



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Pressure From Consulting

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## Description

Ethical issues that arise when a supervisor requests a student's help and the student feels as if she cannot say no.

## Body

You are a Ph.D. student just finishing your dissertation, working in Professor Park's group. Another student, Aya, has been in the program for three years, but has made little progress on a dissertation because of the heavy demands of being a Teaching Assistant. This last year Aya has had a Research Assistant position in Professor Park's group. During this time Aya has settled on a thesis topic and started building a simulator to use for the thesis research.

One day Professor Park tells Aya to stop work on the simulator and write some code that he needs for a consulting project. Aya doesn't need the money and would rather work on the simulator, and confides to you the fear that refusing might jeopardize his RA position.

You tell Aya that it would be all right to decline the consulting work, and that doing so would not damage Aya's future relationship with Park. However, Aya is not

reassured, and asks you to promise not to discuss the problem with anyone, especially Professor Park.

- How else might Aya get help with this problem?
- What else might you do to help?
- Do you know that some universities have policies forbidding faculty members from hiring their own thesis students for consulting? Is yours one of them? How, if at all, does that information affect your response?

## 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 Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item.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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## Rights

Use of Materials on the OEC

## Resource Type

Case Study / Scenario

## Parent Collection

Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research

## Topics

Mentors and Trainees

Workplace Ethics

## Discipline(s)

Computer Sciences  
Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences  
Research Ethics

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