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**Research Concerns: When to ask for help?**

Imagine a working environment that is potentially unstable by design: a place that is populated by highly intelligent, career-oriented, and driven individuals, but one that experiences constant turnover. Add to that significant diversity in cultures, gender, and age. Include pressures to publish, pressures to secure funding or promotion and fierce competition. Try to visualize an environment where many who enter know that they only have a few years to advance their career and, therefore, will need to live a life of superlatives: work the hardest and sleep the least, all to get the best recommendation letter to secure the best job opportunity. This embodies the setting in many research labs.

Research environments are highly complex by nature due to the constant shift in internal dynamics and, unsurprisingly, issues can arise among lab

members. How one understands, interprets, and reacts to these issues can vary based on one's prior experiences, values, and emotions. What can we learn when we hear about compliance issues in a research lab? How do we determine what is fact and what is not?

One recent story in the news reflects an extreme example of how complicated things can get. The case involves Gustavo German, a graduate student at Harvard University, who alleged his supervisor and principal investigator (PI), Professor Lee Rubin, committed research misconduct. Subsequently, Professor Rubin alleged that Mr. German had mental health issues and sought his involuntary hospitalization. German filed a harassment claim against Rubin in the local district court and won, although since then, a number of appeals have been filed on both sides and several revisions to the judgment have been made. [1,4,5] Currently, German is finishing his Ph.D. work in the Rubin lab and laments a lack of resources, while Rubin claims the court decision has made it difficult for him to supervise the research of his students and provide oversight of his lab. [1,4,5] Meanwhile, Harvard declined to pursue the research misconduct allegations made against Rubin, and a number of collaborators and former lab members wrote a letter which was published in *Science* in support of Rubin. [6]

Many potential questions come to mind as we try to unpack what happened in this lab, questions we will likely never have answers to.

- Did the student have mental health issues that needed to be addressed or was the PI retaliating against the student for raising research misconduct concerns?
- Did the student bring the allegations forward in good faith or did he falsely accuse his PI with malicious intent?
- Did the university decline to pursue the allegations because there wasn't enough specific and credible evidence?
- What was lab environment or culture that may have contributed to this situation?

## QUOTE CORNER

"The world is in greater peril from those who tolerate or encourage evil than from those who actually commit it"

-Albert Einstein-

While we don't know everything that happened and we can assume that there is much more to this situation than what we read in the court documents and articles, what can we learn? Even if we disagree about what happened and why, this story provides opportunities to remind ourselves about what we can do when research compliance concerns arise.

### Know Your Resources

If you have research compliance questions or concerns, the [Office for Research Integrity](#) can help you understand avenues for raising concerns, as well as the University's responsibility to respond to potential issues. ORI can also direct you to other appropriate offices to discuss your concerns, if necessary. If you are a staff member, including post doctoral trainees, remember [Human Resources](#) can help you understand your rights as an employee and mitigate personnel or management issues, including harassment and retaliation. Postdocs can also contact the [Office of Postdoctoral Affairs](#). Graduate students, keep in mind that [The Graduate School](#) or the director of your graduate program can help you navigate issues that arise.

If you believe someone is retaliating against you because you have raised good faith compliance concerns, remember that the University has a [non-retaliation policy](#). This policy outlines actions that should be reported, as well as the method for reporting the concerns. The policy states that any faculty or staff member will be protected from retaliation, threats of retaliation or discrimination, independently of the final truthfulness of the allegations, if the concerns are brought in good faith.

### Speak Up But Maintain Confidentiality

Regardless of how things started to go awry in the Harvard lab, it appears to have escalated to a point that resulted in a graduate student being involuntarily hospitalized and legal proceedings for a PI as well as Harvard. Was there a point earlier in time that different steps could have been taken to avoid this outcome? Could something have been done to salvage the relationships as well as protect the student and PI at the same time? Problems are best solved if they can be addressed before they get out of hand. Speaking up early can often prevent unnecessary escalation. Remember that not speaking up when faced with a compliance concern is, in fact, being complicit. Problems cannot be addressed if they're never brought forward. However, if you do speak up don't be surprised if you're instructed to keep the matter confidential. While this might seem counter-intuitive, it is important to understand how confidentiality is extremely important in these matters. Confidentiality is required to protect everyone involved, both the person coming forward with concerns as well as the person being accused. Potential research misconduct allegations are serious, and if proven true, life changing for the accused and their collaborators. Even rumors of such allegations can have devastating effects, for both the accused and, potentially, for the accuser. For this reason among others, it is mandated by federal and institutional policy to keep any matter related to potential research misconduct highly confidential.

Often there are lessons to learn from potential noncompliance, be it a published story about Harvard, or a questionable situation in your own department. Regardless of the issues, it is important to remember that there are avenues and contacts at the University who can help navigate the process and address your concerns.

### References:

1. <http://www.sciencemag.org/sites/default/files/documents/Findings%20of%20fact.pdf>
2. <http://www.researchintegrity.northwestern.edu/reporting-research-compliance-concerns/>
3. <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/civility-and-campus-safety/non-retaliation.html>
4. <http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/01/how-dispute-harvard-led-grad-student-s-forced-mental-exam-and-extraordinary-restraining>
5. <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/1/23/german-rubin-lab-lawsuit/>
6. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/355/6327/806.1>

This infographic has been created by the Health and Human Services' [Office of Research Integrity, Division of Education and Integrity](#).

Northwestern University's [Office for Research Integrity](#) handles these matters. Don't hesitate to contact us for any research-related concerns! (nu-ori@northwestern.edu)

**YOU SUSPECT RESEARCH MISCONDUCT NOW WHAT?**

**IF YOU ARE SUSPICIOUS**

- AVOID CONFRONTATION**  
Direct confrontation may lead to retaliation and/or tampering with evidence.
- KEEP NOTES**  
Document details and save communications related to the misconduct. This will help you recall important information needed by the institution.
- EDUCATE YOURSELF**  
Read your institution's research misconduct policy or contact the U.S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI) with questions.
- SEEK SUPPORT**  
You may want to get advice from someone you trust to help you consider all options.
- CONSULT YOUR RESEARCH INTEGRITY OFFICER (RIO)**  
RIOs can help you better understand the situation. You can speak in hypotheticals as you consider making an official allegation.

**THINGS TO CONSIDER**

**REPORTING MISCONDUCT IS DIFFICULT...BUT IT CAN BE WORTH IT.**

**PEOPLE OFTEN WORRY ABOUT:**

- ✦ The reputation and career of the accused
- ✦ How others in the lab will be affected
- ✦ Implications for their own career
- ✦ Possible retaliation

**REPORTING MISCONDUCT HELPS:**

- ✦ Prevent false and misleading information from entering the research record
- ✦ Correct the scientific literature
- ✦ Ensure funding is awarded to responsible research
- ✦ Protect the public's trust in science

**WHEN YOU REPORT**

**BE SPECIFIC**  
Provide the RIO with specific examples of suspected misconduct and where it occurred (e.g. manuscripts, presentations, posters, grant applications, etc.).

**BE AVAILABLE**  
The RIO may require your help identifying and examining evidence, explaining how the research was falsified, fabricated, or plagiarized, and cooperating as a witness.

**BE PREPARED FOR SILENCE**  
Institutional policies may limit your access to confidential information about research misconduct proceedings.

**BE PATIENT**  
Research misconduct proceedings take considerable effort and time to complete.

**MAKE AN INFORMED DECISION**  
If you want to talk anonymously or report misconduct contact ORI at 240-453-8800 or askORI@hhs.gov.

ori.hhs.gov @HHS\_ORI #ORIedu



## Did You Know?

### NSF Proposal & Award Newsletter

The Policy Office in the Division of Institution & Award Support at the National Science Foundation has recently announced the release of a new quarterly publication. The scope of this newsletter is to clarify and provide information about revisions to policies and procedures that affect NSF awards: their preparation, submission, and management. The first issue of the [NSF Proposal & Award Policy Newsletter](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/newsletter.jsp) (<https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/newsletter.jsp>) is available online.

Fostering Integrity in Research - The National Academies Press  
<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/21896/>

"Fostering Integrity in Research is a new report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. It examines challenges to scientific integrity facing the research enterprise and recommends steps that individual scientists, research sponsors, research institutions, journal publishers, and professional societies should take to meet these challenges and better protect integrity in research."

Report Release: April 11, 2017  
(Washington, DC)

## Introducing Samantha Huggis

1. What is your title at Northwestern?  
Administrative Assistant III

2. What does that mean?  
I assist the Office for Research Integrity staff and coordinate the day to day functions of the office.

3. What is one thing you want people to know about what you do here?  
I enjoy working with the ladies of ORI, the work they do is vital to the University. My goal is that my assistance with that work makes their job that much easier.

4. How long have you been at Northwestern?  
8 months

5. What did you do before you came to Northwestern?  
I worked in catering for The Chicago Club.

6. Where is your home town?  
Chicago



7. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?  
Strawberry with chocolate sauce

8. What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?  
Watch football with my husband

9. What Chicago event are you most looking forward to experiencing?  
Chi-Town Rising NYE Celebration

## Research Administration Training Seminar

This four-session seminar is geared toward research administrators, staff involved in research administration, and anyone who wants to learn about Northwestern's research administration process, policies, and procedures.

The seminar serves as an introduction to Northwestern's research enterprise and the extensive systems involved.

It is a great networking and educational opportunity for staff new to research or experienced staff who would like a refresher in certain areas. Representatives from offices throughout Northwestern will be on hand to present and answer questions.

The next seminar began April 11th, and will run April 13th, 18th and 20th on the Evanston campus from 9:00am-12:30pm, in Chambers, Ruan Conference Center.

Registration is still open and can now be completed through Northwestern University's new training management system, MyHR Learn. Simply [log-in](#) using your NetID and password, then use the

search tool in the top right-hand corner to find the Research Administration Training Seminar class. When you select "enroll," you will be registered for all four days of the seminar. If you experience difficulties registering or have any questions, please email [Office for Research Integrity](#) for support.



# The March for Science

All around the world, including in Chicago, The March for Science will take place on April 22, 2017.

The rally will begin at 10 am and the march at 11am on Columbus Drive.

The March for Science, as the name indicates, is a march of people in support of science. It is not just for scientists, it is about *all* people coming together to express how important science is!

*'The March for Science champions robustly funded and publicly communicated science as a pillar of human freedom and prosperity. We unite as a diverse, nonpartisan group to call for science that upholds the common good and for political leaders and policy makers to enact evidence based policies in the public interest.'*

[\*\[The March for Science mission statement\]\*](#)

Philip Hockberger, Ph.D., Assistant Vice President for Research, is part of the local planning committee and the liaison for Northwestern University, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Chicago. We spoke with him about his commitment to the event, which was sparked by a link on Facebook. AVP Hockberger decided to get involved after speaking with one of the organizing members. The event, he explained, is nonpartisan and not politicized. AVP Hockberger reaffirmed that The March is simply meant to “celebrate science and acknowledge the important role it plays in the society, from healthcare, to energy, electronic and the environment.”

Jon Weiss, M.S. and M.Arch., a laboratory planner and project manager at Northwestern, also decided to get involved and help organize logistics for The March. Mr. Weiss suggests that anyone who is interested should mark their calendars and be ready to join The March. He added that in addition to the actual march, there will be many opportunities to volunteer and help for anyone who is interested.

## Mark your calendars, join The March, and stand up for science!

Do you want to Volunteer? The March for Science is looking for at least 900 volunteer “Marshals,” i.e. people in charge of directing attendees, answering questions, and ensuring a smooth march for the anticipated over 45,000 marchers! You will only need to attend one of the mandatory trainings on April 17th or 19th. RSVP at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/marshal-training-march-for-science-chicago-tickets-33635407409?aff=emails>

For more information <http://sciencemarchchicago.org/>

Check out this video made by the Field Museum in support of The March!  
<https://youtu.be/LB6krdtWa7s>



EthicsPoint is a third party vendor that allows you to confidentially raise ethical concerns, ask questions, and/or report activities that may involve misconduct or violations of Northwestern University policy.

[For more information visit the website here.](#)

## ORI MISSION

Identifying compliance risks in our research practices and communicating those risks to the research community;

Partnering with the research community in innovative and effective ways to minimize and manage research risks;

Educating the research community with respect to appropriate business practices related to the conduct of research at Northwestern University; and

Monitoring and correcting non-compliance in accordance with University and federal guidelines.

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