of interest.
- j) Prepare the reports with the methodological rigor and professional ethics required to fulfill the responsibility acquired with the higher education institutions and deliver them within the time frames requested by the National Accreditation Council.
- k) From the time they are appointed as peer reviewers up to the delivery of the final report, they must refrain from accepting from the assessed institution, directly or indirectly, any job offers, service provision contracts, arrangements or matters that are not directly associated with the tasks of the peer reviewer team and must not intervene for others to do so.
- l) Report in a timely manner to the peer team coordinator and the National Accreditation Council whenever external conditions prevent carrying out their tasks, to assure the integrity of the assessment process.
- m) During visits to the higher education institutions, they must behave with the intention, care and diligence of an honorable and responsible person, with a positive attitude and open to dialog.
- n) The coordinator of the academic peers team shall organize the assessment process by creating a participative work environment of mutual respect and shared responsibility, ensuring that decisions are made in a democratic manner.
- o) The coordinator of the academic peers team shall observe the conduct of the peers, and in the event any irregularities are found related to compliance with legal and regulatory rules or with the Code of Ethics, he/she shall report the situation to the National Accreditation Council.

## **7. INELIGIBILITIES, INCOMPATIBILITIES, DISQUALIFICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The academic peers are private individuals who perform administrative functions and shall be consequently subject to the regime of ineligibilities, incompatibilities and conflicts of interest provided for by the Constitution and by Law.

When an academic peer may have any interest in an assessment because it in any way affects or benefits him/her or his/her spouse, permanent partner or any relative up to the fourth degree of consanguinity, second degree of affinity or first degree by marriage, or his/her partner, or de facto partner, he/she must declare such disqualification for participating in an external assessment for a high-quality accreditation procedure.

The following conducts represent conflicts of interest:

- a) Acting in accreditation procedures fully aware that they are affected by institutional, work, professional or external commercial pressure that could place them in a real or apparent position of conflict of interest.
- b) Take part in an activity that may put into question the competency, impartiality, judgment, or integrity of the actions performed by the National Accreditation Council.
- c) Benefit from information that is not available to the public at large and that they have become aware of during performance of their duties.
- d) Take advantage of their opportunity as peer reviewers to promote the interests of the institution or company they belong to.
- e) Existence of serious enmity or close friendship with directors of the institution that has requested accreditation before the National Accreditation Council.
- f) Having filed a complaint, claim or lawsuit through anybody in connection with actions by the directors or by an institution with an accreditation procedure in progress.

Similarly, the academic peers must refrain from participating in accreditation processes if currently or during the two years prior to the start of said procedures, they have or have had a personal, academic or professional relationship with the institution or academic program that they are going to assess, or any other relationship that may imply ineligibility for the performance of their role as academic peers.

The National Accreditation Council will decide on any disqualifications or challenges and, if appropriate, will assign new peers and will communicate its decision to the institution through the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SACES) or its equivalent.

## **8. FAILURE TO FULFILL THE CRITERIA OR THE STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR OF THE NATIONAL ACCREDITATION SYSTEM**

The meeting of the General Accreditation Chamber of the National Accreditation Council shall be responsible for deciding on the cases of breach in application of the principles of the National Accreditation System or of the standards of behavior of the Code of Ethics, and shall decide by consensus or qualified majority the temporary or final suspension of the academic peer who has incurred in any such breach or has failed to fulfill the assigned responsibilities.

However, this Code of Ethics does not exempt the professionals who participate in the External Assessments for High Quality Accreditation from any criminal offenses they may commit in performing their assessment duties. Such cases will be reported to the competent authorities.