

Research Integrity

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❧ A Semi-Annual Newsletter ❧

Sponsored by:

- The Office of Intellectual Integrity
- The Center for Ethics and Humanities in the Life Sciences
 - The Graduate School

❧ VOLUME I No. 4 ❧

THE ETHICAL ENVIRONMENT FOR RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES AT M.S.U.

INTRODUCTION

The ethical climate of a university is intricately tied to the behavior of its faculty, graduate students, administration and staff. Ethical behavior should be a shared responsibility by both faculty and graduate students. The intention of the newsletter will be to highlight some of the issues associated with optimal ethical behavior between faculty and graduate students. This issue, prompted by a letter to the editor questioning the reasons for anonymous contributions by graduate students, will investigate the ethical climate for research and graduate studies at M.S.U.



INTERNET ACCESS

Research Integrity can be accessed through the World Wide Web on the Graduate School Home Page at:
<http://www.msu.edu/~gradschl/integrity.htm>



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ETHICAL ISSUES IN GRADUATE EDUCATION SURVEY

Research Integrity is devoting this issue to the many concerns that have been raised about the condition of graduate education at Michigan State University. To generate discussion and to provide a forum to debate the educational climate at M.S.U., we are asking faculty and graduate students to complete a survey on the World Wide Web at:
<http://gradweb.grd.msu.edu/nsurvey/login.asp>
Your participation is crucial to the outcome of this discussion and the results will be the focus of the next All-University

Symposium on Research Ethics. The survey will only take approximately five minutes to complete and your confidentiality is assured.

This survey is taken in part from one originally conducted by the Acadia Institute at the University of Minnesota. The Acadia Institute, founded in 1984, is part of the Center for the Study of Medicine, Science, and Society at The University of Minnesota. The Institute's interdisciplinary work focuses on social, ethical, and policy issues in three vital areas: graduate and professional education, basic and clinical medical research, and community health care needs and services.

The survey is intended to take the pulse of M.S.U. and determine where students and faculty believe M.S.U. rates on these issues. It is also intended to inform university administrators, faculty and policy makers about the current state of graduate research and education at M.S.U. and to help identify vital ethical issues regarding the educational climate. Your cooperation is strongly encouraged.

University policy prohibits the use of your name on any reports or publications that result from this survey. If you have any questions regarding the survey, please contact the editor, Julie Reyes at 353-3262. The results of this survey will be included in the next issue of *Research Integrity*.



SPRING 1998 UNIVERSITY - WIDE SYMPOSIUM

The Spring 1998 University-Wide Research Ethics Symposium entitled "The Ethical Environment for Research and Graduate Studies at M.S.U." will be held Thursday, April 9, 1998 from 8:00 am until 12:00 pm in the Lincoln Room at the Kellogg Center. The keynote address will be given by Dr. Judith Swazey, President of the Acadia Institute, Adjunct Professor of Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health, Member of the Federal Commission on Research Integrity, and co-author of "Ethical Problems in Academic Research" which is partially reprinted in this

newsletter. The results from the survey will be discussed as well.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I was pleased to read the issue on "Preventive Ethics" (Spring 1997) and as usual was especially interested in the graduate students' views of the subject. I could not help noticing that in both this and previous issues, most of the graduate students who offered opinions did so anonymously. I want to be clear that I do not object to anonymous contributions; it is better to hear from an unnamed grad student than not to hear from grad students at all. And the reasons why a grad student might wish to remain anonymous are fully understandable. My only question is this: Does this desire for anonymity tell us anything useful and important about the climate at Michigan State? Why would our articulate and thoughtful grad students NOT want their names to be known when they address issues in research ethics and scientific integrity? Is there something more we should be doing to create an atmosphere of trust and open dialogue? Or am I misreading the situation and making too much of a trifle? I would appreciate any comments from other readers in response.

Submitted by **Howard Brody, M.D., Ph.D.**
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ETHICAL RESEARCH

Contributed by
David E. Wright, Ph.D., Intellectual Integrity
Officer, and
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The environment in which research is conducted at American universities has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. That period has been marked by a huge increase in outside (especially federal) funding for university-based research, by increasing complexity in the social organization of research, and by increasing diversity of the research community. Thirty or forty years ago, research institutions were overwhelmingly staffed by white males raised, academically speaking, at a relatively few leading universities in a culture whose values and practices were shared, and largely implicit. Today, the research culture at American institutions is ethnically and sexually much more diverse, and includes many more foreign nationals as well. Not only is the culture more diverse, but it has changed from one dominated by individual investigators to one dominated by (often cross disciplinary) team research.

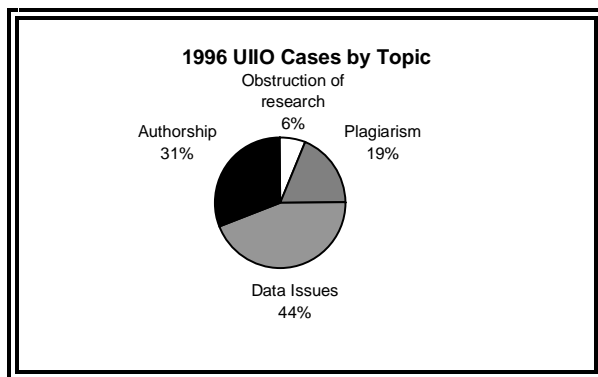


Figure 1

The last thirty years has also been marked by an increase in regulations and laws governing research. New federal regulations concerning animal subjects of research; financial conflicts of interest; research involving human subjects; research with hazardous substances; and misconduct in research have been issued in this period, yet most of them are actually much newer having been issued or revised in the last ten years. These regulations were enacted because Congress and pertinent federal agencies believed there was widespread failure of the university-based research community to maintain appropriate ethical standards to

protect research subjects, to protect the objectivity and integrity of research, and in some instances, to protect public safety. Unfortunately, the historical record (e.g. of research with human subjects) supports this perception.

Many of the ethical standards that were formerly implicit, or at most conveyed informally from major professor to graduate student, or discussed by colleagues briefly in the wake of a serious ethical lapse by a member of the profession are now explicitly embodied in law and regulation. Many universities, including ours, have developed materials and programs to assure compliance with the regulations for graduate students and new faculty.

Further, after the research misconduct regulations were promulgated in the late 1980s universities have developed courses (or course modules, e.g. for research methods courses) exploring ethical issues and standards in research. But these courses are neither universally available, nor of universally high quality. Moreover, most scholars who have studied the question of how best to promote the ethical conduct of research have concluded that the best training is that delivered directly by mentors and lab directors as part of research practice, as opposed to programming developed and distributed by central administrations.

How well are we doing at Michigan State University in establishing a climate in which high ethical research standards are taught and maintained? The record of complaints and cases handled by the Graduate School, the Office of Intellectual Integrity, and the Ombudsman suggests that we could be doing better. Organized by issues, are the cases handled by the Office of Intellectual Integrity in the last two years (Figures 1 and 2).

The actual number of cases ranges from twenty to twenty-five per year. Only four to five of these are formal allegations of misconduct; the rest are disputes among research collaborators. In the socially heterogeneous and organizationally complex environment that is the contemporary research university, and in the absence of clear ethical

standards and expectations, the opportunity for disputes among collaborators has increased. Moreover, a significant percentage of misconduct cases now begins, not in the peer review discovery of suspected fraud, but in disputes among collaborators over ownership and access to research data, over authorship and other forms of scholarly credit, and over intellectual property.

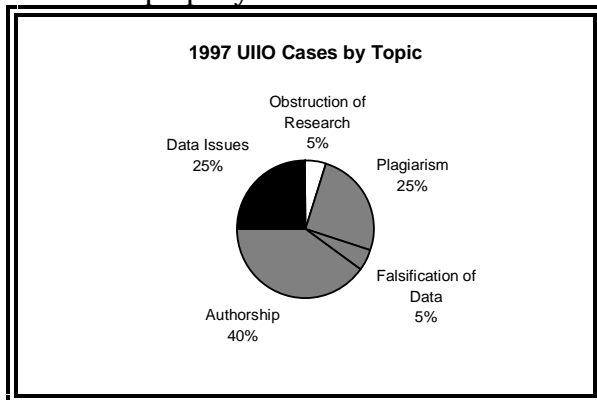


Figure 2

An important component of graduate education is the training of students to conduct research. The overall ethical environment of the institution plays an important role in the quality of this training and is one that is established and influenced collectively by all faculty in a unit, and indeed on the campus. A portion of the scholarly training must encompass frank discussions of ethical issues in research. How is an M.S.U. graduate perceived in the marketplace or as an applicant to a higher degree program elsewhere if he/she has conducted research without regard for federally-mandated human subjects regulations? Have we provided a quality educational experience if we leave this training out? Has M.S.U. successfully completed its responsibilities as educators of the next generation of scholars? What is our responsibility to students on assistantships funded by industry? Do students know where to ask for assistance if they have questions on authorship or data? Do they believe they will be heard, and more importantly, offered explanations for how/why decisions are made that can further inform their understanding of the practices of scholarship in the discipline?

These are all legitimate questions that arise from and contribute to an ethical environment of graduate education.

With its very close connection to research, at the master's level and especially the doctoral level, the ethical environment greatly affects the quality of graduate education. The Graduate School works with both faculty and graduate students on individual issues of research integrity involving federal and state regulations, MSU policies, and "best practice" within the professional societies and the disciplines.

The Graduate School has worked with approximately 180 graduate students (and with faculty) over the past 4 years. The Office of the Ombudsman has worked with approximately 1,000 graduate students (about 250 per year) over that same time period. Individual faculty, department chairs, associate deans and deans also sort out many difficulties each year. The Graduate School also works with issues including discrimination, sexual harassment, admissions, academic dishonesty, and access. While these issues may not be directly involved with research ethics per se, they certainly affect the ethical environment in which research takes place.

The following is a summary of the kinds of issues that graduate students bring to the attention of the Graduate School:

1. Individual conflicts with major professors, advisors and/or other guidance committee faculty members. This category constitutes approximately half of all of the issues brought forward by students. These conflicts are often over misunderstood expectations, decision-making control over data and scholarship including authorship, and who "owns" the data generated. These conflicts often lead to the desire to change advisors/major professors. This is one of the more traumatic issues that graduate students face, especially when it is complicated by additional conflicts over data and scholarship and possible patents.

2. The mechanics and process of graduate education, e.g. the comprehensive exam process, time limits, etc. A serious example of this is that the Graduate School is not permitted

by M.S.U. policy stated in the Faculty Handbook to accept theses or dissertations that describe research conducted with human subjects, but that are not in compliance with UCRIHS regulations. Each year 5-6 documents are turned over to the Office of Intellectual Integrity for action and certification for the degree is delayed.

3. What constitutes “adequate” progress? Is it defined in the graduate handbook, M.S.U. policies? Related to this is what is the definition of “complete” research and a “finished” dissertation and, more importantly, how do students know what that definition is?

4. Issues of assistantships—who gets them, who keeps them and how do students figure this out? To many it seems like a dart-board. The information that students should receive is covered in the Graduate Assistantships brochure from the Graduate School and is detailed in Sections 2.5 and 4.2 of the Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities document.

This list of four general categories is, of course, a rather artificial separation of issues. In most cases one or more of these areas are intertwined making the situation more complicated to understand and to sort out. As a misunderstanding or disagreement escalates between faculty and graduate students, everyone loses time and perhaps resources. It is the graduate student, however, who is the most vulnerable in terms of the very real possibility of losing the opportunity to continue in his/her degree program. It is for these reasons that M.S.U. provides a variety of options to help prevent such misunderstandings or conflicts and to help resolve them.

We believe that one of the best methods of prevention is a combination of education and an explicit mutual understanding of expectations. The Graduate School will sponsor presentations by the Office of Intellectual Integrity at the request of any unit or college. We provide numerous documents, brochures, handouts and flyers on the various regulations that students should be aware of as they pursue their research and scholarship. In the thesis/dissertation formatting packets and workshops we provide information on UCRIHS, copyright and other policies. All of

these documents are also on the Graduate School web page at (<http://www.msu.edu/user/gradschl/>).

In addition, the Graduate School will provide one or more workshops on setting expectations and conflict resolution between graduate students and faculty as part of our FIPSE (U.S. Department of Education) and Hewlett Foundation funded program development grant.



ETHICS AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Contributed by
Lindon Robison, Ph.D. Professor,
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Society has adopted the view that persons representing another person or organization and exercising their responsibility to allocate resources other than their own should act toward others as if relationships were arms' length. Applications of this principle include nepotism laws, civil rights laws, and judicial proceedings. Nepotism laws restrict government employers from hiring their close relatives. These laws recognize the tendency of some government employers to grant employment advantages to their relatives. Civil rights laws preclude employment being denied because of one's race or ethnicity. These laws recognize that race and ethnicity may change the relationship between employers and potential employees. Finally, our judicial system emphasizes the arm's length principle by placing a blindfold on our symbol of the court, Lady Justice. The blindfold helps her make impartial judgments free from the bias created by knowing who is to be judged.

Many studies support the conclusion that relationships or social capital, alters the terms of trade and increase the likelihood of trades between friends and family. One study found that graduate students in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Michigan State University would sell a used car valued at \$3000 for \$420 less than its market value if the

buyer were a friend (Robison and Schmid). A survey of 103 Michigan bankers serving communities of less than 10,000 found that good business and social relationships (social capital) increased the probability of loan approval in some cases by 60% (Siles, Hanson, and Robison). Finally, relationships have been significant factors in customer retention, tipping behavior, data perception, and willingness to cooperate.

Recent interest in social capital and its applications leads naturally to the question: are ethics and social capital connected? Before examining the connection between social capital and ethics, social capital is defined. Several social capital definitions exist. However, they all have something to do with relationships. A definition adopted by several members of the Social Capital Interest Group (SCIG) at Michigan State University follows: Social capital is the potential benefit (harm), advantages (disadvantages), and preferential (discriminatory) treatment, and increased (decreased) value or respect available to a person, group, idealized self, or object resulting the sympathy (antipathy) of another person(s).

One implication of this definition is that social capital providers must be persons possessing sympathy (antipathy). A person's sympathy (antipathy) toward another person, group, idealized self, or object may be culturally dependent, environmentally influenced, and responsive to a wide range of stimuli including the perceived social capital claimed by others. Physical objects such as pictures and personalized gifts; places such as one's birthplace, hometown, and historic locations; organizations such as one's church, alma mater, and social and civic clubs; and animals may acquire social capital; however, the social capital of places, organizations and animals is likely acquired because of their close identity with another person who owns social capital.

Trust, which has also been used synonymously with social capital, may exist for two reasons. One may trust another person because of that person's reputation for keeping promises and meeting commitments. However, one may also trust another person because of that person's caring. It is the latter

source of trust that most closely fits with SCIG's definition of social capital.

Having defined social capital as potential for preferential treatment, we now ask: when is it ethical to employ one's social capital? Some examples of potential uses of social capital follow. The reader is asked: are these uses of social capital ethical?

1. Suppose a junior colleague has social capital with a senior colleague. Then suppose that the junior colleague provides some useful review comments on the senior colleague's research. Under normal conditions, when the senior colleague publishes his or her work, the contributions of the junior colleague would be recognized in a footnote. However, the senior colleague offers the junior colleague joint authorship because he or she knows it will help the junior colleague get promotion and tenure. Is this use of social capital ethical?
2. Recognition of faculties' efforts is a delicate matter for administrator's whose decisions have long term consequences on promotions, career developments, and monetary remuneration. It is hoped that these decisions are made in an arm's length environment in which faculties' efforts are judged against an objective standard. Nevertheless, social capital may reduce administrators' abilities to apply arms' length judgments even when it is their desire to do so. Suppose one faculty member has been especially helpful in promoting the programs of the administrator. The administrator rewards the helping faculty member with an additional raise. Is this ethical?
3. Graduate students may use several criteria to select faculty advisors. One such criterion is the faculty member's social capital with the department administrator and with colleagues in and outside the university. Other criteria, of course, include the faculty member's professional reputation and expertise in his or her discipline. Should the faculty member's social capital that may be used to help the student obtain funding for research and

later employment be used as the basis for the graduate student's selection of an advisor?

4. Suppose a potential faculty member is being considered for employment. In addition, assume the candidate has social capital with a member of the hiring faculty. Is it ethical for the candidate to call the friend for additional information about the expectations associated with the position? Is it ethical for the candidate to ask the friend what questions other faculty members are likely to ask during the interview? Is it ethical for the candidate to ask the friend to lobby other faculty members in his or her behalf? We would clearly define as unethical any efforts to influence the hiring decision with gifts. Nevertheless, where do we draw the line with social capital? Is it ethical for the friend to answer these questions?
5. Suppose a department wants to hire an outstanding faculty member whose employment in the department will add prestige to the department and university and stimulate other faculty in related areas. The difficulty is that the distinguished faculty member's spouse is also employed in an academic discipline and must be offered employment besides that offered his (her) spouse. The spouse may be a capable faculty member, but his (her) area may not be a high priority of the department that would be hiring. Is it ethical for the department chair of the hiring department to use his or her social capital within the university to secure the spouse's employment?
6. Suppose a small group of faculty members is researching an area in which the department's chair (head) also researched before becoming chair. Because of the chair's interest and background, it is possible that the faculty members may have some social capital with their chair that can be used to obtain preferential treatment in the allocation of research funds or facilities. Would it be ethical for these faculty members to use this social capital to improve their funding?
7. Suppose a graduate student is facing preliminary examinations. Also suppose as happens in some departments, the student is allowed to choose his graduate committee that will ultimately decide his (her) status in the program. Is it ethical for the student to choose a committee that is "soft" on students? That is, should the student be allowed to use social capital to influence his or her choice of examiners? When asked, the student defends the choice by stating that one is justified in improving the odds of passing his/her exams and he or she has done nothing illegal. Besides wouldn't it be illogical for the student to select faculty for an examining committee that have a reputation of failing students?
8. Suppose a student develops social capital with his or her thesis advisor. Moreover, suppose because of this social capital, the faculty member accepts requests to meet with the student to discuss research issues outside normal working hours and spends more effort examining the student's topic that he or she is willing to offer to another student with whom the faculty member is advising? When confronted with the inequity of effort, the faculty member responds: "the additional effort is expended outside my university commitment, and I get to choose what I do on my own time". Is the faculty member's preferential treatment of the graduate student ethical?

There are many instances in which social capital is employed to benefit the university and individuals that are generally accepted as ethical. The university may use its social capital with its alumni to raise donations or to obtain legislative support. A department or college administrator may use a faculty member's social capital or loyalty to the department and the university to encourage him or her to pass up lucrative employment at other institutions. Recruiters may use loyal friends of the university to help in recruiting students, athletes, and faculty to M.S.U. One faculty member may call another for advice on a research project, to ask the friend to review a work in progress, or for advice on how to apply for contracts and grants. In the instances just

cited, we usually accept the employment of social capital as appropriate. On the other hand, there are many cases such as the eight examples described above in which the employment of social capital may raise ethical questions.

On close examination, it may be harder than we once thought to find instances in which social capital is not affecting important outcomes in our academic community. It may be that there is no unambiguous answer to the question: when is it ethical to use one's social capital? One conclusion, however, is clear: social capital is an important resource even in a university setting. The university and society have agreed that some factors should not be the basis for discrimination--race, religion, gender, and age to name a few. We need to discuss under what conditions is social capital a proper basis for discrimination. If we agree that under some conditions social capital is not an acceptable basis for discrimination, how do we prevent it from being used anyway? What do you think?

References:

Robison, L.J. and A.A. Schmid. "Interpersonal Relationships and Preferences: Evidences and Implications." In *Handbook of Behavioral Economics*, edited by R. Frantz and H. Singh. Vol. 2B. Greenwich, CT: J.A.I. Press, 1991, pp. 347-58.

Siles, M.E., S.D. Hanson, and L.J. Robison. "Socio-Economics and the Probability of Loan Approval." *Review of Agricultural Economics* 16 (1994): 363-72.



ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH: NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

The following is a partial reprint¹ of an article entitled "*Ethical Problems in Academic Research*" by Judith P. Swazey, Melissa S. Anderson and Karen Seashore Louis. The

¹ *American Scientist*, Volume 81, No. 6, November-December 1993. Pp.542-53. Used with permission.

editor recommends this article which highlights different issues associated with research ethics.

Ethical Problems in Academic Research: A survey of doctoral candidates and faculty raises important questions about the ethical environment of graduate education and research

"Misconduct and other ethical problems in university-based research have been widely discussed, but the result is still wide disagreement. Disparate opinions appear to place the extent and the significance of such impropriety somewhere between minuscule and monstrous. Yet quantitative information on which to base such opinions has been sparse.

"...[T]he effect of misconduct on the academic environment itself has received minimal attention. A faculty member's behavior may have a significant influence on the formation of a student's values and standards. Yet, despite the likelihood that numerous examples of misconduct—some serious—escape the public eye but are readily apparent to those close at hand, commentary rarely concentrates on the exposure of students to questionable behavior.

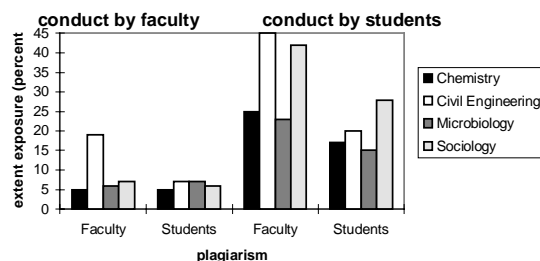


Figure 1

"There is little information about the comparative prevalence of ethical problems in the various academic disciplines. Once again, we would likely be misled to think that the rate at which problems are publicly reported represents their actual frequency. Students in different disciplines may be exposed to different numbers and types of ethical problem

"Equally important, graduate students may receive subtle messages about ethics from

the university's willingness, or lack of it, to undergo self-examination. If a student or faculty member appears to misbehave, does another student or faculty member who dares to report it face reprisal?

"To answer these and other questions about the research environment in doctoral programs, the Acadia Institute Project on Professional Values and Ethical Issues in the Graduate Education of Scientists and Engineers with grant support from the National Science Foundation, surveyed 2,000 doctoral candidates and 2,000 of their faculty about their experiences with 15 different types of ethically questionable behavior. We sampled doctoral students and faculty from 99 of the largest graduate departments in chemistry, civil engineering, microbiology and sociology.

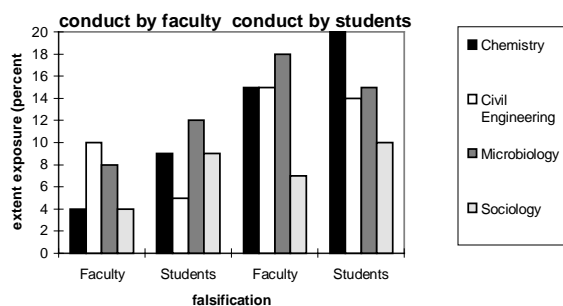


Figure 2

"Although our results do not measure the actual frequency of misconduct—instead, our questionnaires sought rates of *exposure to* perceived misconduct—they do demonstrate that such problems are more pervasive than many insiders believe. We also found significant differences among disciplines in the frequency and the types of questionable behavior observed. Furthermore, students and faculty who responded to our survey were guaranteed anonymity. Without that promise, their responses suggest, it is likely that a number would have remained silent about their perceptions of misconduct.

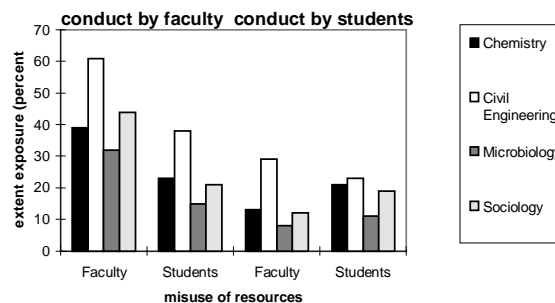


Figure 3

What Is an Ethical Problem?

"For the analyses reported in this article, ethical problems were clustered into three categories used by the National Academy of Sciences 'to delineate...behaviors in the research environment that require attention.' Category 1, misconduct in science includes 'fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, in proposing, or reporting research.' Category 2 includes questionable research practices, such as keeping poor research records or permitting honorary authorship. As the Academy report notes, although such practices 'violate traditional values of the research enterprise and...may be detrimental to the research process,' there is 'neither broad agreement about [their] seriousness...nor any consensus on standards of behavior in such matters.' The report's third category, 'other misconduct,' includes behavior such as sexual harassment and violations of government regulations, which may take place in a research context but 'are clearly not unique to the conduct of science...[and] are subject to generally applicable legal and social penalties.

Scientific Misconduct

"Overall, one can infer from our data that, although misconduct is not rampant, examples of behavior that fall into the National Academy's definition of science-related misconduct (Category 1) are not rare. Between six and nine percent of both students and faculty report that they have direct knowledge of faculty who have plagiarized or falsified data. Faculty reports of plagiarism and falsification by students are considerably

higher; nearly a third of faculty claim to have observed student plagiarism.

“On a more positive note, most of those who reported examples of plagiarism or falsification were aware of such misconduct by only one or two people. At the same time, however, we believe there is cause for concern in the finding that substantially higher percentages of graduate students than faculty in all four disciplines are believed to be engaging in these types of misconduct.

“There were significant differences between disciplines in reported knowledge of plagiarism (*Figure 1*). More than 40 percent of faculty in civil engineering and sociology have detected plagiarism among their graduate students. In civil engineering, 18 percent of faculty have noted plagiarism by their colleagues, a significantly higher proportion than in the other fields.

“Exposure to data falsification (*Figure 2*) does not follow a clear disciplinary pattern. At 10 percent, civil engineering faculty report the highest level of “cooking” among their colleagues, but 12 percent of microbiology students say that their teachers have falsified data. Faculty report similar levels of falsification among chemistry, civil engineering and microbiology students, but sociologists report significantly less. Among the students, chemistry doctoral students note the greatest exposure to falsification by their peers (20 percent).

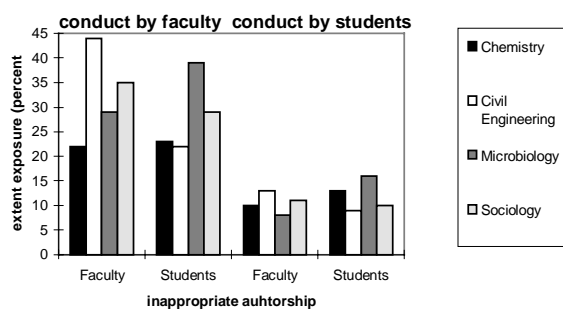


Figure 4

Questionable Research Practices

“Across the disciplines, reports of questionable research practices are far more common than reports of outright misconduct.

For example, 43 percent of faculty say they know of peers making inappropriate use of university resources for personal purposes, and almost one-third know of inappropriate assignment of authorship of research papers. Twenty-two percent of faculty report instances of their colleagues overlooking sloppy use of data, and 15 percent know of cases where data that would contradict an investigator’s own previous research have not been presented. Although students reportedly engage in questionable research practices at somewhat lower rates than faculty, the data indicate that substantial numbers of both students and faculty have observed such practices by students.

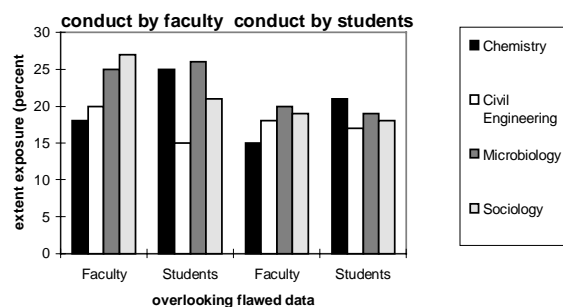


Figure 5

“The most significant disciplinary differences in questionable research practices are in the use of university resources for outside consulting or other personal purposes (*Figure 3*) and in the inappropriate assignment of authorship (*Figure 4*). Among faculty, 61 percent of civil engineers have direct knowledge of their colleagues inappropriate use of resources, and 44 percent report inappropriate assignment of authorship by faculty is most common in microbiology” (38 percent).

“Disciplinary differences in overlooking others’ use of flawed data or questionable interpretations of data are largely insignificant, except in the case of student reports of faculty behavior. Here, civil engineering students report significantly lower levels of these practices compared to other fields (*Figure 5*). With respect to failing to present data that contradicts one’s previous research, there are disciplinary differences among student, but not

faculty, responses (Figure 6). More students in microbiology (21 percent) than in other fields report direct knowledge of this practice by faculty, whereas students in chemistry and microbiology report the highest levels of this practice by their peers (16 and 17 percent).

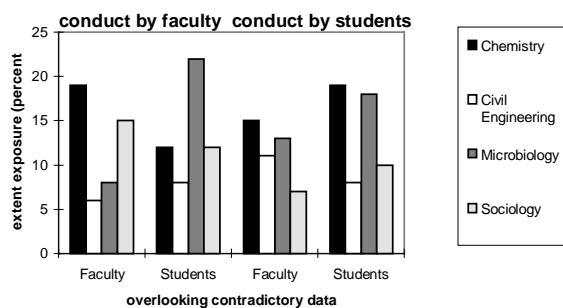


Figure 6

Other Misconduct

“Three types of abuses of a researcher’s position for personal finance gain or professional advantage also are included in the category of “other misconduct”: misusing research funds, unauthorized use of privileged information and failing to disclose involvement in firms whose product are based on the faculty member’s own research. Between 7 and 23 percent of both faculty and students have first-hand information about each of these abuses by faculty. Differences between sociology and other fields are apparent for these three items, but in this case sociology faculty and students are less likely to observe misconduct.

“Compliance with research regulations involving human subjects, animal care and use, and biosafety also appears to be problematic (Figure 7). Almost 20 percent of faculty have direct knowledge of their peers ignoring such policies, with even more students observing misconduct in this area by other students. Microbiologists, both faculty and students, are most frequently exposed to peers who ignore university research policies.

“Chemistry graduate students demonstrate a particularly noticeable disciplinary difference in reported exposure to attempts to get by on the work of others (Figure 8). Although only 16 percent say they have seen this behavior in faculty—the lowest percentage

of any group of respondents—48 percent say they have seen it among their peers. From a faculty perspective, civil engineering students and faculty most frequently try to get by on others’ work—53 percent have seen such behavior by their students.

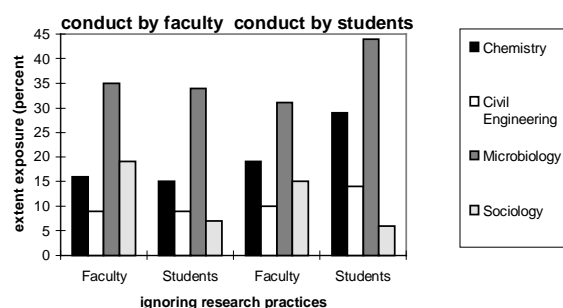


Figure 7

“The final type of misconduct included in the survey is cheating in coursework by graduate students. Not surprisingly, faculty know of more instances of such misbehavior than do students. Among the four disciplines, the highest levels of cheating are identified by both students and faculty in civil engineering.

Dealing with Misconduct

“The ways in which suspected misconduct and other ethical problems are dealt with at the departmental or institutional level are crucial to the integrity of research and scholarship, and they may help shape the values, the attitudes and the behaviors of trainees. Two sets of findings from our surveys bear on these matters: faculty and student expectations of retaliation for reporting suspected misconduct, and the extent to which faculty believe they should and actually do exercise a collective responsibility for the professional-ethical conduct of their colleagues and students.

“The extent to which faculty accept a collective as well as an individual professional responsibility for their colleagues’ and students’ conduct is another aspect of a department’s ethical climate that may affect how suspected wrongdoing or questionable practices are handled.

“Faculty report striking differences between their espoused values and the actual practice in their departments. In principle, virtually all faculty (99 percent) believe they and their colleagues should exercise at least some degree of collective responsibility for the conduct of their graduate students. A smaller but still substantial 74 percent believe they should exercise such a responsibility to a great extent, but only 27 percent judge that they and their departmental colleagues actually manifest to a great extent their shared responsibility for their students’ professional-ethical conduct... Almost all faculty (94 percent) also believe that they have some degree of responsibility for their colleagues’ ethical conduct, but only 55 percent hold this belief to a great extent. In terms of actual behavior, however, just 13 percent judge that faculty in their department exercise a great deal of shared responsibility for their colleagues’ conduct, whereas 30 percent hold that there is very little or no manifestation of collegial responsibility. Looking at disciplinary differences, a substantially smaller percentages of chemists than faculty in the other three fields believe they have a strong degree of collective responsibility for their peers’ behavior.

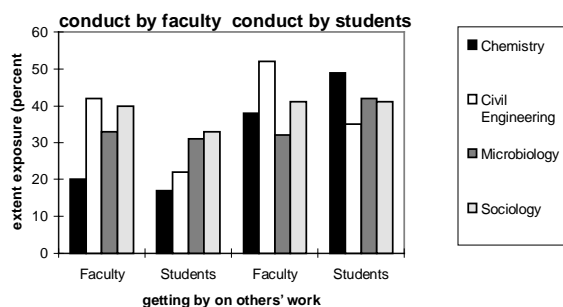


Figure 8

“Environments that foster expectations of retaliation, coupled with low levels of exercised collective responsibility for the conduct of colleagues and students, raise grave concerns about the willingness and ability of members of academic research communities to govern the conduct of peers and students. Many observers of higher education have affirmed the importance of both professional

autonomy and collective or group regulation of the academic enterprise. Burton Clark has written that “the culture of the [academic] profession everywhere emphasizes personal autonomy and collegial self-government.” Our survey data, and statements by faculty and graduate students whom we have interviewed, challenge the idea that faculty actually practice an ethic of collective governance.



GUIDELINES FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN GRADUATE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

The University of Oregon has incorporated the following guidelines regarding good practices in graduate education to encourage the ethical and intellectual environment for graduate research and studies. We include the following guidelines in their entirety for consideration².

Faculty and Graduate Students

“A major purpose of graduate education at the University of Oregon is to instill in each student an understanding of and capacity for scholarship, independent judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual honesty. It is the joint responsibility of faculty and graduate students to work together to foster these ends through relationships which encourage freedom of inquiry, demonstrate personal and professional integrity, and foster mutual respect.

“Graduate student progress toward educational goals at the University of Oregon is directed and evaluated by an advisor and a graduate committee. These individuals provide intellectual guidance in support of the scholarly and artistic activities of graduate students. The advisor and the graduate committee are also charged with the responsibility of evaluating a graduate student’s performance in research and creative activities. The graduate student, the

² Used with permission by Dr. Steadman Upham, Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School, University of Oregon.

advisor, and the graduate committee, then, comprise a basic unit of graduate education. It is the quality, breadth, and depth of interaction in this unit that largely determines the outcome of the graduate experience.

“High quality graduate education depends upon the professional and ethical conduct of the participants. Faculty and graduate students have complementary responsibilities in the maintenance of academic standards and the creation of high quality graduate programs. Excellence in graduate education is achieved when both faculty and graduate students are highly motivated, possess the academic and professional backgrounds necessary to perform at the highest level, and are sincere in their desire to see each other succeed.

“To this end, it is essential that graduate students:

- conduct themselves in a mature, professional, and civil manner in all interactions with faculty and staff;
- recognize that the faculty advisor provides the intellectual and instructional environment in which the student conducts research, and may, through access to teaching and research funds, also provide the student with financial support;
- recognize that faculty have broad discretion to allocate their own time and other resources in ways which are academically productive;
- recognize that the faculty advisor is responsible for monitoring the accuracy, validity, and integrity of the student’s research. Careful, well-conceived research reflects favorably on the student, the faculty advisor, and the University;
- exercise the highest integrity in taking examinations and in collecting, analyzing, and presenting research data;
- acknowledge the contributions of the faculty advisor and other members of the research team to the student’s work in all publications and conference presentations;
- maintain the confidentiality of the faculty advisor’s professional activities and research prior to presentation or

publication, in accordance with existing practices and policies of the discipline;

- take primary responsibility to inform themselves of regulations and policies governing their graduate studies.

“It is also imperative that faculty:

- interact with students in a professional and civil manner in accordance with University policies governing nondiscrimination and sexual harassment;
- impartially evaluate student performance regardless of religion, race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or other criteria that are not germane to academic evaluation;
- serve on graduate student committees without regard to the race, gender, sexual orientation, or national origin of the graduate student candidate;
- prevent personal rivalries with colleagues from interfering with their duties as graduate advisors, committee members, or colleagues;
- excuse themselves from serving on graduate committees when there is an amorous, familial, or other relationship between the faculty member and the student that could result in a conflict of interest;
- acknowledge student contributions to research presented at conferences, in professional publications, or in applications for copyrights and patents;
- not impede a graduate student’s progress toward the degree in order to benefit from the student’s proficiency as a teaching or research assistant;
- create in the classroom, lab, or studio supervisory relations with students that stimulate and encourage students to learn creatively and independently;
- have a clear understanding with graduate students about their specific research responsibilities, including time lines for completion of research and the thesis or dissertation;
- provide verbal or written comments and evaluation of students’ work in a timely manner;

- discuss laboratory, studio, or departmental authorship policy with graduate students in advance of entering into collaborative projects;
- refrain from requesting students to do personal work (mowing lawns, baby-sitting, typing papers, etc.) without appropriate compensation;
- familiarize themselves with policies that affect their graduate students.

“Graduate education is structured around the transmission of knowledge at the highest level. In many cases, graduate students depend on faculty advisors to assist them in identifying and gaining access to financial and/or intellectual resources which support their graduate programs.

“In some academic units, the student’s specific advisor may change during the course of the student’s program. The role of the advising may also change and become a mentoring relationship.

“The reward of finding a faculty mentor implies that the student has achieved a level of excellence and sophistication in the field, or exhibits sufficient promise to merit the more intensive interest, instruction, and counsel of faculty.

“To this end, it is important that graduate students:

- devote an appropriate amount of time and energy toward achieving academic excellence and earning the advanced degree;
- be aware of time constraints and other demands imposed on faculty members and program staff;
- take the initiative in asking questions that promote understanding of the academic subjects and advance the field;
- communicate regularly with faculty advisors, especially in matters related to research and progress within the graduate program.

“Faculty advisors, on the other hand, should:

- provide clear maps of the requirements each student must meet, including coursework, languages, research tools,

examinations, and thesis or dissertation, and delineating the amount of time expected to complete each step;

- evaluate student progress and performance in regular and informative ways consistent with the practice of the field;
- help students develop artistic, interpretive, writing, verbal, and quantitative skills, when appropriate, in accordance with the expectations of the discipline;
- assist graduate students to develop grant writing skills, where appropriate;
- take reasonable measures to ensure that each graduate student initiates thesis or dissertation research in a timely fashion;
- when appropriate, encourage graduate students to participate in professional meetings or perform or display their work in public settings;
- stimulate in each graduate student an appreciation of teaching;
- create an ethos of collegiality so that learning takes place within a community of scholars;
- prepare students to be competitive for employment which includes portraying a realistic view of the field and the market at any given time and making use of professional contacts for the benefit of their students, as appropriate.

“In academic units, faculty advisors support the academic promise of graduate students in their program. In some cases, academic advisors are assigned to entering graduate students to assist them in academic advising and other matters. In other cases, students select faculty advisors in accordance with disciplinary interest or research expertise. Advising is manifold in its scope and breadth and may be accomplished in many ways.

“A student’s academic performance and a faculty member’s scholarly interests may coincide during the course of instruction and research. As the faculty-graduate student relationship matures and intensifies, direct collaborations may evolve which may entail the sharing of authorship or rights to intellectual property developed in research or other creative or artistic activity. Such collaborations

are encouraged and are a desired outcome of the mentoring process.”



We continue to invite contributions, comments, suggestions, letters and articles for future editions from faculty, graduate students and administrators. Please contact the editor, Julie Reyes at: reyesjul@pilot.msu.edu



LISTING OF RESOURCES AND CASE STUDIES

- Anderson, Melissa S., Louis Seashore, Karen, and Earle, Jason. “Disciplinary and Departmental Effects on Observations of Faculty and Graduate Student Misconduct”. *Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. 65, No. 3 (May/June 1994). Ohio State University Press.
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