Overcoming Tensions Among Ethics and Compliance in Responsible Research

Author(s)

Jonathan Beever

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Description

This page contains a description and PowerPoint presentation covering the RCR program at the University of Central Florida Center for Ethics.

Body

What innovative RCR program(s) or promising practices have you implemented at your institution?

Our institution's approach to RCR is innovative in both scope and approach. Our approach integrates RCR content into philosophy and STEM courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Programs are scaffolded, integrated philosophy content into RCR trainings and workshops to bridge the gap between normative theory and compliance-based approaches to ethics. Faculty leadership complementing administrative oversight is a vital part of this innovative approach to RCR. This developing effort is driven by faculty expertise and leadership in the newly-established Center for Ethics (C4E) which leads research and discussions among stakeholders and reports to our Office of Research. The structure is built on the ethics-in-the-disciplines (EID) and ethics-across-the-curriculum (EAC) models.

Ethics courses within the discipline and core knowledge from philosophy bring shared epistemic and ethical expertise to bear on RCR education to cultivate ethics literacy. C4E leadership offers graduate RCR workshops designed and delivered collaboratively with our College of Graduate Studies on both research integrity and personal integrity. These workshops are part of a required core of professionalization workshops taken by all our graduate students across our institution during their graduate education. From graduate ethics certificate courses to a diverse range of courses in applied ethics, our faculty unpack RCR themes and problems to get at their philosophical roots. Our goal is to move beyond the model of box-checking compliance training toward a more robust and sustained approach that engages ethics as a component of graduate education across curriculum and professional identity development.

What are the most important goal(s) of your institution's innovative RCR programs or promising practices?

(1) To balance out the current compliance model with faculty engagement in RCR research and teaching. This goal presents the ongoing challenge of finding functional ways to complement the top-down approach of our compliance administrators through faculty leadership. (2) To take back "ethics" as a concept. My colleagues and students regularly express frustration with the growing number of mandatory "ethics" trainings, workshops, online modules, and checklists. To them, "ethics" is a dirty word connoting red tape, limits to faculty autonomy, and slowing innovation. We must earn faculty and student buy-in by taking back ethics as a philosophical concept essential to responsible conduct in research. We can do this by continuing to demonstrate how interesting and fruitful ethics engagement can be to the research process. (3) To lean on institutional strengths in instructional design, power of scale, and partnerships. To overcome problems of curricular space and faculty expertise, we can lean on institutional strengths to innovate engagement in ethics in partnership with industry design leaders, can make use of our power of scale.

What evidence do you have to suggest that you are succeeding in achieving your goal(s)?

(1) Our philosophy graduate certificate program in ethics continues to grow and our ethics courses have diverse enrollment from across campus. (2) internal and external grants support ethics research, including a 2020 NSF Ethical and

Responsible Research Institutional Transformation grant (Beever, PI). (3) Faculty-led faculty development, including C4E workshops for STEM colleagues, office of faculty excellence support, and service on task forces and institutional committees. (4) Student and faculty surveys that show high interest in studying RCR through the lens of ethical frameworks. Several recent and highly-visible institutional crises (including a mismanagement of fiscal resources and the withdrawal of a doctoral degree due to conflicts of interest concerns, among others), while unfortunate, have also opened news spaces and interests in thinking about ethics as not only a top-down compliance structure but also as a necessary ongoing conversation among stakeholder groups. These examples of lean on institutional strengths in instructional design, power of scale, and partnerships will continue to grow toward the overall success of that goal.

Click here for the PowerPoint.

Notes

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