Academic Integrity in the Mentoring Relationship

A Sampling of Relevant Issues

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FOR MOST GRADUATE STUDENTS, the cultivation of close working relationships with skilled mentors is key to training. These relationships frequently represent the central route through which essential professional competencies are acquired. Moreover, the overall quality of the training experience is in large measure determined by the extent to which the mentor and graduate student can mutually fashion a fruitful working alliance. This working alliance is, in turn, facilitated by the successful negotiation of a variety of academic integrity issues that impinge on the relationship. Three academic integrity issues assume the central focus of this chapter: (1) determination of authorship credit on collaborative projects, (2) role issues and establishment of boundaries, and (3) resolution of conflicts related to these or other areas. For each, the issues are briefly discussed, their relevance to academic integrity is made explicit, and recommendations are offered.

Determination of Authorship Credit on Collaborative Projects

From a graduate student's perspective, collaborative research involving a faculty mentor can be enormously rewarding. These collaborations allow students to capitalize on the mentor's wealth of experience and expertise, and skills acquired in these partnerships form the foundation of success in graduate school and beyond. Collaborators can offer each other moral support and encouragement as they tackle the difficult and demanding tasks of original research (Mendenhall & Higbee, 1982). The old adage "two heads are better than one" seems entirely relevant to collaborative work in academe. Coming together to solve problems

and advance a scholarly agenda may lead to greater yields than either mentors or graduate students could produce alone. Of course, collaborative research in graduate school often involves numerous others aside from one's primary mentor. Research teams in many disciplines (particularly the medical sciences) can be quite large indeed. Learning to cooperate with the various personalities that compose the collaborative team can itself be a valuable training exercise.

When the collaborative work is complete and the manuscript prepared for publication, major contributors to the project appear in the authors' byline. The byline serves two principal functions. First, it establishes accountability (Reichelt, James, & Milne, 1998). The individuals whose names appear in the byline attest to the integrity of the product and endorse the conclusions, along with the specific means used to reach them, presented in the manuscript. It is the task of the authors to address questions, criticisms, or controversies that derive from a public appraisal of the product. Second, authorship credit serves as a reward for executing professional duties essential to completion of the project. In academe, it is widely known that the reward function of authorship is quite lucrative. For faculty, the quantity and quality of authored publications is central to tenure and promotion, salary increases, and opportunities to procure research funding (Costa & Gatz, 1992; Holaday & Yost, 1995; Louw & Fouché, 1999; Sandler & Russell, 2005). For graduate students, authorship enhances competitiveness for internships, postdoctoral fellowships, and academic and nonacademic positions (Hopko, Hopko, and Morris, 1999).

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Given these high stakes, determining authorship credit on collaborative projects can be a delicate task. What types of contributions to the project merit authorship designation? Which contributors should be included as authors? In what order should contributors' names appear in the byline? The latter question is meaningful in light of the fact that, in many disciplines, authorship order communicates information regarding the magnitude of contributions set forth by collaborators. As such, publications in which one's name appears first (known as *first-authored* publications) are particularly coveted (e.g., Marco & Schmidt, 2004).

Determining authorship credit on collaborative projects involving one or more faculty mentors can be particularly fraught with problems. First, there

exists an inherent asymmetry in power and influence between faculty and graduate students (Fine & Kurdek, 1993). Thus, the potential for faculty to abuse power in ways that exploit students, such as claiming more credit than is warranted, has been highlighted (Kwok 2005; Wagena 2005). Short of egregious exploitation, graduate students may be all too willing to defer to faculty in making decisions regarding authorship listing. By failing to advocate fully their own interests, graduate students may find themselves shortchanged with respect to authorship credit. On the other hand, the power asymmetry may instead result in overgenerosity on the part of mentors. That is, mentors may be inclined to ascribe *greater* authorship credit to students than is warranted by actual contributions. This may be particularly true of senior faculty (Over & Smallman, 1973; Costa & Gatz, 1992; Zuckerman, 1968), for whom pressure to produce first-authored publications diminishes.

Relevance to academic integrity. How do these authorship issues relate to academic integrity? First, one could envision instances in which failure to negotiate properly the potentially rocky terrain of authorship determination compromises each of the core values central to academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility (Center for Academic Integrity, 1999).[1] Second, basic procedures for determining authorship credit are outlined in ethics codes and guidelines in numerous disciplines. Thus, failure to carefully and responsibly consider authorship issues would, as a matter of necessity, involve questions of academic and ethical integrity.

Recommendations. First, graduate students should familiarize themselves with discipline-specific policies and procedures used to determine the awarding and designation of authorship credit early in their graduate careers. As mentioned, many disciplines have ethics codes (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2002; American Sociological Association, 1999) that are instructive with respect to authorship determination or other widely accepted guidelines (see, e.g., International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 1991) that are typically invoked. Such guidelines generally outline contributions that merit authorship and those that do not, and set forth procedures for determining authorship order. Clearly, such guidelines are not without limitations. Some writers (e.g., Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985) have argued that many sets of guidelines use ambiguous language that invites competing interpretations. Limitations notwithstanding, these guidelines serve as useful heuristics to consult when determining authorship credit.

Second, the decision-making process should begin early in the project to minimize the likelihood of later conflict when the manuscript is ready for submission. Graduate students should insist on being active participants in these discussions. Learning to negotiate authorship issues should be viewed as a pivotal training task, and as such, faculty mentors can take the lead in

instructing students as to the appropriate procedures used in making such determinations. In this training context, discussions of authorship should include the following: (1) outlining tasks that need to be completed during the course of the project, (2) determining which project personnel will complete these tasks, (3) discussing which contributions merit authorship credit, as per accepted standards in the discipline, and (4) tentatively determining authorship order. Finally, authorship issues should be revisited often as the project unfolds. Original research is a dynamic and always evolving enterprise. Key tasks that were unanticipated at the outset of project planning invariably arise and require attention. Strategies for determining authorship must be sufficiently malleable to accommodate the fluid nature of the work.

Roles and Boundaries

For many graduate students, the mentor-student relationship is unlike most others encountered previously in one's academic career. Undergraduate training provides a stark contrast. For undergraduates, many relationships with faculty are rather distant. Most one-to-one interactions between undergraduates and faculty are limited to brief chats before or after class or the occasional visit to office hours. Moreover, faculty typically adopt a single role: teacher. In graduate school, however, relationships with faculty mentors are generally much closer and more collegial. Similar to any good relationship, a prosperous mentor-student relationship is built upon a foundation of trust, mutual respect, and honesty. Furthermore, the mentor-student relationship is inherently marked by multiple roles (Johnson & Nelson, 1999). Mentors commonly enact any or all of the following roles: academic advisor, role model, career counselor, course instructor, advocate, coach, and friend. Indeed, the strongest mentoring relationships are marked by the mentor's execution of multiple roles (Johnson & Huwe, 2002). Thus, some degree of boundary blurring is expected. In spite of this, a healthy mentoring relationship is bounded, to a greater or lesser extent, (1) intellectually (Hockey 1994) and (2) personally or emotionally.

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Intellectual boundaries. A high degree of autonomy is expected of graduate students pursuing advanced degrees in any given field of study. The academy

demands that graduate students' work substantially reflects their own ideas, efforts, insights, and conclusions. These demands are particularly salient with respect to the Ph.D. dissertation, which, by definition, reflects the original work of the student. This is not to say, of course, that students are prohibited from seeking guidance to complete their work. To the contrary, the mentoring relationship rests on the assumption that students, as novice scholars, require some degree of expert supervision to produce quality work and advance in their studies. The question, then, is rather *how much* guidance is appropriate to provide. This question bears directly on the issue of intellectual boundaries, which entail limits on the volume, specificity, depth, and quality of the mentor's involvement in the student's academic affairs (Hockey, 1994). In general, effective intellectual boundaries permit reasonable guidance and assistance from mentors, but do not permit overinvolvement or "hand holding." Students are entitled to expect a mentor's helpful input, but should not expect hyper-vigilant hovering over their academic affairs. In the end, such a strategy would do a great disservice to students anyhow, as it would be hard for graduate students truly to mature as scholars under such conditions.

Personal or emotional boundaries. Personal relationships with faculty mentors are not inherently problematic. However, certain types of personal relationships are troublesome. Moreover, excessive emotional involvement in the mentoring relationship (on the part of mentors or students) can lead to problems.

First, obviously, sexual relationships between faculty mentors and graduate students provide a clear example of personal or emotional overinvolvement. Although such relationships are not always explicitly forbidden in professional codes of ethics or institutional policies, they can pose serious threats to academic integrity and should thus be strongly discouraged. Syracuse University's sexual harassment policy "strongly discourages [faculty from pursuing] sexual relationships with graduate students and any subordinate whose work the [faculty member] supervises" (Syracuse University, 2006). It goes on to say that if a sexual relationship does develop, alternative arrangements for evaluation and monitoring of the student's work must be made. Given the closeness of the mentor-student relationship, the development of sexual attraction is not uncommon (Tabachnick, Keith-Spiegel, & Pope, 1991). However, translating attraction into action comes with a variety of potentially untoward consequences that may not be sufficiently acknowledged at the outset of the encounter.

Second, in instances where the mentor supervises multiple graduate students, positive personal feelings for any one of them should not lead to a "favored child" situation (Plaut, 1993). Such an arrangement could lead to greater academic and professional opportunities, more favorable evaluations, more one-to-one mentoring time, and so on. Of course, all of the above may very reasonably be based upon merit. That is, if Student A's effort and motivation far

exceeds Student B's, then Student A should expect to reap greater rewards and a more satisfactory relationship with the mentor. The point is that personal amity, per se, should not be used to justify inequitable treatment of students. The mentor must be vigilant in detecting such states of affairs and promptly eliminating them if they develop.

Relevance to academic integrity. Violation of intellectual boundaries implicates academic integrity because it rightly invites serious questions as to the student's ownership of work that is, in fact, substantially based upon another's contributions. With respect to personal or emotional boundaries, if close personal relationships result in the provision of professionally lucrative benefits to the student that are (1) unavailable to other students and (2) not substantially based upon merit, this unquestionably brings academic integrity concerns to the fore.

Recommendations. First, a candid discussion of roles and boundaries should be carried out early in the mentoring relationship. Mentors should clearly delineate the roles that they intend to adopt, the boundaries that they intend to erect, and a rationale for both. Moreover, mentors should clearly communicate what is expected of their students. This helps novice trainees begin to craft their own identities as graduate students and clarifies the nature of their roles in the mentoring relationship. Failure to do this may produce role confusion, boundary blurring, and, ultimately, an impaired mentoring relationship.

Second, roles evolve over the course of the mentoring relationship. For instance, early in a graduate student's career, the mentor's role as academic advisor is primary. The mentor advises on course selection, negotiating the departmental milieu, and so on. Later, the roles of career counselor and friend increase in prominence. Both mentors and students should carefully track the evolution of the mentoring relationship and critically examine whether changing roles and shifting boundaries are problematic. Is it the case, for example, that a mentor's expanding role as friend disrupts her or his ability to provide objective feedback regarding student performance?

Finally, it has been suggested that formal training to prepare junior mentors for their diverse assortment of roles in the mentoring relationship may reduce concerns related to role confusion and boundary violations (Johnson & Huwe, 2002). Such training may assist in alerting junior mentors as to what lies ahead in the business of mentoring and may enhance the overall efficacy of mentors' scholarly supervision of students.

Conflict Resolution

All relationships, even rock solid ones, are characterized by occasional disputes. These disputes need not represent insurmountable roadblocks. Successful resolution of conflicts in the mentoring relationship can ultimately strengthen,

not weaken, the bond. Unsuccessful resolution can, in certain instances, derail a graduate career. Thus, the importance of an effective conflict resolution strategy cannot be overstated. Recommendations as to key ingredients of such a strategy are offered below. However, consideration of an exhaustive set of procedures for resolving conflicts in the mentoring relationship is beyond the scope of this chapter. The reader is referred to Klomparens, Beck, Brockman, and Larson (2004) for a more comprehensive treatment of this important issue.

Relevance to academic integrity. Failure to address conflicts in the mentoring relationship in a timely and responsible fashion may lead to academic integrity problems by fostering a generally hostile climate in which to conduct one's academic affairs. This hostile climate may, in turn, increase the likelihood of engaging in scholarly conduct that threatens the core values of academic integrity. Indeed, some readers may know of situations in which disputes in the mentoring relationship have prompted conduct on the part of mentors or students that is questionable in its ethical soundness.

Recommendations. First, it is essential for students to avoid stewing in the emotional upset of a budding conflict. Permitting a conflict to simmer long enough will eventually yield unmanageable friction that can only impair the mentoring relationship. Ill will, resentment, and hurt feelings are common consequences of a failure to directly address conflict in a timely fashion.

Second, graduate students should be direct and honest, yet tactful and respectful, in addressing conflict with mentors. A failure to communicate directly one's thoughts and feelings, thereby precluding an open airing of relevant issues, often renders a conflict unsolvable.

Third, it is important for graduate students to seek advice in managing conflicts with a mentor. More senior students can frequently offer a wealth of valuable insights which can be brought to bear on resolving a conflict. In addition, many departments have ombudspersons whose principal role is to assist in resolving conflicts. Graduate students should not be timid in consulting these or other individuals who can offer a fair, objective appraisal of the problem and possible resolution strategies.

Concluding Remarks

Graduate school is an exciting time of intellectual and professional growth, and mentoring relationships are vitally important in this process. For the mentoring relationship to truly thrive, graduate students and mentors must build their bond on a foundation of strong academic integrity. Careful attention to the issues outlined here may facilitate this important endeavor and, in turn, enhance the overall quality of the training experience.

Notes

1. The Center for Academic Integrity, formerly at Duke University's Kenan Institute for Ethics, has moved during the publication of this volume. The Center is now hosted by the Rutland Institute for Ethics at Clemson University. The Center can still be found online at the same address: http://www.academicintegrity.org

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