

Report on the Workshop on Academic Ethics

Organised by Institute of Mathematical Sciences and Forum for Global Knowledge Sharing

At the Institute Mathematical Sciences (IMSc) Chennai, July 15-16

Agenda for the Workshop:

To discuss examples of misconduct, such as:

- Plagiarism and self-plagiarism
- Data falsification, misrepresentation and selective use/suppression
- Undeclared conflicts of interest, undisclosed sources of funding
- Inappropriate authorship
- Ethical standards in animal and human experimentation and clinical trials

Presentations were made by the following persons

- T A Abinandanan (Materials Engineering, IISc Bangalore)
- P Balam, (Director, IISc Bangalore; Editor, Current Science)
- Aparna Basu (NISTAD, Delhi)
- Gautam Desiraju (Solid State & Structural Chemistry, IISc Bangalore)
- Neelima Gupte (Physics, IIT Madras)
- S R Hashim (former Member Secretary, Planning Commission; former Chairman UPSC)
- Amar Jesani (Editorial Board, Indian Journal of Medical Ethics)
- Anuradha Lohia (CEO, Wellcome-DBT India Alliance)
- Gautam Menon (Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai)
- Sunil Mukhi (Theoretical Physics, TIFR Mumbai)
- Rohini Muthuswami (Life Sciences, JNU, Delhi)
- K Narayanan (Head, Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay)
- N Raghuram (Biotechnology, GGS Indraprastha University, Delhi)
- Satyajit Rath (National Institute of Immunology, Delhi)
- Chiranjib Sen (IIM Bangalore)
- L S Shashidhara (IISER Pune)
- N S Siddharthan (Forum for Global Knowledge Sharing and Madras School of Economics)
- Rahul Siddharthan (Institute of Mathematical Sciences)
- D K Srivastava (Director Madras School of Economics)
- K VijayRaghavan (Director, NCBS, TIFR, Bangalore)

Several policy recommendations emerged during the proceedings. Some of the recommendations are listed below. They are not ranked according to importance.

- One suggestion that had widespread support was for an official government body (cf. US Office of Research Integrity) to look at academic misconduct cases; this body can nominate committees for individual cases. Some skepticism was expressed about whether a government body would be effective or fair, but it was also pointed out that in many developed countries, such government bodies have been formed in response to serious

ethical cases and imposed on the scientists; in India, organisations like the Society for Scientific Values have been asking for the formation of an official ethics body, but the government has been reluctant to do so.

- Several speakers emphasised the need for official guidelines for ethical research, to be disseminated across institutions and fields. The guidelines could be formulated and kept up-to-date by the above official ethics organ, and modified according to the field. Education in ethics is necessary for students, but it was emphasised that a mandatory, stand-alone and uninteresting "ethics course" can be counterproductive: instead, it would be desirable to integrate ethics education as much into regular courses as possible.
- The need was also emphasised for official guidelines on how to investigate misconduct. Several suggestions were made:
 - It is necessary that the investigatory committee be concerned only with fact-finding, and not charged with making recommendations on disciplinary action.
 - The investigating committee should be drawn from a wide range of institutions, including, if possible and appropriate, international institutions.
 - The report should be authored, and signed by all authors: committee members who disagree with some aspects of the report may write dissenting notes.
 - The report of the investigating committee should be made public, as has been done internationally in several high-profile cases.
- It was suggested by many participants that our science academies should take the lead in transparency and openness, both in investigating misconduct cases and in making contributions to the public debate on other issues.
- It was also felt that given the heterogeneity of academic institutions in India - ranging from undergraduate colleges and universities to research institutions, the UGC and MHRD policy of imposing uniform rules regarding recruitment and promotions of faculty and attempting to micromanage all academic institutions could itself encourage academic malpractices. For

institutions that are primarily teaching institutions, the requirements for hiring and promotion of faculty should be different from the requirements in research institutions. Imposition of unrealistic or inappropriate requirements is likely to encourage ethical violations to meet those requirements. To promote academic ethics it is important to avoid micromanaging, reduce the number of rules and regulations, and facilitate effective governance.