ASK THE SONIC COACH (Q&A)
Career Advice for Aspiring Health Researchers
April 2008

From a Student Concerned About Research Ethics: What is “scientific misconduct”? 

SONIC Coach: According to the National Academies of Science, “Misconduct in science is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reporting research. Misconduct in science does not include errors of judgment; errors in the recording, selection, or analysis of data; differences in opinions involving the interpretation of data; or misconduct unrelated to the research process” <http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=1864&page=5>. The important distinction here is intent. Scientists do not make errors deliberately; nor do they come to conclusions that are inconsistent with the data. If they do, then their behaviour constitutes misconduct, regardless of their reasons. Errors result from honest mistakes; misconduct is intentional.

From a Graduating High School Student: What is “academic integrity”? 

SONIC Coach: As with scientific integrity, academic integrity has to do with how teachers and learners conduct themselves. “Without academic integrity,” states UC Davis on their website, “there can be no trust or reliance on the effectiveness, accuracy, or value of a University’s teaching, learning, research, or public service activities” <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/academic-integrity.html>. The Center for Academic Integrity, Rutland Institute for Ethics, defines academic integrity as “a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behavior that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action” <http://www.academicintegrity.org/fundamental_values_project/index.php>.

Cheating and plagiarism are the two most common types of academic dishonesty. During your university career, there may come a time when you feel that there are good reasons to cheat or submit work that is not your own, but no form of academic misconduct will be tolerated. Make it a point to familiarize yourself with your university’s policy on academic integrity so that you are clear about the institution expectations for your conduct.

You are training to become a scientist. As you develop a greater understanding of the principles of academic integrity and good practice, and consistently choose to behave accordingly, you will be establishing habits of thought and conduct that are the hallmarks professionalism.

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