

Research Integrity FAQ

Below are some frequently asked questions about the University's Policy and Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Research Misconduct (the Policy). These FAQs are intended to clarify the Policy and not to supersede or alter any of its provisions. Should any aspect of this document appear to conflict with the Policy, the Policy takes precedence.

What is research misconduct?

Research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

When and how should I make a report of possible research misconduct?

If you observe or suspect apparent research misconduct, you should report it to the Research Integrity Officer (RIO), for your School or Unit, or to the University's anonymous compliance hotline. If you are not sure whether the behavior in question constitutes research misconduct, you may discuss it with the RIO formally or anonymously. Should they conclude that what you have described is not research misconduct but a violation of other University policies, the RIO may refer you to another office or department, as appropriate.

What about other kinds of professional misconduct?

The University may use the Policy as a framework for reviewing allegations of other forms of professional misconduct, including, for example: abuse of confidentiality, sabotage or other property violations, failure to report observed research misconduct, retaliation, or directing or encouraging others to engage in any of these offenses.

What happens if I make an allegation of research misconduct?

Upon becoming aware of an allegation of research misconduct, the RIO will make a preliminary assessment of whether the allegations, if true, would constitute research misconduct. If so, and if the allegations are sufficiently credible and specific so that potential evidence of research misconduct may be identified, an inquiry will follow.

What happens to the research records?

Before the respondent is notified or the inquiry begins, the RIO must obtain custody of the relevant research records and evidence needed to conduct the research misconduct proceeding, including, for example, research proposals, laboratory records (physical and electronic), progress reports, abstracts, theses, oral presentations, internal reports, journal articles, correspondence, including email, and the like. Those records will be inventoried and sequestered securely. Depending on the circumstances, the RIO may make copies of the records for use in the research misconduct proceeding, so as to minimize disruption to the research.

What happens at the “inquiry” stage?

An inquiry panel consisting of one or more faculty members will be convened to review the allegations and decide whether there is enough evidence to conduct an investigation. The inquiry panel ordinarily will interview the complainant, if any, and the respondent, along with any key witnesses. The inquiry panel’s task is not to decide whether misconduct has occurred, but rather to recommend that the matter either proceed to investigation or be closed. An investigation is warranted if the allegation falls within the definition of research misconduct and the inquiry panel’s preliminary fact-finding and information-gathering indicates that the allegation may have substance. The Deciding Official (usually the Dean of the School) will decide whether to accept and act on the inquiry panel’s recommendation.

What happens at “investigation”?

An investigation panel, consisting of one or more faculty members, will be charged with reviewing all documentary and other evidence, interviewing anyone who may be able to shed light on the allegations, including the respondent, and making a recommendation as to whether research misconduct has occurred. A finding of research misconduct requires that: there be a significant departure from the accepted practices of the relevant research community; the respondent committed the research misconduct intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly; and the allegation be proven by a preponderance of the evidence. The investigation panel then will submit a report with its recommendation to the Deciding Official. As with the inquiry report, the Deciding Official decides whether to accept the recommendations.

What happens if research misconduct is found?

A wide range of institutional actions are possible, depending on the context in which the misconduct occurred. These include, for example: the correction of the public record including the withdrawal or correction of the publication in question; removal of the respondent from a particular project, special monitoring of future work, probation, suspension, leave without pay,

salary reduction, or initiation of steps leading to rank reduction or termination of employment; restitution of funds as appropriate; suspension or termination of an active award, letters of reprimand; or other responses appropriate to the situation.

What if someone makes a baseless claim of misconduct against me?

All inquiries and investigations are handled confidentially, and part of the University's responsibility in handling such matters is protecting innocent respondents against reputational damage arising out of an inquiry or investigation.

May a respondent be represented by a lawyer?

A respondent may choose up to two personal advisors for support through the research misconduct process. Advisors may be present at interviews but may not participate, meaning that they may not question witnesses, make statements, or answer questions on behalf of the respondent. Although personal advisors may be attorneys, the research misconduct process is academic and not legal, and the inquiry and investigation panels must be free to interact with the respondent directly.

What if I am uncomfortable putting my name on a complaint, for fear of retaliation or any other reason?

Allegations may be made anonymously, provided that they include enough detail to make an investigation possible. Depending on the nature of the claim, it may be possible for a faculty panel to infer the identity of a complainant. If the allegation is plagiarism, for example, the panel may assume that the complainant is the original author. All reasonable attempts will be made to preserve confidentiality.

Retaliation for making an allegation of misconduct is strictly prohibited. Anyone who believes they have experienced retaliation should notify the administrative office handling the research misconduct allegation, and/or the OVPR, immediately.