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## A Slippery Slope With Serious Implications

Unethical behavior in the workplace is an unfortunate phenomena that manifests in a number of ways, ranging from seemingly harmless acts of taking home office supplies to shocking instances of research misconduct. One poignant question that many managers and institutional officials seek to understand is not only the origins of such behavior, but perhaps more importantly, how to prevent extreme instances.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* entitled “The Slippery Slope: How Small Ethical Transgressions Pave the Way for Larger Future Transgressions,” sought to answer such a question by arguing “that committing small indiscretions over time may gradually lead people to commit larger unethical acts that they otherwise would have judged to be impermissible.”<sup>1</sup> The study is one of the first to lend empirical evidence supporting the slippery slope effect and an individual’s susceptibility to rises in unethical behaviors over time. Notably, results of the study suggest that small indiscretions may develop into major abuses if not properly addressed.

There are many well known cases of research misconduct involving situations where the researcher’s misdeeds likely started small, such as lying on a resume or making small changes to cover up mistakes, but snowballed into unfathomable events. In hindsight, the slippery slope progression may be at play, yet it can often be difficult to immediately identify unethical behaviors, especially among colleagues whom a level of trust is naturally extended. One recent case involving a study coordinator who was given a 3-year prison sentence and permanently debarred by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) perhaps shines light on this phenomena. Though there is no way to know when his transgressions first began, for instance, if he ever took home office supplies or lied on his time sheet without repercussions, one can’t help but look at his egregious criminal acts and wonder when/how things spiraled out of control and what could have been done to prevent it.

As study coordinator for a clinical trial under FDA’s authority, Wesley A. McQuerry was responsible for administering the clinical trial, which included maintaining participant files, collecting participant data, dispersing gift checks to participants, and communicating clinical trial results to the organization administering the clinical trial on behalf of the pharmaceutical company, results which he knew would be provided to both the pharmaceutical company sponsor and the FDA.<sup>2</sup> McQuerry, who falsified his resume to obtain the study coordinator position, took advantage of his role and the lack of oversight by his principal investigator, and created fifteen to twenty fictional participants in the study. McQuerry used his own blood, stool and EKG results to create the participants’ files, falsifying signatures on participants’ consent forms and physicians’ medical examinations, and lying about participant study visits. He then went on to deposit gift checks provided by the pharmaceutical company for participants’ participation into his personal bank account and also used the gift checks to make several retail purchases, resulting in an approximate loss of \$200,098 to the pharmaceutical company sponsor.

McQuerry’s fraudulent behavior caused him to be convicted on February 10, 2015 under 18 U.S. Code 1001(a)(1) for knowingly and willfully falsifying a material fact while under the jurisdiction/authority of the FDA. This federal felony conviction for conduct related to the regulation of a drug under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act required the FDA to debar McQuerry from providing services to anyone who has an approved or pending drug application. McQuerry, who failed to respond to the FDA’s proposal for debarment, was permanently debarred effective March 18, 2016.<sup>2</sup>

[continued page 4...](#)

# 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 will take place July 11th, 13th, 18th, and 20th on the Chicago campus from 9:00am-12:30pm, McGaw, Daniel Hale Williams Auditorium.

Registration can now be completed through Northwestern University's new training management system, Learn@Northwestern. 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 [bethirwin@northwestern.edu](mailto:bethirwin@northwestern.edu) for support.

## QUOTE CORNER

"Individually, we are one drop. Together we are an ocean. "

-Ryunosuke Satoro

## Enhancing Collaborative Research Opportunities

What do interdisciplinary research and innovative support for principal investigators, funding opportunities, and large proposals all have in common? Why, research development, of course! Specifically, the Northwestern Office of Research Development (ORD) which is dedicated to helping scientists advance research by providing resources and identifying and securing funding opportunities. Though the office has been active in the community for a number of years, the recent addition of a new director and assistant director promises to enhance ORD's mission and continued engagement in new and exciting ways.

"The primary goal of ORD is to support faculty in advancing their research and to enhance interdisciplinary networking across both campuses," explains ORD Director Nicole Moore. "I think it's important that everyone has a home, their core science in which they are an expert, but there are significant benefits to collaborative research. If you get out of your silo and are exposed to different theories, different instrumentation or techniques, all of these differences can be used to gain a new perspective or solutions to existing challenges in your own field."

ORD highlights areas of funding that many faculty just aren't aware exist, for instance, the Department of Defense which is the 2nd largest provider of funding for some areas of biomedical research. Often investigators do not look for funding options outside of the National Institutes of Health or attempt to diversify their funding portfolio. ORD assists faculty in identifying new funding opportunities on a weekly basis by raising awareness when new alerts are sent out from agencies or from Northwestern's Office for Government Relations. ORD frequently conducts the initial work of determining eligibility and uniquely pairs relevant opportunities to a faculty member's specialty and focus. In times when a funding opportunity has a limited submission, which means that the sponsor limits the number applicants from a single institution, ORD coordinates an internal application process that involves a cross-campus faculty committee which reviews applications prior to submission.

In addition to notifying the research community about new funding opportunities, ORD also prides itself on helping to develop large interdisciplinary proposals at all stages of the proposal process. As Moore describes, "we can help with the initial team forming and concept development stage, support project management of the proposal process, or help with the pre-submission review process by creating what we call a 'red team' review." This unique team involves experts in the field, both within and outside Northwestern, who will review the proposal for content, scientific merit, and responsiveness to the funding opportunity announcement evaluation criteria. For single investigator proposal development, ORD provides 1:1 consultations with faculty members and routinely offers workshops for faculty to learn more about funding success stories and/or tips for working with specific funding mechanisms or federal agencies. ORD also incentivizes new collaborations by managing the NU-Interdisciplinary 1-2-3 Seed Funding Program. This program jointly supported by the Office for Research and the schools provides seed-funding, offering as much as \$120,000 a year, to cultivate investigator-initiated 'big ideas' and cross-school collaborations. Applications for the [I3 Seed Funding Program](#) are due June 10, 2016.

Though ORD can be seen as primarily a resource for faculty, it also recognizes the significant impact that research administrators have in faculty research, especially in regards to large proposal development or supporting the limited submission process. Collaboration and open communication among all players in the research development process is greatly valued and critical to success.

Whether it is to review new funding opportunities, discover ways to network with other like-minded researchers, or receive support with developing a large interdisciplinary proposal, ORD is here to help! Visit the new and improved [website](#) or call 847-467-7273 to learn more.



## Did You Know?

The Federal Office of Research Integrity publishes a newsletter which is a great resource for promoting integrity in PHS supported research. Check out the most recent online publication [here!](#)

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The Accounting Services for Research and Sponsored Programs (ASRSP) website has a number of training opportunities for administrators who handle sponsored projects. Visit the [website](#) to access online mini courses introducing salary cost transfers, effort reporting, and travel expenses.

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Northwestern University's Women's Health Research Institute has created many helpful resources to assist with the implementation of the new NIH policy identifying sex as a basic biological variable that must be accounted for in NIH-funded preclinical research. Check out the Institute's [website](#) to access resources designed to support investigators as they engage in sex specific research.

## Introducing Nicole Moore

1. What is your title at Northwestern?  
Director, Office of Research Development

2. What does that mean?

It means that I oversee ORD initiatives and lead program development. I help to identify groups of people that align with federal funding opportunities and help to build teams across the University. I also do a lot of faculty consultations, especially with new faculty that join Northwestern, helping them build a strategy for pursuing funding and identifying collaborators and mentors for research.

3. What is one thing you want people to know about what you do here?

I am trying to align research at Northwestern with where the funding landscape is. Ideally, we try to stay ahead of funding opportunities so that we can anticipate them and build enthusiasm and work-groups around them.

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

5. What did you do before you came to Northwestern?

I was a Program Director at the National Cancer Institute (NCI), part of the National Institutes of Health. In that role I managed a portfolio of grants for



the NCI that looked at how engineering, physics, or mathematics can help solve problems in cancer research. In that capacity I helped investigators obtain funding, create new programs, and led a number of outreach initiatives to highlight new topics/areas of interest.

6. Where is your home town?  
Milwaukee, WI

7. What is your favorite ice cream flavor?  
I'm torn between chocolate or mint-chocolate chip.

8. What is your favorite thing to do outside of work?

Spending time with family going to museums or the beach

9. What Chicago event are you most looking forward to experiencing?

I'm looking forward to the Northwestern Football season.

## Northwestern Takes the Lead at National Research Integrity Conference

Vice President for Research Joseph (Jay) T. Walsh and Office for Research Integrity Director Luran Qualkenbush were invited to speak together at a national meeting, "Promoting the Responsible Conduct of Research for College and University Leaders," in Los Angeles in April 2016. The inaugural conference was co-hosted by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Research Integrity (HHS ORI) & Loyola Marymount University and initiated the formal discussion on the role of university leaders in promoting research integrity. This was the first forum to bring together institutional leaders and research integrity officers to tackle this important topic. Other presenters included representatives from the National Science Foundation Office of Inspector General, the HHS ORI, the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW), the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), as well as peer institutions including The Ohio State University.

VPR Walsh and Qualkenbush's presentation, "The Role of Senior Institutional Leaders in Promoting Responsible Research," helped set the tone for the meeting and launched the dialogue among key university stakeholders on the importance of strong, supportive leadership in creating an environment that advances responsible research. They stressed the significance of committing time and resources to empower the various compliance processes at a university, as well as taking steps to protect all involved parties. They discussed how Northwestern handles research misconduct cases, other research compliance issues, and also promotes research integrity. Highlighting proactive measures like the [Research Roles and Responsibilities](#) tool and the partnership between Walsh and Qualkenbush, they shared their perspectives on balancing compliance and promoting integrity. Meeting leaders plan to continue this dialogue and develop guidelines for university leaders relative to responsible research and Northwestern hopes to continue to play a prominent role. Walsh and Qualkenbush's participation in this critical dialogue resulted in advantageous exchanges with our federal oversight partners and peers and brought Northwestern's commitment to responsible research into the national spotlight.



McQuerry's defense for his recent misdeeds was that he was under great stress and lacking appropriate supervision, and subsequently the FDA has taken action against the principal investigator who supervised McQuerry, though it has not yet released this information.<sup>3</sup> In retrospect, it appears that McQuerry also had a history of fraudulent behavior for embezzling more than \$364,000 from DePaul University when he worked in the alumni relations department from 1999-2001, a fact that he lied about on his resume and which could have easily been identified by background screening at the time of his hiring.

One can hardly imagine that McQuerry applied for the coordinator position with the intent to use his own biological samples to falsify the research findings in order to illegally profit. This raises the question, if he initially fell subject to the slippery slope phenomena, what led him to commit such egregious acts that arguably he otherwise may have been reluctant to commit? According to the study referenced above, "given that past behavior serves as a guide for future ethical choices, moral disengagement may allow one who has committed small indiscretions to justify future unethical acts."<sup>1</sup> Though he was caught embezzling funds at DePaul years earlier, it's conceivable the relative ease at which he was able to later attain respectable employment and subsequent lack of oversight enabled his continued moral disengagement.

The study also demonstrated that such behavior occurs gradually, rather than abruptly, which gives hope to the prospect of creating work environments that can minimize, if not stop, the escalation of unethical behaviors. "Managers may want to consider whether their organization possesses a strong ethical culture in which misconduct is clearly defined and even small deviations are quickly addressed."<sup>1</sup> To assist the research community in adhering to the highest ethical standards, Northwestern has a number of [research-related policies and procedures](#) that all members of the research enterprise are expected to comply with. However, the mere existence of such policies and procedures is insufficient to ward against the slippery slope phenomena and prevent unethical behavior in the workplace. Incorporating these policies/procedures when setting clear expectations for departmental and research operations, or when onboarding new faculty/staff members, along with continued vigilant oversight, is the key to creating a compliant workplace.

Staff who have any questions or have research compliance concerns are encouraged to contact the Office for Research Integrity at [nu-ori@northwestern.edu](mailto:nu-ori@northwestern.edu) or 312-503-0054. Concerns can also be reported anonymously through Ethics Point, a third party vendor, either online or at 866-294-3545.

1-Welsh, D.T., Ordóñez, L.D., Snyder, D.G., Christian, M.S. (2015). The slippery slope: How small ethical transgressions pave the way for larger future transgressions. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100(1), 114-127.

2-81.FR.14862

3-Dudek, M. (2015, February 10). Man gets 3-year prison sentence for fake drug study. *Chicago Sun Times*. Retrieved from <http://chicago.suntimes.com>



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.