SOP 1.6 Corrections and Retractions

General Description:

There are two goals for any misconduct proceeding: a) identifying individuals who may be responsible for research misconduct, and b) restoring the integrity of the research record. Most of the attention of institutions, scholars who study misconduct, and the press, when cases go public, is focused on the Respondent(s). Arguably, restoring the integrity of the research record is ultimately more important. Retraction of publications and grant proposals which have been plagiarized or which contain fabricated or falsified data is a critical part of that process.

Procedures:

1. Scope of Institutional Review to Correct the Literature

In general, the statute of limitations for assessing and investigating allegations of research misconduct is six years prior to the date that allegations are raised. Exceptions to this statute of limitations include:

- **Subsequent use exception.** The respondent continues or renews any incident of alleged research misconduct that occurred before the six-year limitation through the citation, republication or other use for the potential benefit of the respondent of the research record that is alleged to have been fabricated, falsified, or plagiarized.

- **Health or safety of the public exception.** If a federal agency or the institution, following consultation with a federal agency, determines that the alleged misconduct, if it occurred, would possibly have a substantial adverse effect on the health or safety of the public.

- **Pattern of misconduct exception.** Cases in which a respondent appears to have a pattern of committing fabrication, falsification, and/or plagiarism.

In these circumstances, the RIO, inquiry committee, investigation committee, or Deciding Official may evaluate works that are older than six years.

Committees should reach specific findings on each part of an allegation. Once a finding of misconduct is made, the committee should widen its review in thus far unquestioned publications or grants by that Respondent to see if any of those might be problematic. Some misconduct is a one-time occurrence, but very often one known instance of misconduct may be part of an extensive pattern of fabrication, falsification or plagiarism by that Respondent. At minimum, the review should look at all proposals and publications for the past six years. If an obvious pattern of misconduct emerges from this review, the scope should be expanded as far as necessary to capture all potential cases of misconduct.

2. Retraction and Correction of the Research Record

Once the institution finds that a Respondent has fabricated or falsified data or plagiarized another’s work, the institution has an obligation to consider retracting any grant proposals,
contracts or publications in which the fabricated, falsified, or plagiarized work is present. The RIO will exercise caution and ensure sufficient data is available for a full and accurate retraction. The RIO may need to work with the journal to determine the appropriate timing for a correction or retraction. Retraction of journal articles is sometimes more difficult since journals may insist that the corresponding and perhaps all the listed authors agree to the retraction. One of these will likely be the Respondent who may be reluctant to cooperate. In these cases, the RIO may discuss the case with the publisher and/or editor and provide the investigation report or other correspondence as needed.

Once the decision that research misconduct has been committed, the institution may withdraw grant or contract proposals. The university will comply with all reporting requirements of, and provide information requested by, the funding agencies subject to any legal limitations on the disclosure of that information.

When the institution imposes a sanction less than dismissal for an investigator found responsible for research misconduct in a case where there are publications that need to be retracted and/or funding agencies that need to be notified, the institution may require the Respondent to agree to and cooperate as a condition of continued employment. The institution may require the Respondent to identify all other places where the data/text in question has appeared so that can be retracted as well.

**Related Forms, Guidance, and SOPs:**

Policy 4007, Misconduct in Research and Scholarship

**Responsibility:**

Execution of SOP: Research Integrity Officer

**Approval and Version History:**

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