



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

Responsible University Official: Director, Office for Research Integrity
Responsible Office: Office for Research Integrity
Origination Date: September 1, 1989

Policy for Reviewing Alleged Research Misconduct

Policy Statement: It is the policy of Northwestern University to inquire into and, if necessary, investigate and resolve promptly and fairly all instances of alleged research misconduct.

Purpose: As a recipient of federal research funds, Northwestern University must have institutional policies and procedures in place to handle allegations of research misconduct.

Who Approved This Policy: Provost, Vice President for Research

Who Needs to Know This Policy: Faculty, students, other trainees, staff, and all other members of Northwestern University's research community.

Website Address for this Policy:

<https://www.researchintegrity.northwestern.edu/research-misconduct>

Contact: Office for Research Integrity

If you have any questions regarding this policy, you may:

1. Call the Office for Research Integrity at 312.503.0054, or
2. Send an e-mail to researchintegrity@northwestern.edu

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Policy

1.1 Introduction

Northwestern University values the honesty and integrity of our research community in accordance with our mission of conducting innovative research. Northwestern University is dedicated to ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the research conducted by our research community, to protecting this community from unsubstantiated allegations of research misconduct, and to upholding Northwestern University's high standards for our research activity. These standards are adopted to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of research conducted by members of Northwestern University's research community and to protect our research community from unsubstantiated allegations of research misconduct. Misconduct in research represents a breach of the policies of Northwestern University, the standards expected by our sponsors and entrusted to us by the public, and the expectations of scholarly communities for accuracy, validity, and integrity in research.

It is the policy of Northwestern University to inquire into and, if necessary, investigate and resolve promptly and fairly all instances of alleged research misconduct; and to comply in a timely manner with sponsor requirements for reporting cases of possible research misconduct when sponsored project funds are involved.

As a recipient of federal research and development funds, Northwestern University must have institutional policies and procedures in place to handle allegations of research misconduct.

1.2 Applicability

This policy applies to faculty, students, other trainees, staff, and all other members of Northwestern University's research community. Northwestern University's *Policy for Reviewing Alleged Research Misconduct* applies to Northwestern research and related activities, regardless of funding source.

1.3 Definitions

At Northwestern University, research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other serious deviation from commonly accepted practices in the relevant scientific community for proposing, performing or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences in opinion.

- Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.
- Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
- Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.
- Serious deviation from accepted practices includes but is not limited to:
 - Abusing confidentiality, including the use of ideas and preliminary data gained from:
 - Access to privileged information through the opportunity for editorial review of manuscripts submitted to journals; and
 - Peer review of proposals being considered for funding by agency panels or by internal committees, such as the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and the University Research Grants Committee.
 - Stealing, destroying, or damaging the research property of others with the intent to alter the research record; and
 - Directing, encouraging, or knowingly allowing others to engage in fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism.

Other Relevant Definitions

- Allegation refers to any written or oral statement or other indication of possible research misconduct made to an institutional official, including department chairs, deans, the Vice President for Research, the Associate Vice President for Research, and the Provost.
- Complainant refers to an individual(s) who submits an allegation of research misconduct.
- Conflict of interest and commitment refers to a divergence between a faculty member's interests and his/her professional obligations to Northwestern University, such that an independent observer might reasonably question whether the faculty member's professional actions or decisions are determined by considerations other than the best interests of Northwestern University.
- Good faith allegation refers to an allegation made with the honest belief that research misconduct may have occurred. An allegation is not in good faith if it is made in reckless disregard for or willful ignorance of facts that would disprove the allegation.
- Inquiry refers to the initial process for determining whether an allegation or apparent instance of research misconduct has substance and warrants an investigation.
- Investigation refers to the formal examination and evaluation of all relevant facts to determine, based on a preponderance of evidence, whether research misconduct has occurred and, if so, to determine the responsible person and the nature and seriousness of the research misconduct.
- Investigator refers to any individual, including but not limited to any person holding an academic or professional staff appointment at Northwestern University, who is engaged in the design, conduct or reporting of research.
- ORI refers to the Office for Research Integrity, the office within Northwestern University that is responsible for overseeing research misconduct proceedings and promoting the responsible conduct of research at Northwestern University.

- Research refers to any systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and reporting, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. The term encompasses basic research, applied research, and research training activities in areas such as biomedical and life sciences, natural sciences, engineering, humanities and arts, and social and behavioral sciences.
- Research Integrity Officer (RIO) refers to the institutional official appointed by the Vice President for Research to have primary responsibility for assuring adherence to the implementing procedures of this policy and any other Northwestern University procedures adopted to implement it. The Director of the Office for Research Integrity is the RIO for Northwestern University.
- Research personnel
 - Faculty members refers to professors, associate professors, assistant professors, research faculty, associates, instructors, college lecturers, senior lecturers, lecturers, and those holding a rank designated as “clinical.” The term faculty includes individuals designated as “visiting” or “adjunct.”
 - Students refers to those individuals officially accepted and enrolled at Northwestern University for the purpose of advancing their academic achievement. Student status at Northwestern University is a privilege earned by meeting standards of academic performance and adherence to regulations governing conduct.
 - Other trainees include, but are not limited to: pre-doctoral and post-doctoral trainees and fellows.
 - Research staff include, but are not limited to: administrators who support research activities, clinical research coordinators, individuals specifically granted PI status by the Vice President for Research, visiting scholars conducting research at Northwestern University, research technicians, and laboratory technicians.
- Research record refers to any data, document, computer file, computer diskette, or any other written or non-written account or object that reasonably may be expected to provide evidence or information regarding the proposed, conducted or reported research. A research record may include: grant or contract applications whether funded or unfunded; grant or contract progress and other reports; laboratory notebooks; laboratory records, both physical and electronic; theses; abstracts; oral presentations; internal reports; manuscripts and publications; notes; correspondence; videos; photographs; X-ray film; slides; biological materials; computer files and printouts; equipment use logs; laboratory procurement records; animal facility records; human and animal subject protocols; consent forms; clinical records directly related to research; and research subject files.
- Respondent refers to the individual(s) against whom an allegation of research misconduct is directed or the individual(s) whose actions are the subject of an inquiry or investigation.
- Retaliation refers to any action that adversely affects the employment or other institutional status of a complainant or other individual and which occurs as a result of the individual’s good faith allegation of research misconduct or participation in a research misconduct proceeding.
- Sequestration refers to the collection and segregation of research records, equipment, and other tangible or intangible information for the specific purpose of assessing allegations as part of the research misconduct investigative process. ORI has the authority and responsibility for sequestration of research records relative to research misconduct allegations at Northwestern University. All appropriate rights are accorded to the respondent in the act of sequestering research records, as outlined in the *Roles and Responsibilities of the Respondent* section of this policy.
- Sponsored Programs refers to research, training, and instructional projects involving funds, materials, gifts, or other compensation from external governmental or non-governmental organizations under agreements with Northwestern University.

1.4 Roles and Responsibilities

Provost

As appropriate, the Provost is involved in consultations with the Vice President for Research (VPR), the Director of the Office for Research Integrity (Director ORI), and the relevant dean(s) in receiving and assessing allegations of research misconduct and receiving the results of research misconduct investigations. In accordance with established Northwestern University procedures, the Provost may determine and invoke sanctions or disciplinary actions imposed as a result of the investigation committee's findings.

Vice President for Research (VPR)

The VPR ensures the implementation of this policy and oversees the implementing procedures associated with this policy. As appropriate, the VPR consults with the Provost, the Associate Vice President for Research (AVPR), the Director ORI, and the relevant dean(s) when receiving and assessing allegations of research misconduct. The VPR ensures that appropriate review procedures are promptly implemented by the Director ORI when allegations of research misconduct are reported. The VPR receives the final reports of the inquiry and investigation committees and any written comments provided by the respondent. The VPR provides recommendations to the Provost relative to the results of research misconduct investigations.

Deans

The deans ensure implementation of this policy in their respective Schools. The deans report knowledge of allegations of research misconduct to the Provost, the VPR and/or the Director ORI. The deans ensure cooperation of respondents and other individuals in their respective Schools in instances of allegations of research misconduct, including, but not limited to, the sequestration of research records and/or other relevant information and documentation relative to the allegations of research misconduct.

Director of the Office for Research Integrity (Director ORI)

The Director ORI serves as the Research Integrity Officer (RIO), and has primary responsibility for overseeing this policy and the implementing procedures associated with this policy. The Director ORI is appointed by and reports directly to the Associate Vice President for Research (AVPR). In consultation with the Provost, the VPR, the AVPR and relevant dean(s), the Director ORI assesses allegations of research misconduct, determining when such allegations warrant inquiries, and oversees the inquiry and investigation processes. The Director ORI oversees the activities of the inquiry and investigation committees, and institutional personnel involved in proceedings governed by this policy, ensuring compliance with this policy and its implementing procedures and with applicable standards imposed by government or external funding sources. In some cases, an outside consultant or investigator may be retained to assist ORI at the assessment, inquiry and/or investigation phases. If, during the course of research misconduct proceedings, a respondent admits guilt or a complainant refutes allegations, the Director ORI ensures the matter is handled and closed with appropriate due diligence and, as required, notifies federal oversight agencies. The Director ORI ensures, when required, that proper and timely reporting to relevant external agencies is made for any investigation of substantial research misconduct. The Director ORI appropriately maintains files of all relevant documents and ensures the confidentiality and security of the files, including sequestered records and documentation of research misconduct proceedings. When it is determined that present or former Northwestern University research personnel are the subject of or involved with complaints or investigations that involve outside institutions, the Director ORI coordinates with outside institutional officials as necessary and appropriate. The

Office for Research Integrity (ORI)

ORI serves as Northwestern University's independent and objective agent in research misconduct proceedings. The ORI staff, under direction of the Director ORI, support and facilitate the inquiry and

investigation processes. ORI has an obligation to maintain strict confidentiality relative to any research misconduct allegations and proceedings. ORI has the authority to appropriately sequester research records and/or other relevant information and documentation relative to the allegations of research misconduct. ORI formalizes allegations of research misconduct with the complainant, obtains, disseminates, and summarizes information relative to the allegations of research misconduct and secures and stores relevant information for the inquiry and investigation committees. ORI engages committee members and facilitates committee meetings, as necessary, to appropriately address allegations of research misconduct. ORI serves as the liaison, as appropriate and necessary, among the committee members, the complainant, and the respondent. ORI is responsible for educating complainants, respondents, and committee members about Northwestern University's process for research misconduct proceedings. ORI is also responsible for providing ongoing support and guidance to the committee members throughout the research misconduct proceedings.

Complainant

The complainant is responsible for making allegations in good faith, maintaining confidentiality, and cooperating with an inquiry and investigation. The complainant has the opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry and investigation committees. The complainant has the opportunity, if requested by an inquiry committee, to appear before the inquiry committee. The complainant will be given the opportunity to be interviewed by and present evidence to the investigation committee. If the Director ORI or committees determine that the complainant may be able to provide pertinent information or clarification to any portion of the committees' draft reports, these portions may be given to the complainant for comment. The complainant will be informed of the results of the inquiry and investigation.

Respondent

The respondent is the individual against whom allegations of research misconduct have been made. The respondent is responsible for maintaining confidentiality and cooperating with an inquiry and investigation. The respondent is informed in writing of the allegations when an inquiry and investigation is initiated and notified in writing of the final determinations and resulting actions. The respondent is responsible for cooperating with all elements of an inquiry and investigation, including sequestration of research records relevant to the allegations. Research records are sequestered in a manner which causes minimal disruption to the respondent's research. ORI will provide the respondent with an inventory of items sequestered and will generally provide copies of most sequestered items within two or three business days after sequestration, although specialty copies such as gels and films may require a longer period of time to duplicate. The respondent has the opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry and investigation committees. The respondent has the opportunity, if requested by an inquiry committee, to be interviewed by and present evidence to the inquiry committee. The respondent will be given the opportunity to be interviewed by and present evidence to the investigation committee. The respondent will be given the opportunity to review and comment upon the draft inquiry and investigation committee reports. If the respondent is not found to have committed research misconduct, he or she may request to receive reasonable and practical assistance from Northwestern University in restoring his or her reputation.

Inquiry Committee

The inquiry committee is responsible for conducting an initial review of the available evidence to determine whether or not to conduct an investigation. An inquiry does not require a full review of all the evidence related to the allegations. The inquiry committee determines whether the allegations of research misconduct appear to be well-founded, the seriousness of the alleged research misconduct, and the scope of the alleged incident. The inquiry committee may also identify, in the course of its duties, issues that would justify broadening the scope beyond the initial allegations, and may recommend that Northwestern University examine these issues. If the inquiry committee expands the scope of the research misconduct process beyond the initial allegations, ORI will notify the respondent in writing and

the respondent will be given an opportunity to respond to the additional issues. It is not the responsibility of the inquiry committee to make a final determination based on the merits of the allegations. The inquiry committee prepares a final report that meets the requirements as outlined in the implementing procedures of the policy, including recommending whether each allegation warrants an investigation and the basis for its recommendations.

Investigation Committee

The investigation committee is responsible for conducting a thorough examination of all facts and evidence relevant to the allegations, including interviewing the respondent, complainant, and others as necessary and appropriate, to determine based on a preponderance of evidence whether research misconduct has occurred and, if so, to determine the responsible person(s) and the nature and seriousness of the research misconduct. The investigation committee may also identify, in the course of its duties, if there are issues that would justify broadening the scope beyond the initial allegations, and may recommend that Northwestern University examine these issues. If the investigation committee expands the scope of the research misconduct process beyond the initial allegations, ORI will notify the respondent in writing and the respondent will be given an opportunity to respond to the additional issues. The investigation committee prepares a final report that meets the requirements as outlined in the implementing procedures of this policy, including a finding for each allegation of whether research misconduct occurred, the nature and seriousness of the misconduct, and the responsible individual(s).

Inquiry/Investigation Committee Chair

The committee chair is selected from among the committee members, by the committee, and serves as the individual who takes the lead in drafting the committee report based on the committee's findings. Working with ORI, the committee chair handles the compilation of comments from the other committee members into the final committee report and ensures the report is distributed to the committee members for final signature. The elements of the committee report must be in accordance with the required elements outlined in the implementing procedures of this policy. The committee chair ensures that the respondent is afforded the opportunity to comment, that the respondent's comments are considered by the committee, and that the respondent's comments are reflected in and/or attached to the final committee report.

1.5 General Principles

Responsibility to Report Research Misconduct

All employees or individuals associated with Northwestern University should report observed, suspected, or apparent research misconduct in research first to his or her department chair or dean, and through such consultation determine whether the matter should be pursued. Reports of suspected research misconduct can also be made directly to the Director ORI, AVPR, VPR, or Provost. If reports of suspected research misconduct are made to the deans, the deans communicate such reports to the Director ORI, the AVPR, the VPR, or the Provost.

If an individual is unsure whether a suspected incident falls within the definition of research misconduct, he or she may contact the Director ORI to discuss the suspected research misconduct informally. If the circumstances described by the individual do not meet the definition of research misconduct, the Director ORI may refer the individual or allegation to other offices or officials with responsibility for resolving the problem as necessary and appropriate. Northwestern University will protect those individuals who provide information in good faith about questionable conduct against reprisals.

Responsibility of Institution to Respond to Credible Reports of Allegations of Research Misconduct

Because Northwestern University values the credibility of our research activities and the integrity of our community above all, allegations of research misconduct are evaluated to determine whether there is

specific and credible information on which to act. Just as Northwestern University protects complainants against retaliation, Northwestern University is equally concerned about malicious or frivolous allegations made against our research community. Northwestern University performs a careful assessment of all allegations brought to the attention of institutional officials.

The Director ORI, AVPR, VPR, and the Provost shall consider and act upon any specific and credible information which comes to his or her attention indicating that research misconduct may have occurred.

The Director ORI and other institutional officials assigned responsibility for handling allegations of research misconduct ensure that:

- The allegation assessment, inquiry, and investigation are completed in a timely, objective, thorough, and competent manner; and
- Reasonable precautions are taken to avoid bias and conflict of interest on the part of those involved in conducting the inquiry and investigation.

At any time during the assessment period or research misconduct proceedings, Northwestern University will notify the appropriate funding and oversight agency(ies) if:

- Public health or safety is at risk;
- Agency resources or interests are threatened;
- Research activities should be suspended;
- There is reasonable indication of possible violations of civil or criminal law;
- Federal action is required to protect the interests of those involved in the investigation; or if
- The research community or public should be informed.

Cooperation with Inquiries and Investigations

Individuals covered under this policy and its implementing procedures must cooperate with the Director ORI and other institutional officials in the review of allegations and the conduct of inquiries and investigations. Employees have an obligation to provide relevant information to the Director ORI or other institutional officials on research misconduct allegations. The Director ORI or other institutional officials may determine it necessary to sequester original research records and materials relevant to the allegation.

Legal Counsel

Neither Northwestern University nor the respondent may have legal counsel present at the meetings of the inquiry and investigation committees, except at the express invitation of the committees. Should legal counsel be invited, the invitation will be extended to both parties. When invited, legal counsel may observe but shall not participate in the proceedings. With the prior approval of the committees, the respondent may be accompanied by a non-attorney colleague at meetings of the committees. When invited, the non-attorney colleague may observe but shall not participate in the proceedings.

Requirements for Findings of Research Misconduct

A finding of research misconduct requires that:

- There be a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community; and
- The research misconduct be committed intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly; and
- The allegation be proven by a preponderance of evidence.

Protection of Complainant and Others

The Director ORI monitors the treatment of individuals who bring allegations of research misconduct and those who cooperate with inquiries or investigations. Northwestern University ensures that these

individuals are not retaliated against in employment or other status at the institution and the Director ORI reviews instances of alleged retaliation for appropriate action. Individuals should immediately report any alleged or apparent retaliation to the Director ORI. Northwestern University also, to the maximum extent possible, protects the privacy of those who report research misconduct in good faith. If the complainant requests anonymity, Northwestern University makes reasonable efforts to honor the request during the allegation assessment or inquiry, consistent with a thorough, competent, objective, and fair research misconduct proceeding, and as allowed by law. It is important to recognize, however, that because of the standards of due process and Northwestern University's own policies and procedures, there may be situations that cannot proceed under conditions of anonymity. Under federal regulations and its own good business practices, Northwestern University undertakes diligent efforts to protect the positions and reputations of those individuals who make allegations in good faith.

Protection of Respondent

Inquiries and investigations are conducted in a manner that ensures fair treatment to the respondent and confidentiality to the extent possible without compromising public health and safety or thoroughly carrying out the needs of an inquiry and/or investigation. Inquiries and investigations are handled promptly and expeditiously with full attention given to the rights of all individuals involved.

Confidentiality

Institutional activities engaged pursuant to this policy are conducted in such a way as to protect the privacy and confidentiality of complainants and respondents to the extent possible consistent with a thorough, competent, objective, and fair research misconduct proceeding, and as allowed by law. The applicable laws and regulations may require the institution to disclose the identity of respondents and complainants to federal oversight agencies pursuant to the agency's review of institutional research misconduct proceedings.

Restoration of Reputations

Northwestern University makes diligent efforts, as appropriate, to restore the institutional reputations of individuals alleged to have engaged in research misconduct when such allegations are not sustained.

Referrals

If Northwestern University's review of the allegations identifies misconduct other than research misconduct, the RIO refers these matters to the proper institutional or federal office for action.

References

Northwestern University would like to acknowledge that this policy was modeled on and referenced content from the federal Office for Research Integrity's *Sample Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct*, and institutional policies and procedures at the University of Pennsylvania and Indiana University.

Attachment

[Procedures for Reviewing Alleged Research Misconduct](#)

Related Information

[Northwestern University Policy on Faculty Conflict of Commitment and Conflict of Interest](#)

[Northwestern University Policy on Non-Retaliation](#)

[Northwestern University Policy on Research Data: Ownership, Retention and Access](#)

[U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Research Integrity](#)

[National Science Foundation Office of Inspector General](#)

History/Revision Dates

Origination Date: September 1, 1989

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