COI Program Updates

Faculty consulting: The ORP was recently assigned the responsibility for managing faculty consulting procedures under Penn State policy HR80. COINS, the University’s electronic Conflict of Interest System, will be expanded to accommodate consulting approval requests through departments, and to allow for easy college and University-level reporting at the end of each fiscal year. It will integrate with financial disclosures to create a more efficient experience for users.

Financial disclosure reminder: The University’s next annual financial disclosure period begins Monday, January 5, 2015. Anyone responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of research at Penn State will be required to submit a disclosure in COINS. The COI Program is working with colleges and units to update lists of researchers, and will send monthly reminders to those required to disclose from January through April, 2015.

To report concerns about research or scholarship at Penn State: Contact the Office for Research Protections (814) 865-1775; fax (814) 863-8699; email: ORProtections@psu.edu; or call the Penn State Ethics and Compliance Hotline at 1-800-560-1637.
November’s Scoundrel
A July publication in the scientific journal *Ethology* highlighted a remarkable failure of editorial and peer review. The paper contained the following passage (emphasis added):

“Although association preferences documented in our study theoretically could be a consequence of either mating or shoaling preferences in the different female groups investigated (should we cite the crappy Gabor paper here?), shoaling preferences are unlikely drivers of the documented patterns…”

The unfortunate question wasn’t noticed until this month, when it was picked up by multiple blogs and online sources. Corresponding author Zach Culumber has said he regrets the error, and Dr. Gabor has said that she would appreciate an apology. The journal has since published a revised version of the paper, which some have claimed is an example of successful post-publication peer review.

www.iflscience.com/brain/sciences-worst-proofreading-error

Regarding Retractions
Retractions have been in the news lately, spurred by an editorial in *Nature* which described an unprecedented number of retractions by the journal in 2013 and 2014 compared to previous years. Typically, *Nature* retracts an average of two papers per year. In stark contrast, the journal had seven retractions by October 1, 2014, and six in 2013. The editorial notes a number of factors contributing to the retractions: a rise in author-initiated retractions for honest error; a number of older papers finally retracted after long investigations or other delays; and more freely available data combined with “increasingly vigorous…online scrutiny.”

This has prompted a renewed interest in a 2011 paper by Fang and Casadevall proposing that journals be characterized by a “retraction index,” a measure of how likely a given journal is to retract a paper following publication. The authors of the 2011 study (both editors-in-chief of major journals) looked at 17 journals and found that journals with the highest impact factors also had the highest retraction frequencies, or “retraction index.” Proposed explanations for this include: the pressure to publish in high-impact journals may lead to sloppiness, shortcuts, or outright fraud; high-impact journals have more readers (or more critical readers), leading to a form of post-publication peer review; and studies published in high-impact journals are more likely to be replicated by other researchers, leading to problems being uncovered.

Does the rise in retractions indicate a rise in misconduct? Perhaps not, argued Daniele Fanelli, in a 2013 article in PLOS Medicine. His study found that the general increase in retractions seen in the last 20 years was not accompanied by similar increases in published corrections, findings of misconduct by the US Office for Research Integrity, or a spike in retractions (like Nature’s) seen in multiple journals. Fanelli concludes on a positive note that “researchers and journal editors are getting better at identifying and removing papers that are either fraudulent or plainly wrong.”

Read more
   www.nature.com/news/retraction-challenges-1.16023

LARC
Laboratory & Agricultural Animal Researcher Certification (LARC) program!

This one-semester course is designed to train those working with animals (or planning to work with animals) to thoroughly understand the regulations and policies governing animal use, and to serve as their laboratory’s liaison to the Office for Research Protections and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Please visit www.research.psu.edu/training/LARC for details about the program.

To apply for next semester’s class, which begins in January, contact Sara Dries (sad33@psu.edu)

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