



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

A Fruitless Thesis

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Description

A scenario meant to stimulate discussion about the ethical issues that arise in the supervisor-trainee relationship; namely, after reviewing a paper for a journal, a supervisor realizes that his student's thesis is fruitless.

Body

Your student has thought of a new model that both of you see as leading to a promising new line of research in your field. You encourage your student to submit a thesis proposal based on this model and you and a departmental colleague help her to do so.

Just weeks after her proposal is submitted to her committee, you receive a journal article to review. The research reported in the article is very exciting, but it shows that your student's model cannot be right. You do not see any way to alter the model to circumvent the problems you now see with it. You realize that going forward with the project will be fruitless.

- What, if anything, can and should you say to your student and departmental colleague?

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 Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item.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

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Discipline(s)

Research Ethics

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