Ethics Compass of Graz University of Technology   02/2025

Graz University of Technology (TU Graz) is expressly committed to the universal validity of the human rights in the sense of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[1], to the fundamental European values in the sense of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[2], and to a culture of ethically based action. All members of TU Graz fully observe the Austrian Federal Constitution as well as the applicable laws and all statutes and regulations in force at TU Graz.[3]

This is the attitude on the basis of which all members of TU Graz should act, which they carry into society as ambassadors, and which also characterizes international partnerships.

Against the background of the freedom of science and art, TU Graz affirms its autonomy, encourages its members to pursue their professional ethos, and is committed to constant awareness-raising and vigilance in the context of the independence of research.

While morality is generally used as a collective term for social values, ethics is understood as a reflective effort to think about these values. The central task of ethics is to identify conflicts of values and to develop well-founded criteria for responsible decisions against a background of rationality and coherence.

As a public university whose members have a strong influence on society and the environment through their thoughts and actions, TU Graz is aware of its responsibility, especially with regard to sustainable development in the sense of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations.[4] TU Graz reaffirms its commitment to upholding the basic principles of good scientific and artistic practice, research integrity and research ethics, in particular the principles of self-determination, benefit, harm avoidance, and fairness.[5] The establishment of the Commission for Scientific Integrity (CSI)[6] on the one hand and the Ethics Committee[7] on the other is an expression of this affirmation.

In addition, TU Graz is committed to the core values of sustainability, diversity, inclusion, fairness, and transparency as well as to a critically reflective approach to technologies (especially artificial intelligence) and their consequences.
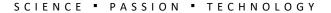
Sustainability means both ecological and social sustainability, as explicitly stated in the mission statement and strategic orientation of TU Graz.[8] This includes, in particular, the promotion of equal opportunities and the active co-design of solutions for social challenges.

Diversity and inclusion refer to all dimensions of diversity, including gender, age, nationality, and social background. Diversity and gender sensitivity in the context of research projects are explicitly taken into account at TU Graz. Diversity and inclusion also include an explicit commitment to linguistic diversity and the protection of vulnerable groups.

Fairness is understood in the sense of the **principle of justice** and means, on the one hand, non-discriminatory equal treatment as already enshrined in the "Affirmative Action Plan" section of the statutes.[9] In addition, fairness includes an appropriate distribution of goods, in particular the fair remuneration of employees. This also requires appropriate compensation for thesis written in collaboration with external companies/industry partners.[10]

Transparency is understood as a responsibility to society as a whole and relates to all areas of research, teaching, administration and management. In compliance with the applicable legal framework (e.g. data protection, professional/business secrecy, and intellectual property), this includes, for example, the disclosure of the methods used and the principle of making research results, data sets, and theses required for research accessible.

Since research - as a result or already in the research process - can also have negative effects on individuals and/or society, TU Graz is committed to research and a constant discourse on the **consequences of technology** against the background of damage prevention.

In awareness of the fact that research results or parts thereof can be used for civil and/or military purposes (so-called "dual use"), TU Graz consciously distances itself from the direct development of weapons systems.[11]

TU Graz is aware of its exemplary role in ensuring a social value of ethical behavior. With this "Ethics Compass", the Ethics Committee takes up this social responsibility for people, animals, and the environment and promotes ethical awareness at TU Graz. Against the backdrop of the increasing use of disruptive technologies in society and thus also at universities in particular, the Ethics Committee states the following:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a collective term for a variety of methods, tools, and products that are already widely used in research and everyday life. Aware that some products on the market and already in use are fraught with ethical problems (in particular lack of transparency of the algorithms and training database, systematic and systematic legal violations in the use of training data, inhumane working conditions during pre-training, unknown biases), TU Graz is convinced that ignoring the questionable development and mode of action at this point in time would be just as inappropriate as a general rejection of use.[12] TU Graz has therefore made a conscious decision to promote active research into existing technologies, but links the use of these AI tools to research into their mode of action (algorithm and training data) and to the critical review of the results. The development and use of AI at TU Graz is based on the applicable law and the TU Graz Ethics Compass.

[1] United Declaration of Human Rights, UN, A/Res/217 A (III), https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/217(III) (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[2] Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, ABl 2012/326, 391, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[3] See, therefore, for example the TU Graz Code of Conduct (Compliance Poly), RL 92000 COMP 040-03, https://www.tugraz.at/fileadmin/public/Studierende_und_Bedienstete/Directives_and_regulations_of_TU_Graz/Verhaltenskodex_Compliance_Policy_Code_of_Conduct.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[4] Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), https://sdgs.un.org/goals (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[5] See, therefore, for example Best Practice Guide for Research Integrity and Ethics, BMBWF 2020: 11 f. https://oeawi.at/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-10-20_Praxisleitfaden-fuer-Integritaet-und-Ethik-in-der-Wissenschaft_engl_.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[6] Website Commission for Scientific Integrity, csi.tugraz.at (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[7] Website Ethics Committee, ethikkommison.tugraz.at, (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[8] See, therefore, the TU Graz Mission Statement, https://www.tugraz.at/en/tu-graz/university/mission-statement (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[9] See the TU Graz Affirmation Action Plan section of the statutes,

https://www.tugraz.at/fileadmin/public/Studierende_und_Bedienstete/Satzung_und_Geschaeftsordnungen_der_TU_Graz/Satzungsteil_Gleichstellungsplan.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[10] See, therefore the Guideline of the Rectorate of the TU Graz on the handling of the supervision of work in cooperation with companies, RL 94000 ABAU 140-01, https://www.tugraz.at/fileadmin/user_upload/tugrazExternal/02bfe6da-df31-4c20-9e9f-819251ecfd4b/2019_2020/Stk_23/RL_Betreuung_Arbeiten_Unternehmenskooperation_11082020.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[11] See, therefore, the TU Graz guideline on armaments research / defense research, https://tu4u.tugraz.at/fileadmin/user_upload/redaktion/Richtlinien/Ruestungsforschung_TU_Graz-Leitlinien.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).

[12] See, therefore, for example the Guideline for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)-supported tools in teaching, https://www.tugraz.at/fileadmin/public/Studierende_und_Bedienstete/Information/Lehre_an_der_TU_Graz/Leitlinie_KI_in_der_Lehre_TU_Graz.pdf (requested on February 20th, 2025).