

Author's Commentary on "To Be or Not to Be Included"

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At first glance, this case appears to be about authorship. But it is really about the responsibilities of graduate students, graduate advisers and graduate institutions.

We do not know Alyssa's scientific background and experience, why she decided to work in Swift's laboratory and what, if anything, she was told about the lab and what was expected of her. We do not know about Swift's relationship with the other six graduate students, his background or why he agreed to have Alyssa work in his lab. We are aware that Alyssa and Swift do not agree on what is expected of each of them in relation to the other.

Graduate students entering into a new program may not be aware of what it "means" to be graduate students. They may have no idea what is expected of them. In some cases students may not even have laboratory experience. If we assume that that was the case with Alyssa, who was responsible for making sure Alyssa knows what is required of her as a graduate student in Swift's laboratory?

In the graduate school setting, it is too often assumed that a Ph.D. confers the ability to teach and train students. Although some institutions do train their faculty to be effective instructors, some do not; contrary to popular belief, there is no universal "scientific method" that all research groups follow. Research groups vary greatly due to discipline, institution, department and especially the personality of the research group director. V. Weil and R. Arzbaecher, "Ethics and Relationships in Laboratories and Research Communities," *Professional Ethics: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 4: 83-125, 1995.

Let's assume that Swift was never trained to teach. Therefore, it is possible that Alyssa was aware of her responsibilities but was not being trained effectively to accomplish the goals set out for her.

Several institutions have developed their own graduate student bill of rights and responsibilities, and some have included the faculty's responsibilities to the students. Many of these are accessible via the Internet. Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, 1999. <http://eddiw.ucdavis.edu/gspub/dean/r&r.htm>. Guidelines for Good Practice in Graduate Education, 1999.

<http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~gradsch/guidelines/html>. Although these guidelines cannot change an individual's work ethic or ability to learn or train, they do define roles and the responsibilities that come with them, thereby eliminating an element of confusion from an inherently stressful environment.

Due to the decentralized nature of research, it is essential that graduate institutions have rules and regulation that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of graduate students and advisers. Without these guidelines, it is not safe to assume that all students in an institution are being trained effectively or comparably. They should also outline the responsibilities each has to each other, the laboratory, the institution and the scientific community. The institution should also make available the resources needed to accomplish these goals. Once a student enters a laboratory, the institution does not relinquish its responsibility for that student's education to the principal investigator; rather, the responsibility is now shared.