Testimony re RP12.201-Ethical Standards of Conduct

ANN SAKAGUCHI <annsakag@hawaii.edu>
Reply-To: annsakag@hawaii.edu
To: bor@hawaii.edu

Mon, May 16, 2016 at 3:46 PM

Please kindly forward my testimony to Chair Bal and the members of the Committee on Research and Innovation.

Thank you for your prompt assistance.

Ann Sakaguchi, PhD

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May 14, 2016

Dear Chair Eugene Bal and Members of the BOR Committee on Research and Innovation,

I am a tenured faculty member in the Department of Anthropology in the College of Social Sciences. This is testimony with regard to “RP 12.201-Ethical Standards of Conduct”.

I would like to recommend: 1) that the suggested policy be amended to include ‘administrators,’ and 2) that the administration use the same definition for ‘plagiarism’ as do other Carnegie I research universities as well as the federal government.

The addition of “administrators” in IIIA would then read:

“In the conduct of research and scholarly activities, administrators, faculty and staff shall adhere to strict ethical standards of conduct.”

Since ‘administrators’ are also involved in research and scholarly activities or related functions, this addition would be consistent with the philosophy and intent of this policy.

Please allow me to share an incident related to plagiarism that will clearly demonstrate why it is important to require administrators to adhere to the same standard. While the definition of plagiarism should be consistent throughout the University and appropriately enforced by the Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation (OVPRI) related to research, training and other scholarly activities, in practice this has not necessarily been the case.

Under a federal grant, a principal investigator submitted a deliverable to the federal government that plagiarized a separate collaborative document of another faculty member and that person’s community partners. More than a dozen pages including photos were copied verbatim and the document was then copyrighted without properly acknowledging the original authors. When the impacted faculty member filed a complaint, VPRI Vassilis Syrmos as the Deciding Official of the research compliance case ruled against the complainant and stated that although there was ‘blatant copying’ and it is ‘near plagiarism,’ it is not plagiarism because the complainant did not ‘own’ the document. It should be noted here that the VPRI serves on the Board of the subcontractor involved in the case and therefore appears to have had a major conflict of interest. He further stated his decision was final and no appeal process was available.

The University of Hawaii received hundreds of thousands of dollars under a federal grant that involved the copied work, whereas the original authors of the work can
no longer publish their work because that would now involve copyright infringement.

After a review of plagiarism policies at other Carnegie I research universities (including the University of Hawaii’s RP 12.211) and that of federal agencies, ‘document ownership’ as a required condition to be successful in a plagiarism complaint appears to be an interpretation unique to the VPRI.

As such, to hold the “administrators” to the same ethical standard of conduct as that of faculty and staff is not only important but essential. It is equally important that the administration use the same definitions of the ethical standards of conduct as other Carnegie I universities and that of federal agencies funding research projects.

Your favorable consideration of this testimony is appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me at annsakag@hawaii.edu or at 956-8454 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ann Sakaguchi, MPH, PhD
Specialist
Department of Anthropology
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Testimony

David Duffy <dduffy@hawaii.edu>  
Mon, May 16, 2016 at 4:04 PM

To: Board of Regents <bor@hawaii.edu>  
Cc: David Duffy <dduffy@hawaii.edu>

Please accept this testimony for tomorrow's meeting of the Committee on Research and Innovation.

Many thanks,

David Duffy

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17 May 2016

The Committee on Research and Innovation
Board of Regents
University of Hawaii

Re: 17 May meeting

To paraphrase Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar; today's meeting of the Committee on Research and Innovation may prove less to praise research and scholarship than to bury it. There is much talk of “growing” research and of accountability, but the truth is that this committee might better focus on preserving what we have.

Our islands have their own problems and we need to address them here. Knowledge and solutions from the mainland may not work here or be appropriate. Organized Research Units are designed to address our local needs with a combination of basic and applied research. ORUs and researchers elsewhere in the university also provide a critical mass of highly educated faculty, staff and students that Hawaii requires if it is to transition to a knowledge economy. Unfortunately, there are significant challenges to the research venture this committee should consider when it deals with ORUs and the wider issue of scholarship at UH.

National research funding is at the bottom of what we hope is a cyclic low. The chance of even an excellent proposal getting funded is less than 10% for several federal agencies. Competition is fierce. Researchers have to write multiple proposals and in some cases are only allowed to apply once a year. This diverts time away from research that does get funded.

Researchers see both federal and UH bureaucracy increasing, often under the cloak of accountability and security. These increases seem both to be ever greater and unaccountable as to effectiveness and efficiency. A former chancellor once suggested that UH researchers spend 60% of their time on such matters with the national norm closer to 40%. This makes UH researchers less competitive when applying for funding.
UH has to compete nationally and internationally for good researchers. Our home-grown researchers are relatively rare relative to demand and are themselves being successfully recruited elsewhere. We can recruit “superstars” from the mainland who come with prestige and big grants. They can cost millions in start up funds. They also come with big labs and lab staffs with families that need incentives to move to the islands. These senior researchers need to be able to arrive in Hawaii, turn on the lights in their labs and get to work. They can’t afford a year or so, waiting for a new lab.

Or we can recruit young researchers just starting out. Salaries and start up costs are lower but still have to be competitive. We may have to wait years, perhaps a decade for them to get up to speed. Some won’t. Those who do pan out present another challenge. Other schools will try to recruit them.

Once researchers reach tenure, a long-term commitment from UH, they look at their own commitment to UH and the islands. At this point they often have a family and children. Valuing education, they want to send their children to good schools, which usually means private ones. They would also like to buy a home in which to raise their families. They look for incentives from UH to stay and are too often met with indifference about retention. They do the math and they leave. Does UH care?

More recently recruiting and retaining faculty faces a new challenge. Some in the administration do not regard the “offer letters” made to potential faculty as binding on UH. This is in contrast to other universities and to most business practices, except perhaps the New York City real estate market. If this aberration becomes more widely known, no researcher is going to risk moving halfway across the Pacific to advance their research or to raise a family, only to find the offer to be “inoperative”. Such letters have to be honored.

Some think UH is only here to teach. While teaching is in fact an integral part of research and scholarship (educating post docs, grad students and advanced undergraduates), a university exists to create and disseminate knowledge. If we cease creating, then we can only respond with the past to future problems. Climate change, sustainability, viable agriculture, a knowledge economy, and the economics of a society that allows our children to stay here and thrive: these are problems that require a UH that is engaged in facing the future, not just in teaching the past. ORUs are part of that future, as is supporting research and scholarship across the university.

Sincerely,

David Cameron Duffy

David Cameron Duffy Ph.D.
Pacific Cooperative Studies Unit
Botany, Manoa