

generated enough data to convince him that any attempt at rehabilitation must address the etiology of the errant behavior. “What was going on in their lives? What were the personal and job stressors that may have contributed to their actions?” asks Davis, now an emeritus professor at The Ohio State University in Columbus.

In particular, he thinks that someone pushed over the edge by the pressure-cooker atmosphere of modern academic science is probably a poor candidate for rehabilitation. “Telling a scientist at Harvard [University] or [the University of California in] Berkeley not to take on more than they can handle because the stress might cause them to commit misconduct isn’t going to be very helpful if they are part of a culture where the rewards go to those who are busiest and who work the hardest,” Davis says.

Likewise, he says, a foreign-born scientist raised in a society that prizes deference to one’s superiors may find it very difficult to resist unrelenting pressure to deliver results. “What is the likelihood that a 3-day workshop will overturn 30 years of socialization?” Davis asks.

DR. X HAD JUST BEEN HIRED into a tenure-track position when he committed misconduct. But UTHSC’s Stancel decided that the ensuing debarment shouldn’t end his career. “In hindsight,” Stancel says, “the fact that he was so forthcoming and embarrassed and clearly knew he had done something wrong probably was in the back

of my mind when I decided what sanctions we would impose.”

Stancel says UTHSC was ahead of the curve in the early 1980s in requiring all graduate students to take a course on research ethics. Two decades later, that ethics course became an important tool in the rehabilitation of Dr. X.

“I decided to have [him] sit in on one of the

“It’s really been a pleasure watching things work out. He has emerged as one of our most productive and respected researchers.”

James Newell, Rowan University

discussion sections after the lecture, which is always led by a faculty mentor,” says Stancel, a longtime professor of pharmacology at UTHSC who had recently become dean of the graduate school. “I never told [the mentor] why. The students didn’t know why he was there, either, but his boss knew.”

The next semester Stancel chose Dr. X to be a section leader. In addition to doing all the student assignments, Dr. X was also required to write a paper—in English as well as his native language—about why plagiarism is unacceptable in science.

Dr. X received tenure several years after the funding ban had expired, and Stancel views him as “a real success story. He has

received multiple NIH grants, he’s publishing good papers, and recently he was elected to our faculty governance body. And now, when he sees me, he looks me in the eye and smiles. There’s no hint of animosity.”

Not every university decides that a debarred faculty member needs retraining. Some just let the researcher serve out the federally imposed punishment. That’s what happened to Dr. Y, a tenured professor at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando. In 2011, NSF debarred Dr. Y for 2 years after finding he had plagiarized materials on a grant application and asked several federal agencies to fund the same research proposal. (Every application is supposed to be unique.)

“This person was doing good work and had a strong portfolio of publications and patents and funding,” says Bahaa Saleh, dean of UCF’s College of Optics and Photonics. The plagiarism, he says, was “just a failure to include the proper citations. ... [It] came from not knowing that he is supposed to be very careful when using ideas that were previously published by someone else.”

The multiple submissions were an outgrowth of that confusion, Saleh adds. “He should have simply told the agency, ‘Here is what I’m hoping to do with this proposal, and here’s where it differs from another proposal that you’ve funded.’” Dr. Y initially appealed NSF’s punishment, Saleh says. “But in the end he accepted it, and he now understands the bounds.”

For Saleh, plagiarism is less corrosive when it takes place in science than when it occurs in literature or, for that matter, in civic discourse by politicians. He puts it this way: “In science, the ideas are the essence, and the words are secondary, whereas in literature or politics, the words themselves are critical. People need to consider that distinction, whether NSF considers it or not.”

Federally sanctioned faculty members should not be asked to bear an added burden, Saleh argues. “A person who violates the law and gets a penalty should not have additional punishment,” he says. “A scarlet letter is a poor way of having a healthy society.”

That approach shaped the university’s decision not to require Dr. Y to undergo any additional training. Instead, Saleh says, “there were meetings to mark his progress. And Dr. Y was sufficiently resourceful to get funding from industry, not the federal government, for the duration of the debarment period.”

Still, Saleh says that UCF wanted its response to the debarment “to conform to NSF’s demands.” So it decided to not renew Dr. Y’s appointment to a prestigious chair while the debarment and other NSF sanc-

Name that offender? It depends

By Jeffrey Mervis

The U.S. government does not maintain a registry of research misconduct cases. And the two agencies that police scientific misconduct, the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) within the Department of Health and Human Services and the National Science Foundation (NSF), follow different practices.

ORI uses the *Federal Register* (the encyclopedic record of government actions published every workday) and its website to disclose cases in which researchers have been sanctioned. Once those penalties have expired, however, the information is removed from its listing of active cases. NSF’s inspector general posts summaries of

every completed case, but all identifying features, including the name, are redacted. Until a few years ago, NSF made an exception for those who were debarred. But their names are now also redacted in the summary document.

The General Services Administration, an agency responsible for managing federal properties, maintains a public website, called the System for Award Management, listing every person and company debarred by any government agency, including all scientists. The site is intended to prevent an agency from inadvertently giving a grant or contract to someone who is ineligible. But the listing provides no details of the case or the nature of the sanction, and the site is not easy to navigate. ■

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