

Addressing Ethical Standards: Mentor Involvement in Research Misconduct

Between 2004 and 2005, the *ASPB News* published a handful of articles addressing the most common types of ethical misconduct in publishing (<http://www.aspb.org/newsletter/ethicalstandards.cfm>). An interesting new study, published in July in the journal *Science and Engineering Ethics* (<http://www.springerlink.com/content/70w5wu2142w6151g/?p=3aeb5f3fe93c4cd6952337857f55e3c2&pi=4>) and discussed in an article in the August 29 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (CHE; <http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/08/4405n.htm>), investigates the extent to which mentors are involved in promoting responsible research in cases of research misconduct. The authors reviewed the U.S. Public Health Service misconduct files of the Office of Research Integrity. They explored the role of the mentor in these

cases on such behaviors as review of source data and teaching of research standards. They found that nearly three-quarters of the mentors had never examined the trainees' lab results, and two-thirds never taught the trainees standards for properly keeping lab notebooks. They concluded that many mentors were poorly prepared to educate trainees about ethics. Further, as noted in the CHE article, many scientists were in fact poor role models because they themselves engaged in possibly unethical research practices.

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Below we have published an extract from the CHE article. It is reprinted courtesy of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, copyright 2008.

The *ASPB News* welcomes ideas for its occasional column "Addressing Ethical Standards," in which we address scientific (mis)conduct in publishing. Our format is simple: We provide the reader with a brief introduction to the topic, then reprint (by permission) a few paragraphs from a previously published article by an authoritative source, with a link to the full article. You can read all prior columns at <http://www.aspb.org/newsletter/ethicalstandards.cfm>.

Send your ideas to column editors Rob McClung and Nancy Winchester at nancyw@aspb.org.

Scientists Who Cheated Had Mentors Who Failed to Supervise Them

By Jeffrey Brainard

When young scientists fake results, their mentors—senior researchers who are supposed to train them—have neglected their

supervisory responsibilities. A new study of scientific trainees caught cooking their data found that in three-quarters of the cases, their

mentors had never examined the trainees' laboratory results. And two-thirds of the

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supervisors never taught the trainees standards for properly keeping lab notebooks.

"There was a troublingly high incidence of missing data or of no lab books at all (even in the laboratories of renowned scientists)," wrote the authors of the study,

<http://www.springerlink.com/content/70w5wu2142w6151g/?p=3aeb5f3fe93c4cd6952337857f55e3c2&pi=4>, which appears in the September issue of the journal *Science and Engineering Ethics*.

The findings suggest that principal investigators and laboratory leaders should more frequently spot-check trainees' work as well

as instruct them about laboratory procedures and ethics, the authors said. But the mentors need help from their institutions to do so...

Read this article in its entirety by visiting <http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/08/4405n.htm>. A subscription to the Chronicle of Higher Education is required to access this article. 📄

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