

Special Reports

THE FIRST WORLD CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH INTEGRITY LISBON, PORTUGAL, 16-19 SEPTEMBER 2007¹

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The globalization of research has been in progress for several decades, aided most recently by new tools for communication and the Internet. Prior conferences and meetings have explored in depth ways to foster and benefit from these developments. None has looked specifically at the issues globalization raises for research integrity.

The World Conference on Research Integrity was the first global forum convened to provide researchers, research administrators, research sponsors, journal editors, representatives from professional societies, policymakers, and others an opportunity to discuss strategies for harmonizing research misconduct policies and fostering responsible conduct in research. The Conference was initiated and organized by the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI, Department of Health and Human Services) and the European Science Foundation (ESF), with additional support from other Conference partners.² A total of 275 participants from 47 countries attended the four-day event.

Research integrity is a broad umbrella concept that can include different interests and concerns. It can be discussed in relationship to individuals or institutions. It encompasses the focused problems of detecting and responding to the most egregious misbehaviors (research misconduct) as well the broad ideals set out in codes and best practices that all researchers should follow, even if many do not. There are, as well, national, institutional, and disciplinary differences that need to be addressed. With not too much jousting for room, all of these interests and others managed to find a place under the World Conference umbrella.

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For many, the issue of research integrity begins with the need for a serious response to research misconduct. For this aspect of the Conference, the Co-chairs (Nick Steneck representing ORI and Tony Mayer representing ESF) and the Planning Committee worked closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Global Science Forum (GSF), which was in the process of preparing a report on *Best Practices for Ensuring Scientific Integrity and Preventing Misconduct* for its member nations.³ This report formed the basis of one of three working groups during the Conference. The GSF Report's endorsement of clear policies and serious efforts to promote integrity was for the most part well received by Conference delegates, many of whom are actively engaged developing policies and programs in their home countries.

Lapses in integrity are frequently discovered during peer review and publication. The second Conference working group, organized by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE),⁴ looked at research integrity in this context. Papers and discussion explored the role editors can play in preventing misconduct and promoting integrity; how other stakeholders, such as funders and publishers, can help; the problems smaller journals face and the help they need to promote integrity. The goal of these sessions was to address the challenges faced in adopting and enforcing the broad codes that have already been developed by COPE, the World Association of Medical Editors, or the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, the latter in the widely used *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals: Writing and Editing for Biomedical Publication*.⁵

Finally, there are the institutional and public faces of research integrity discussed by the third working group. Institutions can provide training on responsible research practices. Professional organizations develop guidance on best practices and set the ideals for individual fields of research. International organizations are well suited to develop global standards and to promote the harmonization of national policies. And all researchers need to be aware of the importance of integrity in

maintaining public support for research and of the ways in which public demands and pressure can influence integrity in research. The speakers who addressed these topics did not provide instant solutions. They did set the stage for the work that lies ahead.

Some of this work is already underway. The OECD GSF Report, which had its first public airing at the Conference, has been accepted and should be followed in a year by the report from a new working group chaired by Canada and the US. The ESF, with the support of the European Heads of Research Councils (EUROHORCS), will be developing a compilation of policies from its Member Organisations in Europe and this, together with the Conference report, should lead to the development of a Member Organisations Forum for research integrity. The European Commission is planning a number of initiatives following the publication of the report of its Expert Group on Research Integrity, including a call for research integrity related research proposals. Some of the educational challenges will be taken up at ORI's upcoming Conference of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Education, Instruction and Training (April 2008).⁶

In their evaluations of the Conference, participants were asked whether a second World Conference should be held in two or three years. They overwhelmingly agreed that it should, and that the focus should be on addressing key problems, such as misconduct, conflict of interest, and a wide variety of questionable research practices.

Based on this feedback, the Conference Co-chairs are in the process of developing plans for additional follow-up activities, focusing on three crucial needs: 1) for better information about the behavior of researchers and the factors that influence their conduct; 2) to clarify, harmonize, and publicize standards for best practice and procedures for reporting improper conduct in research; and 3) to incorporate global standards for best practice and policies for responding to misbehavior into training and research environments.

Updates on these and other activities and plans for the Second World

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Conference will be available on the
World Conference web site.¹

[1] This summary is drawn from the final
Conference Report, which is available at:
<http://www.esf.org/activities/esf-conferences.html>.

[2] Other co-sponsors and funders included:
European Commission, Portuguese EU Presidency,
Gulbenkian Foundation, Committee on Publication
Ethics, European Molecular Biology Organization,
UK Research Integrity Office, ICSU, and NATO.

[3] <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/1/26/14116226.pdf>.

[4] <http://www.publicationethics.org.uk/>.

[5] <http://www.icmje.org/>.

[6] <http://epi.wustl.edu/epi/rcr2008.htm>.