

NSF Research Ethics Training Grant

New grant to offer research ethics/ cultural competence training to graduate students and faculty at ESF and Brown University

Summary: ESF has just been awarded a three-year NSF Research Ethics/ Cultural Competence Training Grant, in partnership with Brown University's Center for Environmental Studies. This new grant will provide opportunities for graduate students and faculty at ESF for training in research ethics, combined with cultural diversity/ competence training.

ESF has been awarded a three year grant for developing and implementing a "Northeast Ethics Education Partnership" with Brown University's Center for Environmental Studies. A grant totaling \$397,000 was received from the National Science Foundation's program for "Ethics Education in Science and Engineering". Professor David Sonnenfeld (co-PI) will provide supervision to the activities at SUNY-ESF, and Dr. Dianne Quigley (PI), Adjunct Assistant Professor of Research at Brown University, will conduct and manage many of the activities at both Brown and ESF. Professor Phil Brown (co-PI), Department of Sociology and Center for Environmental Studies, Brown University; and Syracuse University's Dept. of Religion also participated in the grant development and will provide ongoing assistance. Drs. Philip P. Arnold and Ernest Wallwork from the SU Dept. of Religion are consulting faculty on the project. Dr. Quigley received her PhD from Syracuse University's Dept. of Religion last year. The project commences October 1.

ESF graduate students in environmental studies, science, and engineering, will be eligible for participation in advanced training in research ethics and cultural competence for field research. The collaborative project team is advancing a new research ethics training curriculum combining 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.

The new grant 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. 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. 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. Much has been written on cultural competence theory and culturally-appropriate approaches for research that can be used in the classroom to prepare graduate students for culturally-relative needs/ problems in environmental research. 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 interested in participatory methodologies and community engagement methods.

Brown University and Syracuse University have pioneered this new ethics training through courses in cultural competence and ethics in recent years. Dr. Quigley developed this initial outreach at Syracuse University when, as a graduate student, she conducted the National Institute of Health (NIH) project, "Collaborative Initiative for Research Ethics and Environmental Health". Now in a partnership with SUNY-ESF, this project can reach many more graduate students, bringing together faculty from these universities who have worked on ethics training. Through building NEEP as a regional research ethics training and support network, faculty and graduate students in Central New York can benefit from this training through summer workshops and on-line resources.

Additional details about training opportunities will be forthcoming in coming weeks. For further information, please contact Dr. David A. Sonnenfeld, Dept. of Environmental Studies, ESF <dsonn@esf.edu>; or Dr. Dianne Quigley, Brown University, <Dianne_Quigley_1@brown.edu>.

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