



## Revocation of academic degrees based on real-life examples.

### Introduction

Nowdays, academic dishonesty is one of the main problems in academic institutions. Unfortunately, every year many students make academic fraud such as cheating, plagiarism in their assignments, exams and dissertations. However, majority of students do not consider the upcoming consequences of academic dishonesty to their degrees and professional careers. As a student, imagine that you spend years to get academic degree for your dream job, and one day you can lose it because of your academic fraud in the past. This is called revocation of degrees and there are many real-life examples of it in many universities in the world. The purpose of this paper is to show these examples from different countries and to understand the possible results of academic dishonesty. It is true that revocation of degrees can be implemented as a result of academic and non-academic reasons. All chosen cases for this paper are based on academic reasons. Moreover, in this paper, not all cases end with revocation of degrees. There are some reasons behind them such as absence of clear educational legislation in some countries, lack of investigation by universities, lack of reliable ethical culture and standards in education system and so on.

### Cases in United States

1. **John Walsh** had been Senator in United States from 2014 to 2015. He had obtained master's degree in US Army War college in 2007. In 2014, New York Times revealed that Walsh had plagiarized in 14 pages of his master thesis by taking words and ideas without citations. At first, senator had denied allegations, and then he had told that nothing had been done intentionally. As an outcome of the case, his master's degree had been revoked by college in 2014.

#### Online sources:

Lauren Barbato (2014) „This Senator Just Lost His College Degree“. Retrieved from <https://www.bustle.com/articles/43835-sen-john-walsh-loses-army-war-college-degree-over-plagiarism-scandal>

Alex Rogers (2014) „Montana Senator's Degree Revoked Over Plagiarism Charges“. Retrieved from <https://time.com/3491095/john-walsh-plagiarism/>



2. **Suvi Orr** is a researcher who received her PhD in the field of chemistry in 2008 at University of Texas. However, in 2012 and 2014, university decided to revoke her degree (two times) due to the falsified data in the research. Orr sued the university in 2014. According to the court decision, university has violated the rules. As an outcome, Orr won an injunction against University of Texas.

**Online source:**

Alison McCook (2017) „Chemist wins injunction against university trying to revoke her degree“.  
Retrieved from <https://retractionwatch.com/2017/04/21/chemist-wins-injunction-university-trying-revoke-degree/>

### Case in Canada

3. **John Measor** obtained his master’s degree at University of Calgary in 2003. After 15 years, Measor’s thesis was checked at Saint Mary’s University when he was a teacher in there. And, results were reported to the University of Calgary. According to the result, there were plagiarism in his master thesis (Thesis name : “Canada and the Imposition of Sanctions on Iraq: 1990-2002”). It should be mentioned that university committee had warned Measor to remove plagiarized part before defending the thesis in 2002. Considering all evidences, court’s decision was in favour of university.

**Online sources:**

Bill Graveland (2018) “University of Calgary can rescind master’s degree over plagiarism: judge”  
Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/4467017/university-of-calgary-judge-masters-degree-plagiarism/>

Jonathan Bailey (2018) “Revoking Degrees: How and Why Schools Do It?” Retrieved from Plagiarism Today <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2018/09/27/revoking-degrees-how-and-why-schools-do-it/>

### Cases in Germany

4. **Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg** had been Defence Minister of Germany from 2009 to 2011. He had received his PhD in law at University of Bayreuth in 2007. In 2011, allegations were raised that



many passages of Guttenberg's final work had been copied word by word without any citations. Guttenberg had said that "I neither knowingly nor intentionally deceived". In 2011, University of Bayreuth revoked his doctorate. The same year, he resigned from all political posts.

**Online source:**

Helen Pidd (2011) „German defence minister resigns in PhD plagiarism row“. Retrieved from Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/01/german-defence-minister-resigns-plagiarism>

5. **Annette Schavan** had been Education Minister of Germany from 2005 to 2013. She had received her PhD in the field of education, philosophy and catholic theology at Düsseldorf University in 1980. However, university decided to revoke her academic degree because of the plagiarism without showing the more than 60 sources in her thesis. However, she had denied the plagiarism and sued the University of Düsseldorf for invalidating her degree. Her doctoral degree had been revoked in 2013 and she resigned from her duty in the same year.

**Online sources:**

Ben Brumfield (2013) "German education minister loses PhD over plagiarized thesis". Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/06/world/europe/german-minister-plagiarism/index.html>

BBC News (2013) „German minister Annette Schavan quits over plagiarism“. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-21395102>

## Case in Hungary

6. **Pal Schmitt** had been President of Hungary from 2010 to 2012. He had received his PhD degree at Testnevelési Egyetem (University of Physical Education) in 1992. In 2012, media revealed that serious plagiarism had been found in Schmitt's doctoral thesis. According to the allegation, he had translated 16 pages of thesis from the article of a German author, Klaus Heinemann. Moreover, 180 pages of thesis had been translated from the work of Bulgarian academic, Nikolay Gueorguiev. After all these evidences, university revoked his degree in 2012 and in the same year, Pal Schmitt resigned his post.



**Online source:**

Palko Karasz (2012), “Hungarian President Resigns Amid Plagiarism Scandal”. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/03/world/europe/hungarian-president-pal-schmitt-resigns-amid-plagiarism-scandal.html>

### Case in Finland

7. **Male foreign student** had obtained master’s degree in the field of physics at University of Eastern Finland in the year 2011. However, after awarding the degree, university had observed serious and continual research fraud in his final thesis. Student had strongly denied the plagiarism allegations and had appealed the university. According to the decision of the Administrative Court, student’s master degree was revoked in 2013. However, the universities should find the mistakes at an earlier stages of the research process as court decision.

**Online source:**

Acatiimi [https://www.acatiimi.fi/7\\_2016/14.php](https://www.acatiimi.fi/7_2016/14.php)

### Cases in Spain

8. **Cristina Cifuentes** had been the regional leader of Madrid from 2015 to 2018. She had earned her master’s degree in public law at King Juan Carlos University in 2012. Allegations about her academic degree had been lifted after six years. According to the investigations, she had not attended on the classes, exams and even had not completed her master thesis. Cifuentes had denied these irregularities. However, her academic degree was revoked in 2018. The same year, shoplifting video of Cristina Cifuentes emerged in media, which had happened seven years ago, and she resigned from her posts.

**Online source:**

Susana Urrea (2018) ”Madrid premier returns controversial master’s degree, but blames university“. Retrieved from El Pais [https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/17/inenglish/1523950657\\_212474.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/17/inenglish/1523950657_212474.html)



9. **Pablo Casado** is Spanish politician and president of People's Party (PP) who had been graduated from master program of regional and local law at King Juan Carlos University. After the academic scandal of Cristina Cifuentes, Casado claimed that he also had not participated in classes, exams and final master thesis because of the university requirements. According to the university, after graduation of Casado in 2009, the university system had changed to the European Union's Bologna Process. Therefore, investigations in 2018 showed that Casado had fulfilled all academic obligations according to the old requirements of the university.

**Online source:**

Urra and Hunter (2018) „Master's degree scandal deepens, as another PP politician admits not going to class“. Retrieved from El Pais

[https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/10/inenglish/1523345735\\_964396.html](https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/04/10/inenglish/1523345735_964396.html)

10. **Carmen Monton** had been Spain's Health Minister from June 2018 to September 2018. She earned her master's degree in the field of interdisciplinary gender studies at King Juan Carlos University in 2011. According to the investigations, plagiarism was detected in her dissertation from Wikipedia and other websites. Carmen Monton had denied plagiarism allegations. She could keep her academic degree, however, Monton resigned from her job in September 2018.

**Online source:**

Sam Jones (2018) "Spain's health minister quits over degree scandal". Retrieved from El Pais

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/12/spain-health-minister-carmen-monton-resigns-masters-degree-irregularities>

## Case in Czech Republic

11. **Female student** had received master's degree Palacky University in Olomouc in 2015. After four years, it was revealed that student had made academic fraud in her final state exam. According to the university proofs, student had cheated by using earbuds. Despite the evidences, in 2019, student had sued the university and court decision was in favor of student. Court also had added that examiners should detect fraud during the exam and in this case, it would be handled by disciplinary

committee of university. However, it is expected that this case will establish new legislation in this field in Czech Republic.

**Online source:**

ČT24 (2019) <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/regiony/2852324-studentka-mela-u-statnic-v-uchu-sluchatko-univerzita-ji-chtela-odebrat-titul-soud>

### Case in Slovakia

12. **Igor Matovič** is current Prime Minister in Slovakia. He obtained his master degree at Faculty of Management at Comenius University in 1998. In 2020, he is accused copying sentences in his thesis from other authors' articles without quotations. However, there is no certain legislation in order to revoke academic degrees in Slovakia. This is why any further investigation was not implemented in this example. In addition, Igor Matovič is not only politician in Slovakia, who had accused for plagiarism in final thesis. Some other slovakian politicians such as Andrej Danko, Boris Kollar, Branislav Groehling are also in this list.

**Online sources:**

Julius Kravjar (2020) "Recent High Politicians' Plagiarism Cases in Slovakia"

Retrieved from ENAI Newsletter

<https://mailchi.mp/42300684070e/enai-august2020?e=7007dc92d8#mctoc1>

DPA International (2020) "Slovakian Prime Minister Matovic latest to be accused of plagiarism"

<https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/slovakian-prime-minister-matovic-latest-accused-plagiarism-urn:newsml:dpa.com:20090101:200716-99-821241>

### Case in Romania

13. **Victor Ponta** had been Prime Minister of Romania from 2012 to 2015. He had received his PhD degree at University of Bucharest in 2003. In 2012, he was accused because of the plagiarism and absence of clear attribution of sources in his doctorate work. At the same year, different committees were created to investigate the process. They made different decisions. Ponta appealed the given



decisions to the court, but it was rejected. Ponta's degree was revoked in 2014. However, he resigned in 2015 because of other reasons. Moreover, Ponta is not only politician in Romania, who had been accused of plagiarism. Corina Dumitrescu, Ioan Mang, Liviu Pop are also in this list. And they had resigned after allegations.

**Online sources:**

Jonathan Bailey (2012), "The Plagiarism Insanity in Romania" Retrieved from Plagiarism Today  
<https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2012/07/02/the-plagiarism-insanity-in-romania/>

Irina Popescu (2016) "Former PM Victor Ponta may be disbarred after losing doctor degree". Retrieved from Romania-Insider.com <https://www.romania-insider.com/former-pm-victor-ponta-might-excluded-bucharest-bar>

### Case in Albania

14. **Evis Kushi** is new Minister of Education in Albania. She obtained her PhD in Staffordshire University (UK) in 2008. However, in 2020, after she became new education minister, she was accused of plagiarism in her doctorate work. The name of her published article is "Political transition, Corruption and income inequality in new democracies. Special case Albania". According to the allegations, 90 percent of work had been plagiarized from other publications. Kushi denies plagiarism rumours and she still execute her duty. In addition, Albania government has not issued a statement about it. It should be noted that Evis Kushi is not only politician in Albania that accused of plagiarism. MP Taulant Balla, Health Minister Ogerta Manastirliu, Director of the National Information Society Miranda Karcanaj, Former Minister of Defense Mimi Kodheli, SP Deputy Blerina Gjylameti, former Deputy Minister of Education Ervin Demo are also include in this list. However, none of these cases has ended with revoking degrees. Moreover, none of these politicians had resigned after allegations except Ervin Demo.

**Online sources:**

Jonathan Bailey (2020) "The Ongoing Albanian Plagiarism Crisis"

Retrieved from <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2020/09/30/the-ongoing-albanian-plagiarism-crisis/>

Tirana Times (2020) "Minister of Education accused of plagiarism"

Retrieved from <https://www.tiranatimes.com/?p=147294>

## Case in Japan

15. **Serkan Anilir** had been a assistant professor at University of Tokyo who had received PhD of Engineering at the same university in 2003. Due to the doubtful resume of Serkan Anilir, university decides to investigate the details of his academic career. According to the investigations, falsifying and lying had been found on his resume. As a result, his degree was revoked in 2010 and his assistant professor career was ended at university.

### Online source:

Akky Akimoto (2013) „CV frauds revealed by diligent online fact checks“. Retrieved from <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2013/01/16/digital/cv-frauds-revealed-by-diligent-online-fact-checks/>

## Conclusion.

Revocation of academic degrees is the result of academic dishonesty. In this paper, we showed some of real-life examples of people who had faced with this issue. As it mentioned before, not all cases end with the revoking of degrees. Because, in some countries, there is no proper educational legislation to revoke an academic degree. Of course, this is not the only reason. It should be noted that revoking of degrees is not easy process for both universities and students. Mostly, students sue the university and the final decision is given by courts by considering all evidences (You can see more academic court cases for different reasons in the article by Jonathan Bailey (2017) at <https://www.plagiarismtoday.com/2017/02/07/academic-plagiarism-real-courts/>). These cases happen even in the most prestigious universities in the world. What can be done to prevent this at first place? From all these academic based revocation cases, we can see that the main reasons of revocation problems are the lack of reliable ethical culture and standards in education system. Students clearly should be informed about the importance of academic integrity when they are accepted by university. And if committees of universities investigate plagiarism or cheating at first place before awarding degree, this can prevent majority of these cases. This is why law and policy of higher education institutions need to prepared by considering promotion of more ethical and disciplinary approach.

## Questions

- ✓ What do you think about given real-life examples?
- ✓ If you were be in the same situation, how would you react?
- ✓ Is it general standard that after plagiarism is proven the plagiarist resign from his/her job?

Until now, many questions have been raised about revoking degrees. You can see some questions and answers from the article of Gary Pavela (2014):

1. Is it legally possible to revoke a degree after it's awarded?
2. Have any courts addressed the issue of degree revocation?
3. Has degree revocation been upheld for admissions fraud?
4. Has degree revocation for plagiarism been upheld?
5. May colleges withhold or revoke a degree for misconduct before graduation?
6. If there was no fraud or error, what would justify withholding or revoking a degree?
7. What procedures should be followed before a degree is withheld or revoked?
8. Who should decide to withhold or revoke a degree?

You can find more about this article at <https://medium.com/law-and-policy-in-higher-education/law-and-policy-in-higher-education-6be381f9be0a>