



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# An Aborted Ph.D. Program

## Author(s)

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## Year

2000

## Description

A scenario designed to stimulate discussion about the ethical issues that arise in advisor-advisee relationship; a student and advisor disagree about whether work completed for a Ph.D. should count towards an MA.

## Body

You are a graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. degree and working under the supervision of Professor Tiki. Professor Tiki pays you a monthly stipend in addition to paying your tuition out of research funds.

You first take the qualifying examination after completing 12 credit hours of coursework, but you do not pass. You retake the examination the next year, after a total of 24 hours of coursework and 12 hours of thesis. Again, you flunk. Your department's policy is that one must pass the Ph.D. qualifying examination to obtain a Ph.D. degree, and each student has only two chances to pass the examination.

Since you no longer can continue in the Ph.D. program, you propose to Professor Tiki that you leave at the end of that semester with a master's degree. (The requirement for a master's degree is 18 credits of coursework and 9 credits of research work,

whereas a Ph.D. degree requires 24 credits of coursework and 18 credits of research work). If you had passed the examination, your thesis project would have taken from one to one and one-half years more to complete. Professor Tiki had expected that his supporting you through graduate school would enable you to complete a certain Ph.D. Thesis that has an important place in the whole pattern of research coming out of his lab. You do not want to continue research any further, since you are no longer in the Ph.D. program and the thesis work that you have completed so far does answer a subsidiary research question, that you believe more than satisfies the expectations for a master's thesis. Professor Tiki does not want you to leave without completing the aims and objectives of what was supposed to be your Ph.D.-level project.

- What, if anything, can you do at this point?
- Is there anyone whom you could consult for advice or mediation?

## **Notes**

Caroline Whitbeck introduced methods and modules for discussing numerous issues in responsible conduct of research at a Sigma Xi Forum in 2000. Partial funding for the development of this material came from an NIH grant.

You can find the entire sequence on the OEC at [Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research](#). Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item. If you have suggestions for updates, please contact the OEC.

## **Contributor(s)**

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## **Resource Type**

Case Study / Scenario

## **Parent Collection**

Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research

**Topics**

Mentors and Trainees

**Discipline(s)**

Research Ethics

**Publisher**

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