New Faculty Mentoring Project for Research Ethics and Cultural Competence at SUNY-ESF and Brown University

SUNY-ESF, in collaboration with Brown University’s Center for Environmental Studies, has been awarded a three year grant for developing and implementing a "Northeast Ethics Education Partnership (NEEP)" from the National Science Foundation’s grant program for "Ethics Education in Science and Engineering". Both faculty and graduate students in environmental studies, science, and engineering will be able to participate in advanced training in research ethics and cultural competence for field research, and for gaining competency to teach research ethics to others. The collaborative project team is promoting a new research ethics training curriculum that combines expanded education about individual and community-based human subjects protection, and cultural competence training for environmental research in the US and abroad.

Activities to be included in the NSF training grant include mentoring of graduate students, their faculty supervisors, special workshops/courses, and a two-day summer training workshop. New online resources will be developed. Additionally, the project faculty will be conducting "train-the-trainer" workshops at national professional meetings for faculty who teach graduate students in environmental studies, sciences, and engineering.

Faculty Mentoring Activities for Research Ethics and Cultural Competence/Relativity in Environmental Studies

The Northeast Ethics Education Partnership will offer mentoring and resources to faculty through one-on-one or small group consultations by project staff and through access to an online site of training materials, applied ethics articles, field studies and teaching slides.

Consultation Activities

ESF faculty may be interested in having access to applied ethics articles, ethical theories and case studies from the field that have been compiled by NEEP. In these consultations with faculty, NEEP project faculty will review the training materials and resources that they have organized for research ethics and cultural competence issues. The use of certain case studies and articles that have been useful in training students will be discussed. Also, a review of digital teaching slides will be offered to determine if faculty would like some more training for using these in their own courses. The project faculty could work with ESF faculty to insert research ethics and cultural competence training objectives into some of their own course development and implementation objectives.

Many ESF faculty have conducted research in diverse settings nationally and internationally. They may have important perspectives and learning experiences from these field studies. Faculty may have gathered important lessons for research ethics and cultural competence that could be offered to other researchers. NEEP project faculty would assist these ESF faculty in disseminating case studies, applied lessons or other valuable advice for working in specific settings or for generalized approaches to research ethics/cultural competence in environmental studies.
Online Site – Electronic Resource Center for Faculty

NEEP Project faculty can provide access to an online site for research ethics and cultural competence training for ESF faculty. In this website, the NEEP will have these headings for applied articles and case studies:

- Research ethics guidelines – national and international guidelines
- Human subjects protections – resources on beneficence, informed consent, privacy/ confidentiality
- Data management – resources on data ownership, management, dissemination, publication, community-based data management protocols, and data-sharing.
- Intellectual property rights – resources among developing nations and for the US
- Institutional review boards and community reviews – research review issues
- Community-based participatory research (CBPR)
- Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)
- Cultural competence theory and applications.
- Language and ethics – resources on language and intercultural linguistic mediation with linguistically-diverse groups.

Over the three year period of the grant, the NEEP Project Faculty will be compiling advice in these areas and additional research areas to build a library of articles and case studies for teaching faculty at ESF.

Digital slides are also available for use in teaching by ESF faculty. Topics include:

- Human subjects protections
- Informed consent
- Community-based participatory research
- Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS) and CBPR
- Community identity
- Cultural competence theory
- Ethical theories: liberal-individualism, rights-based theories, deontology, distributive justice, communitarianism, postmodern ethics, ethics of care, Native-based ethics

Additional slides will be developed by NEEP faculty; others will be welcome from ESF faculty who have developed training in relevant areas.

NEEP Project Background

NEEP addresses increasing requirements for environmental scientists and engineers to obtain IRB approval for research activities involving individual informants, focus groups or community meetings. To understand and meet these requirements, graduate students must train in research ethics, fully appreciating the Belmont principles for the protection of human subjects, including: beneficence and respect for autonomy and justice for both individual subjects and diverse communities. Further, the best-designed and most community-sensitive research goes beyond formal IRB requirements, to deeply involve community members and organizations in the research process. A growing number of federal agencies and private foundations now fund such projects. Our training can help students and faculty gear up for the future of research ethics.

Although many environmental and engineering field studies take place in settings with culturally-diverse groups, few cultural competence models adapted to the environmental sciences have yet
been developed. The Northeast Ethics Education Partnership (NEEP) will offer innovative training in research ethics, including an emphasis on cultural competence/relativity.

Cultural groups and local communities in the US and internationally have particular histories and traditions, group processes and research experiences that students can learn about from case study and other sources. New research ethics texts and reports offer valuable preparation for meeting today's complex graduate training and reporting requirements.

Research in the environmental sciences, engineering, and related fields often involves working with groups of community members through partnerships and consultation arrangements. Training in human subjects protections must therefore include respecting individuals as members of place-based communities. Applied ethics articles, theories and case studies provide ethical guidance for the conduct of research with communities/groups and provide the basis for rigorous ethics training for graduate students and interested faculty involved in participatory methodologies and community engagement methods.

**NEEP Project Faculty**

Project faculty include Professor Dianne Quigley, Project Principal Investigator, Center for Environmental Studies, Brown University; Professor David Sonnenfeld, ESF, Subcontract Principal Investigator; and Professor Phil Brown, co-investigator, Center for Environmental Studies, Brown University.

**Dianne Quigley** (PI) is Adjunct Assistant Professor at Brown University’s Center for Environmental Studies, and lecturer at UMass-Dartmouth. She was principal investigator of a National Institute on Health grant entitled, “Collaborative Initiative for Research Ethics in Environmental Health” (2000-2007). Dr. Quigley holds a PhD in Religion from Syracuse University; and a Master’s degree from Clark University, Worcester, MA, in the Environment, Science and Policy Program.

**David Sonnenfeld** (co-PI) is Professor of Sociology and Environmental Policy, Dept. of Environmental Studies, ESF. His research has focused on the role of communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizen groups in influencing corporate environmental practices in newly industrializing countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia) and elsewhere. He is interested in collaborative and participatory, as well as more traditional scholarly, research approaches.

**Phil Brown, PhD** (co-PI) is Professor of Sociology and Environmental Studies Director of Graduate Studies at the Center for Environmental Studies at Brown University, where he leads the Contested Illnesses Research Group, directs the Community Outreach Core of Brown’s Superfund Research Program, and directs the Community Outreach and Translation Core of Brown’s Formative Children’s Environmental Health Center. He has been extensively involved in CBPR projects involving report-back to participants in biomonitoring and exposure studies.

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