

INTEGRITY IN GRADUATE STUDY: A Graduate School Guide

Introduction

Integrity in scholarly work has received considerable attention in recent years both in academic circles and in the news. Some notorious cases of fraud have made those in higher education sensitive to this issue. Some of these cases, especially in the sciences, have surfaced when attempts to replicate work have failed. In the humanities and social sciences plagiarism assumes greater prominence. Cheating, the bane of many high school and undergraduate teachers, surfaces as well at the graduate level. Moreover, in our ever more complex professional world, graduate students may find themselves embroiled in abuses of confidentiality or conflicts of interest. All five of these problems are of major concern to graduate students, faculty, and other graduate educators.

Although many graduate students will have few problems with the ethical decisions involved in maintaining integrity in their work, others may not see the issues so clearly. Some very few may even be unaware of the potential for problems with integrity in graduate study. For these reasons and to help its constituent units in the event that fraud, plagiarism, cheating, abuses of confidentiality, or conflicts of interest should arise, the Graduate School has prepared these guidelines.

Fraud

Fraud usually involves the intentional and deliberate misuse of data in order to draw conclusions that may not be warranted by the evidence. Falsification of results may take one of two forms: (1) fabrication of data, or (2) omission or concealment of conflicting data for the purpose of misleading other scholars. An intermediate form, difficult to detect especially in quantitative analyses, occurs when students are sloppy about categorization. All researchers, irrespective of discipline, can agree that the fabrication of data is fraudulent, and most will agree that the deliberate omission of conflicting data is also fraudulent. But a few scholars might argue that one person's conflicting data is another person's irrelevant data. In general, the best researchers are those who come to terms with any piece of evidence which others may regard as conflicting. Strong support for a given hypothesis involves disposing of or dealing with alternative hypotheses.

The best insurance against fraud in graduate-student research is the careful and close supervision by the faculty advisor as well as the examples other members of the academic community provide. The student should communicate regularly and frequently with his or her major professor. He or she can do so in a variety of ways--by submitting laboratory notebooks for frequent faculty review, by having faculty monitor the student's reading in the field, by regular progress reports to the faculty advisor, etc. Faculty should normally expect such communication, and in the absence of faculty initiative, graduate students should instigate dialogues with faculty. Such communication will help the student develop intellectually and lessen the possibility of fraud. If a student is suspected of fraud, the academic community should handle the matter forthrightly with a clear regard to the rights of the graduate student so that the career of a student researcher, who may be innocent, is not damaged. Similarly, if graduate-student fraud is verified, it must be adjudicated in accordance with established University procedures. The Graduate School will provide information on those procedures to any interested party.

Plagiarism

Unlike fraud, which is usually the deliberate creation of false data or results, plagiarism is the use of another's words, ideas, or creative productions or omission of pertinent material without proper attribution, i.e., without giving due credit to the original source. Flagrant cases of plagiarism may involve extensive borrowing of others' material from articles, books, or creative productions with perhaps only slight modifications. In such cases penalties are usually very severe for the student and would likely result in expulsion from Graduate School or, if a degree has already been earned, in rescinding of that degree. Less extensive cases of plagiarism may be either intentional or unintentional (carelessness or ignorance of the commonly accepted rules) but may also have severe repercussions. In using other people's work, one must cite that work in the text or, more commonly, in footnotes and use either direct quotations or skillful paraphrasing for all ideas that are not one's own. Since much of the basic information about our disciplines comes from outside ourselves through a variety of sources common to all who work in a discipline, it is unnecessary to footnote those facts and ideas which are, so to speak, in the common domain of the discipline. Otherwise, we would be footnoting everything we know. But an *intimate* familiarity with the literature of the discipline, or a sub-discipline thereof, lets one know when the distinctive words or ideas of another researcher should be given proper attribution. The fairly common practice among scientists of citing the previous significant literature relating to the subjects of their articles or books, serves as something of a safeguard against plagiarism, but such reviews of the pertinent literature are less usual in the humanities.

Every graduate student should have a comprehensive knowledge of what constitutes plagiarism. Ignorance of the concept of plagiarism on the part of the student is no excuse for resorting to it at the graduate level, if indeed ignorance is an excuse at the undergraduate level. Graduate students, if in any doubt about the concept, should discuss plagiarism with faculty members. And students should expect faculty members to demand that they know what constitutes plagiarism.

There are problems, however, not always associated with traditional perceptions of plagiarism. One of these is the danger, when borrowing from the works of others, of quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing the material in such a way as to misrepresent what the author is trying to say. A second problem arises when a student is overly dependent on the work of another, even if the other is cited meticulously. Still another problem is plagiarizing oneself by submitting the same data or findings in more than one article or by reviewing the same book in two different journals. And, finally, there is the problem of a graduate student's findings being used by his or her mentor without proper attribution to the student either in the article or book, indeed of not giving credit for joint or co-authorship in articles or books where a substantial amount of the work is done by the student. The student should discuss any perceived problem of this nature with the faculty member involved, the chair of the department, or, if need be, with the Graduate School.

In nearly all of these instances of plagiarism, or variations thereon, the best preventive is the example and consultation of the faculty advisor and the rest of the academic community, who should be sensitive to all of these nuances. Again, as with cases of fraud, Indiana University faculty should handle any suspicion of plagiarism with due regard to the student's rights, and any detection of plagiarism should be adjudicated in accordance with established University procedures. The Graduate School will provide procedural information on request.

Cheating

Cheating at the graduate level may not differ morally from the same action on the undergraduate level, but many find graduate cheating more reprehensible and the consequences, understandably, more severe. Academic dishonesty for one whose presence in graduate school declares he or she has opted for the intellectual life is a serious matter indeed. While cheating in the classroom is covered by regulations emanating from other parts of the University, cheating on qualifying or preliminary examinations is not. Such dishonesty, once proven, will at the very least result in failure of the examination and may mean termination of the student's enrollment.

Abuses of Confidentiality

Abuses of confidentiality by graduate students can take various forms. Students often have access to thesis and grant proposals, data, or unpublished papers of other graduate students or faculty members. Some students use this privileged material in their own research without permission, even though proper attribution may be made. Such an abuse of confidentiality would include the adaptation into one's own research of a thesis or dissertation proposal or any unpublished work that one has opportunity to read or indeed of adopting ideas first floated, and not yet relinquished, by someone else. Another example of the abuse of confidentiality is that in which the graduate student gains archival or library materials about living or recently living subjects and uses them in his or her research without permission from the library or archive or in some cases from the individual. Any research on live subjects can present similar dilemmas.

In some ways confidentiality is one of the forms of integrity which is relatively easy to abuse and relatively difficult to detect. Once again, as with fraud and plagiarism, the example of the graduate student's mentor and that of the rest of the academic community is the best preventive.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest between graduate students and faculty members may arise in a variety of ways. We have already alluded to the problems which can occur when the research of a graduate student is inadequately acknowledged by faculty either by failure to footnote properly or to give co-authorship credit. But another set of professional interpersonal relationships must be handled with great care if the integrity of graduate study is to be preserved. As continuing formal education becomes more common and as academics begin to become involved in the world of business, the possibility of a business relationship between student and teacher becomes greater. All of us are familiar with the kind of conflict of interest which may arise through nepotism, that is, when a person serves in an administrative or supervisory relationship to those who are related to him or her by blood or marriage. Most universities have rules which try to regulate professional relationships in such cases. Many faculty members are reluctant to have their own sons, daughters, or spouses take their courses for credit on the grounds that such students may be perceived by others to have an unfair advantage. A business relationship including a consulting one must evoke the same kind of caution. And a student should be careful about working for a company owned or administered by faculty involved in the student's degree work.

Similarly, a student should not date an instructor while the student is enrolled in the instructor's course. And a student should not ask any instructor to serve as his or her thesis or dissertation director (or research committee member) if the student is having or has had either an intimate

personal relationship, a family relationship, or a business relationship with that instructor. If such a relationship should develop after a professional one has been established, the student should expect the instructor to remove himself or herself from the professional role. Such a relationship, whether between a graduate student and a faculty member or between a graduate student acting as an associate instructor and an undergraduate, constitutes a potential conflict of interest, especially as perceived by other students and faculty members. Both because of perceptions and because of the possibilities for exploitation, such relationships should be scrupulously avoided.

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