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Ethics Symposium 2011: Executive Summary and Next Steps

Issues of ethics and the responsible conduct of research are of great interest across campus. While the Academic Integrity Task Force and I-Cubed are surveying current training activities on campus, the efforts in planning and presenting the UF campus-wide Ethics Symposium on September 27, 2011 enabled faculty, staff, and graduate students across campus to openly discuss and debate opportunities in ethics and the Responsible Conduct of Research that the organizers feel merit attention for further training across campus.

This summary is provided to quickly update you and invite your input on our collective thoughts regarding the Symposium outcomes and future steps.

The Ethics Symposium was developed as a collaborative effort from Michelle Leonard, PI of the NSF grant “Gaming Against Plagiarism” (GAP), and the I-Cubed program. Keynote speaker Don McCabe, an internationally-recognized expert on ethics, offered to present the results of his survey of UF graduate students compared to all students he has surveyed. The I-Cubed program funded his travel and Michelle Leonard developed the symposium program around Dr. McCabe’s presentation with the aid of I-Cubed members, Denise Bennett (Engineering Librarian), Erik Sander (Director of the Engineering Innovation Institute), and Bill Allen (HSC Program Director in Bioethics, Law and Medical Professionalism and link to CTSI).

Accomplishments of the Ethics Symposium:

- * Bringing together 95 registrants to discuss campus wide issues and opportunities in ethics and RCR training
- * Raising awareness of Responsible Conduct of Research at several levels: graduate students, staff, faculty

Activities supplemental to the symposium:

- * Developed and conducted workshops on the Responsible Conduct of Research. Piloted in the Marston Science Library in August 2011, reached 80 graduate students. Areas of interest expressed in the workshops are included in our environmental scan.
- * Developed guides for the UF community, maintained by the Libraries:
Ethics: <http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/ethics> provides links to policies and case studies to support all disciplines.
Responsible Conduct of Research: <http://guides.uflib.ufl.edu/stemrcr> serves as an outline for the graduate student workshops.

Topics of greatest interest as determined by our scans:

Faculty:

- * Collaborative Science
- * Peer review process and responsibilities
- * Mentor/trainee responsibilities
- * Authorship and publication practices
- * Research misconduct: falsification, fabrication, and plagiarism

Graduate Students:

- * Mentor/advisor responsibilities and communication
- * Data ownership/sharing
- * Authorship and publication practices
- * Defining “accepted practices” in your field

Staff :

- * Research Coordinator responsibilities
- * Mentor/trainee responsibilities
- * Treatment of human subjects

The topic common to all groups is “mentor/mentee responsibilities,” indicating a strong need for training and development of communication skills in this area. Staff observe and express a need since they may be placed in the center of advisor/student communication situations.

Recommendations for future training activities:

- * Focus on best practices and solutions-oriented discussions
- * Devise focused, topic-based training targeted at several levels of participants:
 - * faculty – especially target advisers/mentors
 - * graduate coordinators -- insert segment into annual Graduate Coordinator and Staff Orientation?
 - * experienced graduate students – discussion/workshop format preferred
 - * beginning graduate students -- they do more listening than contributing
 - * undergraduate students -- focus on plagiarism rather than research
- * Keep concept/theoretical presentations and discussions at faculty/staff sessions.

Through the course of the symposium preparation, faculty from all disciplines expressed their gratitude of and support for this type of educational activity on campus. As a result, several continuing training opportunities have been developed. We welcome further discourse to promote a positive approach to ethical and responsible research on the UF campus.

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