

Bryn Mawr College Policy: Ethical Standards in the Conduct of Research

An underlying principle of all research is the quest for truth. The credibility of research must be above reproach if the public trust is to be maintained. Any compromise of the ethical standards required for conducting research cannot be condoned. While breaches in such standards are rare, these must be dealt with promptly and fairly by all parties in order to preserve the integrity of the research community and of this College.

“Misconduct,” as used herein, is defined as: (1) fraudulent or improper practice in conducting research or reporting the results of research, including intentional falsification or fabrication of data, plagiarism, or intentional misrepresentation of data collection and analysis, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgment of data: (2) serious misappropriation of research funds, including but not limited to diversion of such funds to personal or non-college use. The term “serious misappropriation,” as used herein, is not contemplated to include minor deviations within budget categories.

A. Allegations of misconduct should be reported immediately in writing to the Dean of the school in which the incident occurred and in which the accused is employed. All such allegations shall be signed. The confidentiality of those who, in good faith, report apparent misconduct will be protected to the extent possible.

B. After consultation with the Provost, the Dean shall conduct a preliminary inquiry (which shall include informal consultation with the accused) into the circumstances of the allegations and determine whether there are sufficient grounds to indicate that these have validity. The Dean shall attempt to complete this initial inquiry within 60 days, after which a written report shall be prepared which states what evidence was reviewed, summarizes relevant interviews, and includes the conclusions of the inquiry. The individual(s) against whom the allegation was made shall be given a copy of the report of inquiry.

C. If the Dean finds sufficient evidence to suggest the allegations may be true, after consultation with the Director of Sponsored Research and the Provost, the Dean shall appoint, within 30 days, an investigative body of impartial experts to conduct the formal examination and evaluation of all facts to determine whether misconduct has taken place. The Public Health Service, Office of Research Integrity, shall be notified within 24 hours of obtaining a reasonable indication of possible criminal violations.

D. At the time the investigative body is appointed, the Dean shall inform in writing the individual(s) about whom allegations have been made and any involved collaborators that an investigation is to be conducted and shall present to them a statement of the allegations. This statement shall include information on the nature of the allegations and the focus of the investigation and shall inform those being investigated of the opportunity to defend their conduct and provide comments and other relevant information to the investigative body. The same individual(s) shall be informed of their right to be represented in preparing and/or giving their response in this and all subsequent phases of the investigation.

E. The Dean shall inform the College Counsel and the Chairperson of the department of each individual under investigation and the Chairperson of any other department in which the event may have occurred, that an investigation is under way. The Dean also shall inform the agency sponsoring the research if such action is required by the agency.

F. The investigative body shall conduct a formal examination and evaluation of all relevant facts to determine if the allegations of misconduct are valid. The investigative body may call witnesses, examine research data (both published and unpublished), and seek expert opinion both inside and outside the College to aid in the scientific audit.

1. The investigative body shall attempt to complete its investigation within 120 days. If an extension of the investigation period is needed, such an extension must be approved by the Public Health Service, Office of Research Integrity. All parties involved in the investigation shall strive to maintain confidentiality of information.

2. Interim administrative actions, as appropriate to the allegations may be taken prior to the completion of the investigation if such actions are necessary to protect the welfare of human or animal subjects of research or to prevent the inappropriate use of funds.

G. Having completed its investigation, the investigative body shall submit its findings of fact and recommendations in writing to the Dean and Provost.

1. If the investigative body's findings fail to confirm an instance of misconduct, all participants in the investigation, as well as the Director of Sponsored Research and the Provost shall be so informed in writing by the Dean. Diligent efforts will be undertaken, as appropriate, to restore the reputations of persons alleged to have engaged in misconduct.

2. If the investigative body has reason to believe that unfounded charges have been brought with malicious or dishonest intent, the investigative body shall recommend consideration of the appropriate action by relevant faculty bodies and by the Administration.

3. If the investigative body finds that the allegations are substantiated and that misconduct has occurred, the accused shall have a right of appeal. If the appeal does not alter the decision of the investigative body, the following actions shall be taken by the Dean in consultation with the Provost.

a. The Agency sponsoring the research shall be informed of the findings of the investigation.

b. Publishers and editors of journals shall be informed if manuscripts emanating from fraudulent research have been submitted or published.

H. The institution will maintain, for a minimum of three years, after Public Health Service acceptance of the final report, all documentation accruing from the investigative actions of the institution.