



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# The Endless Dissertation

## Author(s)

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## Year

1992

## Description

A scenario meant to stimulate discussion about the ethical issues that arise when a thesis supervisor demands significantly more work after the student thinks the draft is complete.

## Body

You have been pursuing doctoral studies in Engineering at X U for six years. You chose to do a thesis with Professor Z, despite having heard Z characterized as a "slave-driver." Although you found Professor Z to be an exacting supervisor, and the thesis work was challenging, the two of you developed a fairly good working relationship.

You completed course work eighteen months ago, and have since been working solely on the thesis. During this period, you have submitted each chapter of the thesis to Professor Z; Z suggested incremental revisions in both the methods and the writeup, which you have carried out. You now believe the original goals that the two of you agreed upon have been completed and you submit the final draft to Z.

Professor Z responds that it is unsatisfactory and asserts that you must not only revise the thesis document, but do additional work on the experimental apparatus

and collect substantially more data. You feel that the additions that Professor Z has demanded go unreasonably beyond the original scope of the project and will require another eighteen months to complete.

What can/should you do now?

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 Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item.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

Caroline Whitbeck

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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)**

Engineering  
Research Ethics

## **Publisher**

