

MEDIA REVIEW

The Lab: A Positive Solution to Research Misconduct
Office of Research Integrity,
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
<http://ori.hhs.gov/TheLab/>

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ABSTRACT

Research Misconduct is a serious issue that has been around for quite some time, but recently it is at the forefront of funding agency regulations and compliance due to the new requirements from the National Science Foundation (NSF) on Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). To comply with RCR, institutions of higher education have been developing and creating training programs that address core areas such as ethical foundations, research misconduct, business ethics, financial conflicts, data management, mentoring, human and animal subjects, publication practices, and peer review. Many different programs and tools covering an array of these topics are now being implemented. One of the most powerful training tools I have encountered is “The Lab: Avoiding Research Misconduct”.

INTRODUCTION

Research misconduct is defined as the “fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results” (U.S. DHHS, n.d.). Research integrity has always been an important part of performing research. Every major university has misconduct policies and

procedures. Some universities have research integrity offices with a wide array of staff, including a Research Integrity Officer (RIO). Research integrity is not new by any means and it is just as important as it has ever been. However, since January 2010 when the National Science Foundation (NSF) incorporated the requirement for

Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) into its *Grant Policy Guide* (GPG), which mandates that all postdoctoral researchers and graduate and undergraduate students funded by NSF receive training in RCR, this most important topic has taken center stage. Every university, college, and organization that receives NSF funding immediately went to work to put RCR programs in place and ensure that everyone is trained in order to comply with sponsor requirements. A large majority of universities invested in the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). “The CITI Program is a subscription service providing research ethics education to all members of the research community” ([Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, n.d.](#)). Others created home-grown programs and face-to-face courses and programs to satisfy the requirement. Although these programs provide information about research ethics, “The Lab” has become the interactive program that has taken research ethics learning to another level.

WHAT IS THE LAB?

“The Lab: Avoiding Research Misconduct” was created by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to serve as an educational tool in the area of research misconduct. “The Lab” is an interactive movie that allows the viewer to step into one of four main characters and play that role in a case of possible research misconduct. The four main characters in the movie are a Postdoctoral Researcher, a

Graduate Student, a Principal Investigator, and a Research Administrator who recently took the position of Research Integrity Officer. The video is full of questions and situations that, depending on the character chosen and the responses provided to the questions, will drive the direction the story takes, not just for the chosen character but for the other characters as well. The main story revolves around a possible case of research misconduct; the fact that how the chosen character responds guides the story in different directions is one of the reasons “The Lab” is a tremendous learning tool.

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“The Lab” is thought-provoking and provides an opportunity for decision-making. Playing just one of the roles in the movie provides great learning, but in my opinion, in order to take full advantage of what “The Lab” has to offer, everyone should play each of the characters because each one provides different choices and perspectives on the situation. Each one will allow you to guide the story in a different direction, which will play out in the outcome of the situation.

ORI also created a *Facilitator’s Guide* to go along with the movie. The guide has an introduction to “The Lab” and what is

included in the program: simulation that includes four playable characters; tutorials for each character that describe a step-by-step way to make ethical decisions; and the *Facilitator's Guide*. The latter also covers items such as learning methods and provides suggestions for using the simulation in a group setting or individually as homework. Additionally, it thoroughly explains how to navigate the program; introduces the characters and story; and provides discussion topics and questions. The *Facilitator's Guide* is easy to read and follow and it is an excellent addition to the simulated movie.

Since "The Lab: Avoiding Research Misconduct" was released earlier this year it has been viewed by thousands of people and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. It is my opinion that the reason for this positive reaction is because the movie is interactive. There are many different ways to learn, and studies support the use of "active learning" as the best way for students to learn. "Active learning" is "...anything that students do in a classroom other than merely passively listening to an instructor's lecture" (Paulson & Faust, n.d.). "Role playing" is another form of learning that also receives great approval. Paulson and Faust (n.d.) pointed out that active

learning and role-playing should not be utilized as stand-alone, but instead used to supplement classroom instruction. In today's technological age, ORI created in "The Lab" the best of all tools by incorporating active learning and role-playing in a format that is the favorite of the up and coming generation—the electronic format. "The Lab", as a web based program, has the flexibility to be viewed anywhere and at any time. This tool can be utilized individually or in group sessions to promote further discussions. ORI has even produced a DVD-ROM format of "The Lab" and it is continuing to distribute free copies with the intent of using it in places that do not have access to the online version.

CONCLUSION

Not having instances of research misconduct is the ultimate goal for any university or research unit—perhaps one day that will be the case. This may indeed be the case if organizations like ORI continue creating learning tools like "The Lab". It is this type of interactive, online training that will spread the message of what research misconduct is, how to report it, how to deal with it, and how not to get into such a situation. "The Lab" gets 5-thumbs-up from this reviewer.

LITERATURE CITED

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Miriam Campo is the Director of the Sponsored Programs office, University of Tennessee Knoxville campus. She has been in her current position for three years, but has over 25 years of experience in research administration. Her responsibilities have included all aspects of pre-award at the central research office level, as well as pre- and post-award for an environmental engineering research center.
