



## Ethical duties of law professors: A study of professional conduct and moral responsibility

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### Abstract

The ethical duties of law professors occupy a central place in the architecture of legal education, as they shape not only the intellectual competence of future legal professionals but also their moral character and commitment to constitutional values. This research paper undertakes a comprehensive study of the professional conduct and moral responsibility of law professors in India, examining their ethical obligations within the broader framework of constitutional mandates, regulatory norms, judicial pronouncements, and societal expectations. The study analyses the ethical dimensions of the role of law professors as educators, researchers, mentors, and public intellectuals. It explores how principles such as integrity, academic honesty, impartiality, fairness, accountability, and respect for human dignity form the ethical foundation of the teaching profession. Special emphasis is placed on regulatory standards prescribed by the University Grants Commission, including obligations relating to academic integrity, plagiarism control, research ethics, and teacher-student relationships. The paper further evaluates the moral responsibility of law professors in fostering constitutional morality, rule of law, social justice, and ethical legal practice among students. It critically examines ethical challenges such as abuse of authority, discrimination, sexual harassment, bias in evaluation, conflict of interest, and erosion of academic freedom, highlighting how deviations from ethical conduct undermine institutional credibility and public trust in legal education. Judicial interpretations concerning teachers conduct and service jurisprudence are analysed to demonstrate how courts have reinforced ethical accountability while safeguarding academic autonomy. The paper also situates the ethical role of law professors in the context of contemporary challenges such as contractual employment, administrative pressures, digital teaching platforms, and performance-based evaluation systems. The study concludes that ethical conduct is not merely a professional obligation but a moral imperative for law professors, whose influence extends beyond classrooms into the justice delivery system and democratic governance. Strengthening ethical awareness, institutional mechanisms for accountability, and a culture of moral leadership is essential for ensuring excellence, credibility, and social relevance in Indian legal education.

**Keywords:** Ethical duties, legal education, professional conduct, academic integrity, moral responsibility, legal education, constitutional morality etc

### Introduction

Legal education occupies a distinctive and elevated position within the Indian education system, as it is entrusted with the responsibility of nurturing not merely skilled professionals but custodians of constitutional values, rule of law, and justice. At the heart of this system stands the law professor, whose role transcends conventional teaching and enters the domain of moral leadership, ethical guidance, and institutional integrity. The ethical duties of law professors are therefore not incidental but foundational to the legitimacy and credibility of the legal education framework in India. Law professors serve as interpreters of law, mentors of future judges, advocates, administrators, and scholars, and role models whose conduct deeply influences students' professional character. Unlike many other disciplines, legal education directly shapes the justice delivery system consequently, any ethical failure at the level of legal pedagogy has a cascading impact on courts, governance, and society at large. This makes the professional conduct and moral responsibility of law professors a matter of public concern rather than a purely private or institutional issue. In India, the ethical responsibilities of law professors derive from multiple sources that is constitutional values, statutory regulations, professional norms, judicial pronouncements, and long-standing academic traditions. The Constitution of India, particularly its emphasis on justice, equality, dignity, and constitutional morality, implicitly mandates that educators

especially in law-act with fairness, impartiality, and integrity. Further, regulatory frameworks such as the norms framed by the University Grants Commission emphasize professional ethics, academic integrity, and accountability in teaching and research. These obligations are reinforced by service rules applicable to public universities and by evolving standards of academic governance. The moral responsibility of law professors is particularly significant in an era marked by commercialization of education, contractualisation of faculty, administrative interference, and increasing pressure on academic autonomy. Ethical dilemmas today often arise in contexts such as discriminatory practices, misuse of authority, bias in assessment, sexual harassment, suppression of academic dissent, and inequitable treatment of contractual and junior faculty members. Judicial interventions by constitutional courts, including the Supreme Court of India, have repeatedly underscored that teachers occupy a position of trust and are expected to uphold the highest standards of probity, fairness, and moral rectitude. Moreover, law professors play a critical role in transmitting constitutional morality a concept repeatedly emphasized in constitutional jurisprudence to future legal professionals. Their ethical conduct in classrooms, research supervision, faculty relations, and governance processes directly shapes students' understanding of justice, fairness, and professional responsibility. Any deviation from ethical standards risks normalizing arbitrariness and injustice, thereby undermining

the very foundations of the legal system. This study seeks to undertake a comprehensive examination of the ethical duties of law professors in India, focusing on professional conduct and moral responsibility within teaching, research, and institutional governance. It aims to analyse the normative framework governing ethical behaviour, identify emerging ethical challenges in contemporary legal education, and evaluate the role of law professors as moral agents in shaping a just and constitutional society. By doing so, the paper aspires to contribute to the discourse on strengthening ethical standards in legal academia and reinforcing public confidence in legal education institutions.

**Conceptual Framework of Ethics, Professional Conduct and Moral Responsibility of Law Professors:** Ethics, professional conduct, and moral responsibility together form the foundational conceptual framework governing the role of law professors in India. Ethics in legal academia refers to the normative principles that guide a law professor's behaviour in teaching, research, evaluation, and institutional engagement. These principles are rooted in honesty, integrity, fairness, impartiality, respect for human dignity, and commitment to truth. Ethical standards in legal education are not merely personal virtues but institutional and constitutional expectations, flowing from the values of justice, equality, and rule of law that the legal system seeks to uphold. A law professor, therefore, is ethically bound to maintain academic integrity, avoid plagiarism and intellectual dishonesty, respect diversity of opinions, and ensure transparency and fairness in pedagogical practices. Professional conduct represents the codified and institutionalized dimension of ethics. It encompasses adherence to statutory regulations, university statutes, service rules, and academic norms prescribed by bodies such as the University Grants Commission. Professional conduct requires law professors to discharge their duties with competence, neutrality, discipline, and accountability. This includes fair evaluation of students, objective supervision of research scholars, collegial respect, avoidance of conflicts of interest, and responsible use of academic authority. Unlike general ethics, professional conduct is enforceable through institutional mechanisms and disciplinary procedures, reflecting the expectation that educators, particularly in law, must exemplify procedural fairness and natural justice in their own professional behaviour.

Moral responsibility, on the other hand, extends beyond written rules and regulatory compliance. It embodies the inner conscience and societal obligation of law professors as educators of justice and constitutional values. Moral responsibility demands that law professors act with empathy, sensitivity, and courage, especially in situations where rigid adherence to rules may result in injustice or exploitation. It requires them to protect academic freedom, mentor students ethically, resist arbitrary or discriminatory practices, and speak against institutional wrongs when necessary. As law professors shape future judges, lawyers, and public officials, their moral responsibility includes fostering constitutional morality, social justice, and respect for human rights. Thus, while ethics provide the guiding principles, professional conduct supplies the regulatory framework, and moral responsibility infuses legal academia with its higher purpose ensuring that legal education serves not only institutional efficiency but also justice, humanity, and the rule of law.

**Constitutional and Legal Foundations of Ethical Duties of Law Professors:** The ethical duties of law professors in India are firmly anchored in the constitutional philosophy and legal framework that governs public education, academic freedom, and professional accountability. The Preamble to the Constitution of India lays down justice, social, economic, and political along with liberty, equality, and fraternity as foundational values of the Republic. Law professors, as educators in a discipline that directly shapes governance and the justice delivery system, carry a heightened moral responsibility to internalize and transmit these constitutional ideals. Their ethical conduct in teaching, evaluation, research, and institutional engagement must therefore reflect the spirit of constitutional morality, fairness, and reasoned decision-making, ensuring that legal education serves the larger purpose of strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution impose a binding obligation of equality, non-arbitrariness, and fairness upon all State instrumentalities, including public universities and their faculty members. Law professors, particularly in State-funded universities, function within this constitutional mandate and are ethically required to act without discrimination, favouritism or bias in academic decisions such as student assessment, supervision, and administrative responsibilities. Any form of arbitrary conduct, abuse of authority, or differential treatment of students or colleagues violates not only service norms but also the constitutional ethos of equality. Ethical teaching in law thus becomes an extension of constitutional governance within the academic space.

The principle of academic freedom, derived from Article 19(1)(a), grants law professors the liberty to express ideas, engage in critical legal scholarship, and encourage free intellectual inquiry. However, this freedom is not absolute and is subject to reasonable restrictions in the interest of public order, morality, and institutional discipline. Ethically, law professors must exercise academic freedom responsibly, ensuring that classrooms remain spaces of rational discourse rather than ideological indoctrination. The duty of neutrality, objectivity, and balanced reasoning is particularly crucial in legal education, where the cultivation of independent judicial and professional thinking is paramount. Article 21, which guarantees the right to life with dignity, extends its influence into the academic domain by mandating humane, respectful, and fair treatment of students and colleagues. Ethical duties flowing from Article 21 require law professors to uphold the dignity of learners by avoiding humiliation, harassment, or coercive practices, and by fostering an inclusive, respectful learning environment. This constitutional guarantee reinforces the moral obligation of professors to act as mentors and guardians of student welfare, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups, gender equity, and mental well-being. From a statutory perspective, the ethical duties of law professors are concretized through regulatory instruments such as the norms framed by the University Grants Commission, especially the UGC Regulations, 2018, which emphasize integrity, transparency, accountability, and professional competence in teaching and research. These regulations, read with university statutes and service rules, transform ethical expectations into legally enforceable standards of conduct. Additionally, anti-plagiarism regulations and research ethics guidelines impose a legal duty of academic honesty, originality, and

intellectual responsibility upon law professors, underscoring that ethical scholarship is inseparable from legal compliance.

Judicial pronouncements in India have consistently recognized teaching as a noble profession requiring higher moral standards than ordinary employment. Courts have emphasized that educators, particularly in law, are expected to exhibit exemplary conduct, fairness, and devotion to duty, as their influence extends beyond classrooms into the justice system and public life. Thus, the ethical duties of law professors are not merely aspirational ideals but are constitutionally and legally grounded obligations, reflecting the convergence of constitutional morality, statutory regulation, and judicial conscience in shaping ethical legal academia.

**Core Ethical Duties of Law Professors:** The core ethical duties of law professors arise from their unique position as educators of law, mentors of future legal professionals, and custodians of constitutional values. Foremost among these duties is the obligation to maintain academic integrity and intellectual honesty in teaching, research, evaluation, and public discourse. A law professor must ensure that the content delivered in the classroom is accurate, current, and free from deliberate distortion, while research outputs must strictly adhere to standards of originality, proper attribution, and scholarly rigor. Any form of plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts, or manipulation of academic records fundamentally undermines the credibility of legal education and violates the moral trust reposed in the teaching profession.

Equally central to the ethical role of a law professor is the duty of neutrality, objectivity, and fairness, particularly in evaluation and academic decision-making. Given that legal reasoning is grounded in impartiality and reason, a law professor must consciously avoid favoritism, discrimination, ideological indoctrination, or personal bias while assessing students, supervising research scholars, or participating in institutional governance. Ethical neutrality requires that diverse viewpoints be respected and encouraged in the classroom, fostering an environment of critical inquiry rather than authority-driven conformity. Arbitrary grading, selective mentoring, or punitive conduct motivated by personal disagreement is inconsistent with both professional ethics and the principles of natural justice. Another essential ethical duty is respect for human dignity and professional boundaries. Law professors wield considerable authority over students and junior colleagues, and this power must be exercised with restraint, sensitivity, and accountability. Ethical conduct demands the creation of a safe, inclusive, and non-discriminatory academic environment, free from harassment, humiliation, intimidation, or abuse of authority. In this context, adherence to gender sensitivity norms and prevention of sexual harassment is not merely a statutory obligation but a moral responsibility rooted in constitutional values of equality and dignity. Any conduct that compromises the physical, psychological, or academic well-being of students is ethically indefensible.

Law professors also bear a profound ethical responsibility as mentors and role models. Beyond imparting doctrinal knowledge, they are expected to inculcate professional values such as honesty, responsibility, respect for the rule of law, and commitment to justice. Ethical mentorship requires

genuine academic guidance, encouragement of independent thinking, and avoidance of exploitation of students or research scholars for personal or institutional gain. A law professor must support students' academic growth without coercion, undue influence, or appropriation of their intellectual labour.

Furthermore, ethical duties extend to institutional loyalty tempered by moral courage. While law professors are expected to respect institutional discipline and administrative frameworks, ethical responsibility requires them to resist arbitrariness, illegality, or injustice within academic administration. Blind obedience to unethical directives, suppression of academic freedom, or complicity in unfair practices erodes institutional integrity. Thus, ethical professionalism demands a balance between administrative compliance and principled dissent grounded in law and conscience.

Finally, law professors owe a broader social and constitutional responsibility. As educators in a discipline intrinsically linked to justice and governance, they must promote constitutional morality, social justice, and public interest through teaching, research, and community engagement. Participation in legal aid, public legal education, and law reform initiatives reflects the ethical commitment of law professors to society at large. In essence, the ethical duties of law professors are not confined to classrooms or campuses; they extend to shaping a just legal culture, strengthening democratic institutions, and upholding the rule of law through exemplary professional conduct and moral responsibility.

**Ethical Duties of Law Professors Towards Students:** The ethical relationship between a law professor and students is founded on trust, fairness, and moral authority. A law professor occupies a position of dominance and influence, and therefore owes heightened ethical duties to students, who are often vulnerable to academic, evaluative, and institutional power structures. At the core of this duty lies the obligation to treat every student with dignity, equality, and respect, in consonance with the constitutional ethos of fairness and non-arbitrariness. Discrimination on the basis of caste, gender, religion, ideology, region, or socio-economic background is ethically impermissible and constitutionally abhorrent. A law professor must ensure that personal biases, prejudices, or external pressures never influence classroom interactions, academic opportunities, or evaluation processes. A fundamental ethical duty of a law professor is to ensure fairness, transparency, and objectivity in teaching and evaluation. This includes clearly communicating academic expectations, syllabi, and assessment criteria, and applying them uniformly to all students. Arbitrary marking, selective strictness, or preferential treatment erodes the credibility of legal education and violates principles of natural justice. Ethical evaluation demands that grades reflect academic merit alone, supported by reasoned assessment, and that students are provided constructive feedback to facilitate intellectual growth rather than intimidation or humiliation.

Law professors also bear a profound moral responsibility as mentors and guides. Beyond classroom instruction, they are ethically obliged to support students' academic, professional, and ethical development. This includes encouraging critical thinking, independent reasoning, and adherence to professional ethics essential for the legal

profession. Exploiting students for personal academic gain, assigning non-academic tasks, or using students research without acknowledgment constitutes serious ethical misconduct. Ethical mentorship requires patience, accessibility, and a genuine commitment to students' holistic development.

Ensuring a safe, inclusive, and harassment-free academic environment is another indispensable ethical duty. Law professors must strictly adhere to principles of gender sensitivity and actively prevent sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation, or mental harassment in any form. Compliance with statutory frameworks against sexual harassment is not merely a legal formality but a moral obligation rooted in respect for human dignity. Any abuse of authority, whether through coercion, threats, or academic victimization, undermines the ethical foundation of the teacher–student relationship.

Respect for student autonomy and freedom of expression also forms a vital component of ethical conduct. Law classrooms are spaces for debate, dissent, and critical engagement with law and policy. Professors must encourage diverse viewpoints and protect students from retaliation for expressing reasoned disagreement. Suppressing dissenting opinions, imposing ideological conformity, or penalizing students for academic disagreement is ethically indefensible and antithetical to the spirit of legal education.

Further, law professors owe students a duty of confidentiality and sensitivity, particularly in matters relating to personal information, academic performance, or grievances. Publicly humiliating students, disclosing confidential academic records, or trivializing genuine concerns violates ethical norms and causes lasting psychological harm. Ethical conduct demands empathy, restraint, and professionalism, especially while dealing with underperforming or distressed students. Finally, law professors have an ethical duty to prepare students for the realities of the legal profession by exemplifying integrity, discipline, and respect for the rule of law. Students learn as much from the conduct of their teachers as from textbooks. When professors act ethically, fairly, and courageously, they impart an enduring lesson in professional responsibility. Conversely, unethical conduct by law professor risks normalizing injustice and undermining faith in legal institutions. Therefore, ethical duties towards students are not peripheral obligations but central to the moral mission of legal education in India.

**Ethical Duties of Law Professors towards Colleagues:** A law professor bears a fundamental ethical obligation to maintain collegiality, mutual respect, and professional integrity in all interactions with fellow faculty members. The academic environment thrives on cooperation and intellectual exchange, and any conduct that undermines trust, dignity, or equality among colleagues strikes at the core of institutional ethics. Law professors must refrain from engaging in defamatory conduct, professional rivalry driven by personal animosity, or the misuse of administrative influence to marginalize or victimise colleagues. Ethical collegial conduct requires acknowledging the academic contributions of peers, respecting differences in legal ideology and methodology, and fostering an atmosphere of free and reasoned discourse grounded in constitutional values of equality and fairness. Further, senior law professors carry an enhanced moral

responsibility to mentor junior and contractual faculty members without discrimination or prejudice. Ethical duty demands that senior academics provide guidance, share institutional knowledge, and support professional growth rather than obstructing career advancement through arbitrary assessments or biased recommendations. In institutions where contractualisation has created hierarchical vulnerabilities, ethical conduct towards colleagues also entails resisting exploitative practices, opposing unfair workload distribution, and ensuring that academic evaluations remain transparent, reasoned, and free from extraneous considerations. Such conduct not only aligns with principles of natural justice but also strengthens the credibility of legal education.

Law professors occupying administrative or leadership roles must exercise authority with fairness, restraint, and accountability. Ethical responsibility requires that decision-making in matters such as workload allocation, committee assignments, research recognition, and disciplinary processes be guided strictly by objective criteria and institutional norms. Any abuse of power, selective enforcement of rules, or retaliatory action against dissenting colleagues constitutes a serious ethical breach. In this context, collegial ethics are inseparable from constitutional morality, as arbitrariness and discrimination within academic institutions erode the rule of law that legal educators are duty-bound to uphold.

#### **Ethical Duties of Law Professors for Legal Research:**

Ethical responsibility in legal research lies at the heart of a law professor's professional identity. A law professor is morally and professionally obligated to pursue research with intellectual honesty, originality, and scholarly rigor. This duty includes strict adherence to anti-plagiarism norms, accurate citation of sources, and truthful representation of data, judicial precedents, and doctrinal arguments. Misrepresentation of authorities, selective quotation of judgments, or deliberate suppression of contrary views undermines the integrity of legal scholarship and compromises the academic mission of universities. Beyond formal compliance, ethical legal research requires a commitment to objectivity and balance. Law professors must approach research questions without predetermined conclusions driven by personal ideology, institutional pressure, or external influence. Ethical scholarship demands openness to critique, willingness to revise positions in light of new evidence, and respect for diverse legal interpretations. Where research addresses sensitive issues such as constitutional rights, social justice, or service jurisprudence, the moral responsibility of accuracy and fairness becomes even more pronounced, given the potential impact on policy, litigation, and public discourse. Law professors also bear ethical duties as research supervisors and collaborators. Supervising faculty must provide genuine academic guidance, protect the intellectual autonomy of research scholars, and avoid exploitative practices such as ghost authorship or coercive co-authorship. Ethical supervision requires timely feedback, fair evaluation, and respect for the dignity and labour of scholars, particularly doctoral candidates. Moreover, in collaborative research, law professors must ensure equitable attribution of authorship and transparent acknowledgment of contributions. Such ethical practices preserve the credibility of legal research and reinforce the role of law professors as custodians of academic integrity and constitutional values.

### **Ethical Duties of Law Professors Towards Institution and Society:**

Law professors occupy a position of trust not only within their academic institutions but also in society at large. Ethically, a law professor owes a duty of institutional loyalty grounded in integrity, which requires faithful adherence to the university's statutes, ordinances, regulations, and academic policies. This duty does not imply blind obedience but demands principled compliance combined with constructive criticism where institutional actions deviate from legality, fairness, or constitutional values. A law professor must discharge teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities with honesty, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that academic decisions such as evaluation, supervision, and participation in committees are free from arbitrariness, favouritism or personal bias. Misuse of authority, manipulation of academic processes, or deliberate deviation from established norms amounts to a serious ethical breach, as it undermines institutional credibility and public confidence in higher education.

Ethical responsibility towards the institution further requires law professors to uphold academic discipline and collegiality. They must foster a culture of mutual respect among faculty members, administrators, and non-teaching staff, avoiding conduct that generates hostility, intimidation, or abuse of hierarchical power. Law professors entrusted with administrative or leadership roles carry an enhanced moral obligation to act fairly, record reasons for decisions, and follow the principles of natural justice. Transparency in governance, ethical handling of confidential information, and avoidance of conflicts of interest are integral to this duty. Even in situations of disagreement with the administration, ethical conduct mandates lawful and reasoned dissent rather than disruptive or vindictive behaviour.

Towards society, the ethical duties of law professors extend far beyond the classroom. As interpreters and transmitters of law, they serve as guardians of constitutional morality, with a moral obligation to promote justice, equality, human dignity, and the rule of law. This societal role demands that law professors engage in legal literacy, public discourse, and community outreach, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged sections of society. By contributing to legal aid clinics, policy research, and law reform initiatives, law professors ethically discharge their responsibility to make law accessible and meaningful to the public. Silence or indifference in the face of injustice, discrimination, or systemic illegality contradicts the ethical foundations of legal academia.

Law professors also bear an ethical duty to ensure that legal education serves the public interest rather than private or commercial motives. They must resist the commodification of legal education that prioritizes rankings, revenue, or personal advancement over academic excellence and social relevance. Ethical scholarship requires that research addresses pressing legal and social issues, contributes to policy development, and remains intellectually honest. When law professors participate in public debates, expert committees, or advisory roles, they must maintain independence, avoid partisan misuse of legal expertise, and act with intellectual humility and responsibility.

In essence, the ethical duties of law professors towards the institution and society are inseparably linked. Ethical institutional conduct strengthens the credibility of legal

education, while ethical social engagement reinforces the legitimacy of law as an instrument of justice. A law professor who upholds fairness within the university and justice in society embodies the true spirit of the legal profession, ensuring that legal education remains a moral enterprise dedicated to constitutional values, public trust, and the advancement of the rule of law.

**Contemporary Ethical Challenges before Law Professors in India:** In the contemporary Indian higher education landscape, law professors face multifaceted ethical challenges arising from structural, technological, administrative, and socio-political transformations. One of the most pressing ethical dilemmas stems from the contractualisation and precaritisation of academic employment, where a significant number of law professors serve on ad-hoc, contractual, or part-time bases for extended periods. This employment insecurity often places faculty members under implicit administrative pressure, compelling them to compromise academic independence, neutrality in evaluation, or critical scholarship to safeguard continuity of service. Such conditions undermine the ethical foundations of academic freedom and institutional fairness, creating a conflict between professional integrity and economic survival.

Another major ethical challenge concerns administrative interference and erosion of academic autonomy. Law professors are increasingly confronted with directives that influence syllabus design, research priorities, examination processes, and even academic opinions expressed in classrooms or public forums. When administrative authorities act arbitrarily or without adherence to statutory norms, professors face ethical dilemmas in choosing between compliance and resistance. Ethical conduct demands fidelity to constitutional values and academic standards, yet institutional power asymmetries often penalize dissent, thereby discouraging principled standpoints and fostering a culture of silence.

The rapid expansion of digital education, online teaching, and artificial intelligence has introduced new ethical complexities. Law professors must navigate issues of academic integrity in online examinations, protection of student data, responsible use of AI-assisted research tools, and maintaining originality in scholarship. The ease of digital content replication challenges traditional notions of authorship and plagiarism, requiring professors to set ethical benchmarks while simultaneously adapting to technological innovations. Failure to do so risks normalizing academic dishonesty and diluting the credibility of legal education.

Bias, discrimination, and gender sensitivity constitute another significant ethical challenge. Law professors occupy positions of authority that can either reinforce or dismantle systemic inequalities related to caste, gender, class, and ideology. Ethical lapses in this sphere whether through conscious bias, stereotyping, or misuse of evaluative power violate constitutional morality and human dignity. The duty to create inclusive, safe, and respectful academic environments is further intensified by statutory obligations under anti-discrimination and workplace harassment laws, making ethical vigilance indispensable.

The commercialization of legal education has also placed law professors in ethically precarious positions. Market-driven metrics emphasizing rankings, revenue generation, and publication quantity over quality may pressure faculty to prioritize numerical outputs at the expense of intellectual

rigor and social relevance. This environment can incentivize predatory publishing, superficial research, and compromised peer review practices, thereby eroding scholarly ethics and the public purpose of legal education.

Further, ethical challenges in research supervision and mentorship have become increasingly visible. Law professors supervising research scholars must balance authority with accountability, ensuring guidance without exploitation. Delays in evaluation, appropriation of student research, favouritism or neglect of supervisory responsibilities raise serious ethical concerns. Such practices not only harm individual scholars but also weaken the research culture and moral fabric of academic institutions.

Finally, law professors today face ethical challenges arising from political polarization and public scrutiny. As public intellectuals, their academic opinions on constitutional, social, or governance issues may attract backlash, misinterpretation, or institutional retaliation. Upholding ethical responsibility in such circumstances requires courage to speak truth to power while maintaining scholarly objectivity and professional decorum. In this context, the ethical role of law professors extends beyond classrooms and campuses, demanding a careful balance between academic freedom, social responsibility, and institutional loyalty.

Collectively, these contemporary ethical challenges underscore the urgent need to reinforce ethical frameworks, protect academic autonomy, and reaffirm the moral mission of legal education. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for the dignity of law professors but also for preserving the integrity of the legal profession and the constitutional values it serves.

**Judicial Perspective on the Ethical Duties of Law Professor:** From a judicial perspective, Indian courts have consistently recognized that teachers, particularly law professors, occupy a position of trust that demands the highest standards of ethical conduct and moral responsibility. The judiciary has repeatedly emphasized that teaching is not merely a contractual or service-oriented occupation but a noble and nation-building profession, where the character, integrity, and fairness of the teacher directly influence the moral fabric of society. Courts have held that educators shape not only academic outcomes but also the values, discipline, and constitutional consciousness of students, and therefore their conduct must be above reproach. In several decisions, the Supreme Court has underscored that a teacher's ethical obligation includes impartiality in evaluation, fairness in administrative decisions, honesty in academic work, and respect for the dignity of students, observing that arbitrariness, favouritism or abuse of authority by teachers violates principles of equality and natural justice under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. The judiciary has also drawn a clear distinction between academic freedom and ethical accountability, holding that freedom of teaching and expression does not extend to conduct that is discriminatory, coercive, vindictive, or professionally dishonest. Courts have further recognized that law professors bear an enhanced ethical duty, as they train future judges, advocates, and administrators; any ethical lapse on their part undermines public confidence in the legal system itself. Judicial pronouncements have affirmed that sexual harassment, humiliation, bias, plagiarism, and misuse of

academic power are not merely service misconducts but violations of constitutional morality, warranting strict disciplinary and, in appropriate cases, legal action. At the same time, courts have cautioned university administrations against arbitrary or vindictive disciplinary proceedings, emphasizing that ethical regulation of teachers must conform to due process, fairness, and proportionality, thereby balancing accountability with academic autonomy. Overall, the judicial approach reflects a nuanced position of law professors are expected to meet higher moral and ethical standards than ordinary employees, yet institutional responses to ethical issues must themselves be just, transparent, and constitutionally compliant, reinforcing the principle that ethical education begins with ethical governance.

### **Ethical Duties of a Professor towards Research Scholars:**

A professor, particularly in the field of law, occupies a position of trust, authority, and moral leadership vis-à-vis research scholars, irrespective of their gender. The ethical duty of a professor begins with the fundamental obligation to treat male and female research scholars with absolute equality, dignity, and respect, in conformity with Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India. Any form of discrimination, differential treatment, stereotyping, or bias whether explicit or implicit on the basis of gender, marital status, pregnancy, parenthood, or personal beliefs is ethically impermissible and legally untenable. A professor must ensure that academic opportunities, supervision quality, evaluation standards, access to research resources, and professional guidance are extended uniformly to all scholars, based solely on merit, academic performance, and scholarly potential.

Ethically, a professor owes a duty of care and mentorship to both male and female research scholars. This includes providing timely academic guidance, constructive feedback, and intellectual support necessary for the completion of research work, without creating an atmosphere of fear, dependency, or intimidation. Professors must avoid exploiting the inherent power imbalance in the supervisor-scholar relationship for personal, professional, or institutional gain. Any conduct that pressures scholars directly or indirectly into performing non-academic tasks, personal errands, or compliance beyond legitimate academic requirements amounts to ethical misconduct. The relationship must remain strictly professional, transparent, and academically oriented at all times.

A core ethical obligation is the maintenance of a safe, inclusive, and harassment-free academic environment, particularly for female research scholars, who may be more vulnerable to misuse of authority. Professors are morally and legally bound to uphold gender sensitivity, maintain appropriate boundaries, and ensure that their words, conduct, gestures, communication (including digital communication), and evaluation methods do not create discomfort, humiliation, or hostility. Any form of sexual harassment, suggestive behaviour, unwelcome advances, or gender-based remarks whether subtle or overt constitutes a grave breach of ethical duty and violates both professional morality and statutory norms. Equally, male research scholars must be protected from bullying, humiliation, or discriminatory treatment, as ethical responsibility is gender-neutral in its application.

Professors also bear an ethical duty of fairness and transparency in assessment and evaluation. Progress reports, viva recommendations, publication credits, authorship decisions, and thesis evaluations must be conducted impartially, free from personal prejudice, favouritism retaliation, or bias. Ethical conduct requires that criticism of a scholar's work be academic, reasoned, and respectful, never personal or demeaning. Deliberate delays in evaluation, withholding signatures, obstructing submission, or using assessment as a tool of coercion or punishment is a serious ethical violation, particularly when it disproportionately affects female scholars due to maternity, caregiving responsibilities, or social constraints.

Another crucial ethical duty lies in respecting autonomy, privacy, and personal dignity of research scholars. Professors must not intrude into the personal lives of male or female scholars, inquire into irrelevant personal matters, or use personal information as a means of control or intimidation. For female scholars, ethical responsibility extends to accommodating legitimate needs such as maternity, health concerns, or safety without prejudice or stigmatization. Denial of academic support during such periods reflects moral insensitivity and violates the ethics of care inherent in the teaching profession.

Further, professors have an ethical obligation to protect scholars from institutional injustice. They must act as facilitators rather than gatekeepers, guiding scholars through academic procedures fairly and supporting them against arbitrary administrative actions. Where conflicts arise, professors must adhere to principles of natural justice, provide scholars an opportunity to be heard, and avoid vindictive or retaliatory conduct. Ethical professors do not silence dissent or penalize scholars for raising grievances or asserting their rights; instead, they foster an environment of intellectual freedom and lawful expression. In essence, the ethical duties of a professor towards male and female research scholars demand equality without discrimination, authority without domination, mentorship without exploitation, discipline without humiliation, and guidance without prejudice. Upholding these ethical standards is indispensable not only for the protection of research scholars but also for preserving the sanctity of legal education, the credibility of academic institutions, and the moral authority of the teaching profession itself.

### Suggestions and Recommendations

- 1. Formulation of a Uniform National Code of Ethics for Law Professors:** There is an urgent need for the formulation and implementation of a uniform national code of ethics specifically for law professors in India. While general conduct rules exist under university statutes and service rules, the absence of a discipline-specific ethical framework leads to inconsistency and arbitrariness. Such a code should clearly define standards relating to academic integrity, neutrality, evaluation fairness, research ethics, mentorship, and institutional accountability. A nationally accepted ethical code, aligned with constitutional values and legal pedagogy, would bring uniformity across public and private law institutions and strengthen the moral authority of legal education.
- 2. Mandatory Ethics and Professional Responsibility Training:** Ethics should not be assumed as an inherent

attribute of educators but must be institutionally reinforced through regular training and sensitization programmes. It is recommended that all law professors undergo mandatory induction and periodic refresher courses on professional ethics, academic integrity, gender sensitivity, and constitutional morality. Such programmes would help faculty remain aware of evolving ethical standards, judicial pronouncements, and regulatory expectations, thereby minimizing ethical lapses arising from ignorance, complacency, or institutional pressure.

- 3. Strengthening Academic Freedom with Ethical Accountability:** Academic freedom is the cornerstone of legal education; however, it must be exercised with ethical restraint and responsibility. Universities should adopt policies that protect law professors from undue administrative or political interference while simultaneously ensuring accountability for unethical conduct. Freedom of thought and expression in teaching and research should not become a shield for personal bias, indoctrination, or discrimination. A balanced framework that safeguards autonomy while enforcing ethical norms is essential for preserving the credibility of legal academia.
- 4. Transparent and Fair Evaluation Mechanisms:** One of the most sensitive ethical duties of law professors relates to student evaluation. It is recommended that universities establish transparent, reasoned, and reviewable evaluation systems, particularly in internal assessments, dissertations, and viva voce examinations. Clear marking rubrics, moderation committees, and grievance redressal mechanisms should be institutionalized to prevent arbitrariness, favouritism or misuse of academic authority. Ethical evaluation practices not only protect student rights but also reinforce trust in academic processes.
- 5. Institutionalization of Research Ethics and Plagiarism Control:** Given the increasing emphasis on research output, it is imperative to strengthen institutional mechanisms for research ethics. Universities should ensure strict compliance with anti-plagiarism norms, ethical review procedures, and authorship standards. Law professors must be encouraged to pursue socially relevant, original, and honest research rather than quantity-driven publications. Ethical research culture should be promoted through mentorship, peer review, and accountability, ensuring that legal scholarship contributes meaningfully to jurisprudence and policy-making.
- 6. Ethical Mentorship and Protection of Research Scholars:** The relationship between law professors and research scholars is inherently unequal and therefore demands heightened ethical sensitivity. It is recommended that universities clearly define the ethical responsibilities of research supervisors, including timely guidance, non-exploitative practices, intellectual honesty, and respect for academic independence. Institutional safeguards must be established to protect scholars from harassment, coercion, or neglect, thereby ensuring that mentorship remains a constructive and ethically sound academic relationship.

7. **Gender Sensitization and Safe Academic Environment:** Law professors play a pivotal role in shaping campus culture. It is recommended that gender sensitization and compliance with sexual harassment prevention laws be treated as core ethical duties rather than mere statutory obligations. Regular awareness programmes, strict enforcement of internal complaints mechanisms, and zero tolerance for harassment are essential for maintaining dignity and equality in academic spaces. Ethical conduct in this sphere strengthens trust, inclusivity, and constitutional morality within educational institutions.
8. **Ethical Safeguards for Contractual and Ad-hoc Law Professors:** The growing contractualisation of teaching staff poses serious ethical challenges. Universities must ensure that contractual and ad-hoc law professors are treated with dignity, fairness, and professional respect, including equitable workload, transparent renewal policies, and protection from arbitrary action. Ethical governance requires that institutions do not exploit job insecurity to suppress academic freedom or professional integrity. Long-serving contractual faculty should be provided clear pathways toward stability and recognition.
9. **Transparent Institutional Governance and Administrative Ethics:** Law professors entrusted with administrative responsibilities must adhere to higher ethical standards of transparency, fairness, and reasoned decision-making. Arbitrary exercise of power, favouritism or misuse of authority undermines institutional integrity. It is recommended that decision-making processes within law faculties be documented, participatory, and subject to internal review. Ethical administration reinforces democratic governance within universities and sets a positive example for students.
10. **Promotion of Social Responsibility and Legal Outreach:** Ethical duties of law professors extend beyond the classroom to society at large. Universities should encourage and recognize faculty engagement in legal aid, legal literacy, community outreach, and law reform initiatives. Such activities align legal education with constitutional goals of justice and access to justice. Law professors, as public intellectuals, must ethically engage with social issues while maintaining academic neutrality and professional discipline.
11. **Establishment of Independent Grievance Redressal Mechanisms:** To ensure ethical accountability, universities should establish independent, accessible, and transparent grievance redressal mechanisms for students and faculty. Such bodies must function fairly, without fear or favour, and in accordance with principles of natural justice. An effective grievance mechanism not only addresses ethical violations but also acts as a deterrent against abuse of authority.
12. **Ethical Adaptation to Digital and Technological Advancements:** With the rise of digital education, law professors must adapt to technology while maintaining ethical standards. Clear guidelines should be framed regarding online teaching conduct, digital evaluation, data privacy, and use of artificial intelligence in legal education. Ethical digital practices are essential to

protect academic integrity and student rights in the evolving educational landscape.

13. **Periodic Ethical Audit and Institutional Self-Regulation:** Finally, it is recommended that universities adopt the practice of periodic ethical audits of academic and administrative functioning. Self-regulatory mechanisms, peer review, and institutional reflection can help identify ethical shortcomings and promote continuous improvement. Ethical self-assessment reinforces a culture of responsibility, transparency, and excellence in legal education.

### Conclusion

The ethical duties of law professors are inseparably linked with the credibility of legal education and the health of constitutional democracy in India. As educators entrusted with shaping future judges, advocates, administrators, and scholars, law professors occupy a position of profound moral authority. Their responsibilities extend far beyond classroom instruction to include the embodiment of constitutional values such as justice, equality, dignity, fairness, and the rule of law. Ethical conduct in teaching, evaluation, research, mentorship, and institutional engagement is therefore not merely a professional expectation but a constitutional and moral obligation. Any deviation from integrity, neutrality, or fairness at the faculty level directly undermines public confidence in legal institutions and weakens the foundation of justice delivery. This study underscores that professional conduct and moral responsibility must operate together as complementary dimensions of ethical duty. While regulatory frameworks and institutional codes of conduct provide minimum standards of behaviour, the true ethical responsibility of a law professor lies in conscientious self-regulation, intellectual honesty, and commitment to truth. Ethical neutrality in classrooms, fairness in assessment, respect for student dignity, sensitivity to gender and social diversity, and responsible research practices are indispensable to nurturing a culture of trust and academic excellence. Particularly in law, where education directly influences legal reasoning and public policy, ethical lapses cannot be treated as private or inconsequential matters; they have systemic and long-term repercussions. The conclusion further recognizes that contemporary challenges such as contractual employment, administrative pressures, commercialization of education, and digital transformation have intensified ethical dilemmas for law professors. Despite these constraints, the moral responsibility of legal educators remains undiminished. Institutions and regulators must therefore create enabling environments that protect academic freedom, ensure fairness in service conditions, and provide transparent grievance redressal mechanisms. Ultimately, the ethical strength of law professors determines the moral character of the legal profession itself. Reaffirming and institutionalizing ethical duties in legal academia is essential not only for professional discipline but also for sustaining constitutional morality, social justice, and the rule of law in India.

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