

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 1: Interpersonal Dynamics

### Case of a Day Early and Grade Short

#### Scenario

Gary is a student in a small college, who is enrolled in a chemistry lab course taught by Yolanda. Yolanda is a female graduate instructor in her early twenties who has established a genuine camaraderie with all the students, especially Gary. When final grades arrive, Gary finds he has earned a “B” rather than the “A” he was expecting. He files a complaint requesting a grade change.

Gary claims that during the final week of class, Yolanda told him he had earned an “A” in the course. Gary also claims that Yolanda invited him on a date, but he declined. In addition, Gary has documentation that he feels justifies a higher grade, along with the verbal commitment. The department chair checks with Yolanda and she seems to be able to justify the grades she assigned and is rather vague on whether she asked Gary out on a date or just a friendly get-together open to other students.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by the Supervisor?

- A. The Supervisor changed Gary’s grade to an “A” and Yolanda wasn’t asked to teach again.
- B. Since Yolanda had documented the grade calculations, her assigned grade was honored.
- C. Gary was required to complete some extra lab work with a different instructor to earn an “A” and Yolanda was required to attend classes on sexual harassment before teaching again.

#### Stage 2:

##### Which of the following actions do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. The Chair should change Gary’s grade to an “A”.
- B. Yolanda should not be asked to teach again.
- C. Since Yolanda had documentation of grade calculations, her assigned grade should be honored.
- D. Yolanda should be required to review proper protocol for socializing with students.
- E. All graduate instructors should be required to attend sexual harassment training.
- F. Gary should be required to complete some extra lab work with another instructor to earn an “A”.
- G. Gary's grade should remain, but he should have the option of retaking the course with another instructor, in order to have his grade replaced.
- H. The supervisor of part-time instructors should be directed to micro-manage all courses.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 1: Interpersonal Dynamics

### Case of Conflicting Criteria

#### Scenario

Liu is a teaching assistant for a chemistry laboratory in a state college. She is of Asian decent with an above average mastery of English as a second language, and outstanding mastery of the course material. Liu is an undergraduate senior majoring in chemistry and plans to attend graduate school after receiving her B.S. degree.

Fred is a student in Liu's course, who is a white male taking pre-health career science courses.

Fred tells Liu that he needs to miss a lab to attend a wedding. When he returns, he expects Liu to provide opportunities for him to earn the points he missed in lab. Instead, Liu sticks to the rules outlined in the syllabus. Fred becomes so aggressive in his verbal response to Liu that she is fearful enough to register concerns with her supervisor.

Separate interviews with Liu and Fred follow. Fred contends that, since he plans a career in medicine, his behavior is necessary as he feels his future contributions to health care justify his actions.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by the Supervisor?

- A. The supervisors talked to Liu and convinced her to provide opportunities for Fred to do makeup labs. He was a good student, and they wanted to help him get into medical school.
- B. The supervisors talked to Fred and convinced him to accept Liu's decision.
- C. The supervisors talked to Liu and Fred and helped them arrive at a compromise solution.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken by the Supervisor?

- A. Since he is a good student, give Fred the credit so he can become a good doctor.
- B. Support Liu's position since she is following syllabus guidelines.
- C. Give Fred a copy of the school's code of conduct, so he can learn about proper treatment of others in workplace.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 1: Interpersonal Dynamics

### Case of Humorous Harassment

#### Scenario

Brian is a male chemistry laboratory instructor in a large community college that employs many adjuncts. He is very popular with most students as he is known to give them algorithmic solutions to help them finish labs early. Sam is an undergraduate male in Brian's class. One day Brian is entertaining faculty colleagues in the department office by relating how he was able to make Sam turn red by incessant teasing. Angelo is a recently tenured faculty member from another country and he is offended by this incident. This incident is part of a long-line of events that seem counter to Angelo's ideas of an ethical way to behave in an academic environment. Angelo therefore files a complaint with the institution EEO office about this behavior.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by the Supervisor?

- A. Brian was asked to meet with the supervisor and the EEO officer for the university for guidance.
- B. The supervisor assumed that the incident was merely two individuals who didn't interpret the situation the same way due to differences in their cultural backgrounds. He decided there are two sides to every story, and they have equal merit, so nothing was done.
- C. Brian was asked to change this behavior.
- D. Brian filed countercharges against Angelo for being a damper on "fun" in the department.
- E. Angelo was warned that he needed to keep a low profile if he wanted to keep his job, and thus be eligible for permanent residence in the United States.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken by the Supervisor?

- A. Take Brian aside and remind him of the institution's harassment policies.
- B. Report Brian to the department chair.
- C. Recognize that Brian's treatment of Sam is really just male bonding and join in the fun of this shared story.
- D. Take Brian aside and remind him of the institution's harassment policies.
- E.F. Use this incident as an excuse to deny Angelo further promotion since he doesn't fit the tradition enjoyed by most of the department.
- G. Faculty should initiate regular discussions on professional behavior.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 1: Interpersonal Dynamics

### Case of Interpersonal Dynamics

#### Scenario

Carma is an undergraduate at a small liberal arts college doing research for a female Professor Sims. Sims is a colleague of male Professor Xeno. Both Carma and Xeno are immigrants from the same country in Asia. When Carma was a student in Professor Xeno's class, she and other women in the class felt they were discriminated against and were given lower grades than the white American men in the course. When they filed a complaint, the department administrators found some evidence that this might be true, but felt it was insufficient for action. After the complaint was filed, Professor Xeno began to routinely come into the research area of Carma and Sims to order Carma to run errands for him, do department cleaning chores, or blame her for instrument failures in the department. During one of these events, Carma was reduced to tears. This was witnessed by a student peer of Carma's, Joshua a black male student from the Dominican Republic. A huge verbal conflict between Xeno and Joshua ensued including profanity and name-calling. Professor Xeno filed a racial intimidation complaint against Joshua with the department.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by the Supervisor?

- A. Professor Xeno was asked to meet with the Chair to learn about expected protocols for treatment of students in the United States.
- B. The department chair provided Xeno with a copy of the Academic Guidelines from ACS and Joshua was required to apologize to Xeno before the department would grant him a degree.
- C. Professor Xeno was not offered tenure, and Carma and Joshua were given strong letters to attend graduate school.
- D. Professor Xeno was given tenure with the provision that he modify his attitude.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken by the Supervisor?

- A. Make sure Joshua doesn't receive any references for graduate school or jobs.
- B. Gather a history of complaints about Xeno and take them to EEO office.
- C. Commend Joshua for trying to protect Carma from harassment.
- D. Make sure Xeno is not retained in the department.
- E. Demand that Xeno take a workplace ethics course.
- F. Support Xeno's position, as he represents an important minority group.
- G. Support both students and remove them from interactions with Xeno.
- H. Try to sooth students and make them understand that this is just a "cultural thing."

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 2: Collecting & Managing Data

### Case of the Prevaricating Postdoc

#### Scenario

Post-doctoral researcher, Sissy, has been working hard for a year and a half in Professor Beaker's lab and generating interesting, if not quite earth-shattering, results. A new graduate student, Glenda, is assigned a project that extends Sissy's work.

Despite many attempts, neither Glenda nor anyone else in the lab can duplicate Sissy's results. After looking at Sissy's lab notebooks, Professor Beaker concludes that her reported results are fraudulent.

The professor is dismayed and discusses the case with some of his colleagues. In general, their advice is to fire Sissy immediately without filing a formal fraud investigation. Beaker doesn't like this solution, but the thought of the hours of time a formal investigation would take—and the potential embarrassment and cost to the university—are also unpalatable.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by Professor Beaker?

- A. Fired Sissy immediately and retracted a submitted paper.
- B. Asked Sissy to leave, in return for not filing formal Institutional complaints against her. Sissy was thus able to find a position elsewhere. Beaker resubmitted the paper after removing Sissy's data.
- C. Followed Institutional guidelines, and spent many hours dealing with the paperwork involved.
- D. Fired Sissy immediately and told her not to list him as a reference. But he didn't tell anyone else the circumstances of her leaving.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken by the responsible parties?

- A. Beaker should fire Sissy immediately.
- B. Beaker should retract a paper he had submitted that includes Sissy's data.
- C. Beaker should carefully remove some or all of Sissy's data from any planned publications but submit them anyway.
- D. Beaker should file formal complaints with the institution about Sissy's behavior.
- E. The institution should ask Sissy to leave on her own, in return for not filing formal ethics complaints against her.
- F. A colleague of Beakers should be asked to accept the transfer of Glenda to her/his group
- G. The department should be asked to follow institutional guidelines for charging Sissy with fraud.
- H. Beaker should ask Sissy to leave quietly and not list him as a reference.
- I. Beaker should submit the paper, since the general science is still valid even it Sissy's work is possible fraudulent.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 2: Collecting & Managing Data

### Case of Manipulating Data; Moving Ahead

#### Scenario

Post-doctoral researcher, Rolfe has recently arrived from Eastern Europe to do research under the direction of a young biochemistry faculty member, Professor Trendy. Rolfe's background does not match the research for which he has been hired, but he needs to advance his skill set and the professor needs a pair of hands in her lab. Professor Trendy is also an immigrant (from Western Europe) and wants to make sure that she is able to publish quickly enough to get tenure. When Rolfe brings results to Trendy that only weakly support the hypothesis of a paper that Trendy plans to submit, she suggests that he delete some of the data points. Rolfe is reluctant to do so, but fears he will lose his position and have to return to a country with less career opportunity for him and his family.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken?

- A. Rolfe stalled for time, and kept reporting actual results from new tests, while quietly seeking a position with another professor in the institution.
- B. Rolfe reported the incident to the department chair, and was helped in his efforts to maintain a different position in the department as a post-doctoral researcher.
- C. Rolfe complied, and the results led to a publication that helped both his and Trendy's careers. As soon as possible he moved to find a different position.
- D. The faculty in the department heard about the plan to falsified results and took action against both Trendy and Rolfe.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. Rolfe should ask Trendy for a different project.
- B. Rolfe should document the request and continue to give all results to Trendy, and not worry about whether or not she removes some data to get a publication.
- C. Rolfe should seek help from other members of the research team.
- D. Rolfe should comply with all requests, as he isn't ultimately responsible.
- E. Rolfe should ask a co-researcher to try to repeat his experiments.
- F. Rolfe should seek work with another faculty member.
- G. Rolfe should seek work away from this institution.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 3: Safety & Comportment

### Case of the Dangerous Doc

#### Scenario

Professor Manick does synthetic organic chemistry. He has been successful over the years, developing a reputation for producing difficult-to-synthesize fine chemicals. Unfortunately, he has also developed a reputation in his department for unsafe laboratory conditions. Several students working in his lab have had serious accidents.

After the last incident, the university terminates Manick's appointment. Professor Manick starts up a contract synthetic lab in an old abandoned building in a nearby small town. He advertises in the university newspaper for part-time student help, specifying his need for chemistry majors. His former faculty colleagues believe that his new facility has inadequate safety equipment. The faculty, but not the current students, knows of Manick's past.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by the chemistry faculty?

- A. They issued a blanket email warning to all students about their concerns regarding working for Prof. Manick.
- B. Did nothing regarding Prof. Manick, but set up enticing research opportunities and work-study jobs for students on campus.
- C. Quietly started rumors among the chemistry department's students to inform them of previous problems regarding Prof. Manick.
- D. Confronted Prof. Manick regarding safety issues in the past, and urged him (under threat of exposure) not to hire any students from the department.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think the chemistry faculty SHOULD have been taken?

(Remember: The students are unaware of Prof. Manick's past.)

- A. Issue a blanket email warning to all students about their concerns regarding working for Prof. Manick.
- B. Go to Prof. Manick's new facility and offer to perform a safety audit.
- C. Quietly spread the word about Prof. Manick's past history with safety issues.
- D. Confront Prof. Manick about their concerns regarding safety issues in his past, and demand that he not hire any students from the department.
- E. Do nothing. What happens off-campus is not the faculty's responsibility.
- F. Contact the institution's legal department for advice.
- G. Find enough alternative jobs on campus so the students won't work for Prof. Manick.
- H. Make the history of Prof. Manick known to all students.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 3: Safety & Comportment

### Case of the Dangerous Doc (cont'd)

#### Stage 3

**What SHOULD be the response of the university administration to the current solicitation for student employees?**

(Assume the concerns of the chemistry faculty have been confirmed.)

- A. Direct the student newspaper to refuse future advertisements from Professor Manick.
- B. Contact Professor Manick and inform him that he is forbidden to solicit students as employees.
- C. Contact the local zoning board and other appropriate government bodies and inform them of Professor Manick's current operation and history.
- D. Do nothing out of concerns of litigation by Professor Manick.
- E. Find the termination documents for Professor Manick, and use the constraints (that should have been included at the time of his dismissal) to prevent him from hiring students.
- F. Let the chemistry department know that anything that goes wrong will be their responsibility.
- G. Work with the department to develop policies that prevent this situation from developing.
- H. Find a way to silence anyone in the department bringing attention to this situation.

#### Stage 4

**What SHOULD the department/university administration have done about the safety issues and accidents prior to terminating Professor Manick?**

- A. Ignore those instances when no blood was spilled.
- B. Issued a reprimand for instances of documented injuries.
- C. Require Professor Manick to attend and pass re-education seminars on laboratory safety.
- D. Agreed with Professor Manick that the students were at fault in all cases.
- E. Assigned Professor Manick to conduct safety seminars for the department.
- F. Kept a written account of each incident in Professor Manick's personnel file.

#### Stage 5

**Does the ACS have a responsibility in matters such as this?**

- A. Yes, it can testify officially.
- B. Yes, it can direct departments to safety documents on [its website](#).
- C. No, it cannot take any stance on safety outside its official offices.



# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 3: Safety & Comportment

### Case of Deceptive Description

#### Scenario

Professor Ruff is a physical chemist with a reputation for being a rigorous grader. English is not his first language, but he does a reasonable job explaining this difficult subject. In fact, Ruff's students actually perform better on standardized exams than any others in the department. Still students complain about the work they must put into the course in order to achieve success. Pandy and Hap are student leaders who conduct a vigorous campaign to assign negative responses on the end-of-the-semester evaluation forms for certain instructors, such as Professor Ruff. As an additional bonus, they find unfilled forms and use these to skew the results of Professor Ruff's student ratings even further. A couple of Pandy and Hap's peers report this scheme to the department chair.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken?

- A. When the institution questioned retaining Ruff, the chair reported this incident and worked to make sure that student ratings were not considered when evaluating Ruff's contributions to the school.
- B. Ruff was not granted renewal of his contract and had to return to his country of birth to find an academic job.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. The chair should intervene with the retention/tenure/promotion committee on behalf of Ruff.
- B. The chair should support the students, since they pay for tuition and have a right to their opinions.
- C. The chair should make sure the tenure committee is aware of objective measures of the performance of Ruff's students.
- D. The chair should bring charges against Pandy and Hap for unethical behavior.
- E. The chair needs to ignore this, as it is impossible to prove, and would take him away from more important aspects of his work.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 3: Safety & Comportment

### Case of Unsafe Acceptable Over the Ocean

#### Scenario

Professor Slick works in a large U.S. research university. On a recent trip to Asia to give a talk, he meets a colleague, Professor Yup. Together they craft a system for disposing of waste from Slick's lab that will bring financial benefits to both Professors. Yup is aware that the laws protecting workers in his country are far less restrictive than in the US. Slick agrees to charge his school for his waste disposable while shipping it to Yup, where the latter will have his graduate students detoxify the waste as part of the requirement for earning a degree. Slick and Yup are able to split the money saved by not having the detoxification take place at the more expensive US facility. Inez works in the shipping department at Slick's university, and discovers the scheme.

#### Stage 1

##### What do you think happened?

- A. Inez talked to Slick and told him about her concerns. Slick discontinued the project.
- B. Inez talked to Slick and told him about her concerns. Slick enacted counter measures and talked the department chair into moving Inez to another department.
- C. Yup and Slick had a few setbacks when two students in Yup's lab became ill, but they managed to make sure no connection was made to the waste management, and thus keep the lucrative operation going for many years.
- D. Inez was able to convince the department safety department to investigate the scheme between Slick and Yup.

#### Stage 2

##### How SHOULD the faculty colleagues respond?

- A. Inez should notify the department chair. The chair should begin an investigation.
- B. Inez should notify the department chair. The chair should do nothing unless there are more documented complaints.
- C. Everyone should give Slick the benefit of the doubt because of his status in the department.
- D. Inez should spread gossip about the plan among any department faculty who will listen.
- E. Inez should bypass the department and contact ACS for intervention.
- F. Inez should contact the International Chamber of Commerce.
- G. Inez should forget challenging an esteemed professor and accept the unequal conditions in which international workers find themselves.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 4: Cheating, Dishonesty, Plagiarism

### Case of the Cheap Chemist

#### Scenario

Professor Parsimony, a chemistry professor who is overheard by colleagues telling his graduate students to not waste their money by registering for the national ACS meeting, since ACS doesn't check registration credentials at the doors to the technical sessions anyway. The students are attending with partial support from departmental travel funds, since the professor has no travel funds to allocate. Professor Parsimony is not attending, but extols the advantages of networking at ACS meetings and encourages these students to make contacts for future post-doc positions.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken by Parsimony's colleagues?

- A. His colleagues confronted Professor Parsimony, called him cheap and unprofessional, and demanded that he/she pay for the student registrations.
- B. His colleagues asked the department to help pay the registration of Professor Parsimony's students, and reprimand him for his behavior.
- C. His colleagues caught Professor Parsimony's students and offered advice counter to that which they were given by Professor L.
- D. His colleagues reported Professor Parsimony's behavior to ACS so that he could be brought up on charges before the Ethics Committee.

#### Stage 2

##### Which of the following actions do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. His graduate students should refuse to go the meeting if they can't pay to register.
- B. The students should follow Parsimony's advice - after all, he understands how things work (and controls their future?).
- C. The students should recognize that what Professor L is recommending is wrong and bring it to the attention of their department chair.
- D. Parsimony's colleagues should talk to him about the ethical implications of his advice.
- E. The colleagues that overheard the conversation should keep it to themselves.
- F. All parties should recognize that it is difficult to have sufficient funding for students during tough economic times.
- G. Admit that no-one else pays 100% of registration to attend meetings, so Parsimony isn't out of line.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 4: Cheating, Dishonesty, Plagiarism

### Case of the Redistribution of Wealth

#### Scenario

Manny is an undergraduate student and an entrepreneur who has returned to school to complete a B.S. degree he left unfinished years ago. Although not a stellar student, he has a solid "C" and has struck up a friendly relationship with Professor Philly, who is newly arrived to an East Coast School from a former republic of the Soviet Union. During one of their conversations after class, Manny mentions he is ordering a significant amount of lobster from his brother-in-law in Maine and offers some to Professor Philly at cost. Manny makes it clear he wants no favors in the course from Professor Philly, and Professor Philly makes it clear he would not allow this to affect his grading of Manny.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken?

- A. Professor Philly accepted the gift, since it was not a monetary loss to Manny, and it was easy for Philly to give a "B" to Manny in this class since he performed better than in his previous courses. No one questioned the grade.
- B. Professor Philly said no to the generous offer, even though he had fewer resources in American than Manny.
- C. Professor Philly accepted the offer quickly, which led Manny to provide him with other amenities from his numerous connections.

#### Stage 2

##### What actions do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. Philly should refuse the offer under any circumstances.
- B. Philly should accept the offer, and document any grade assignments carefully.
- C. Philly should accept the offer only with someone to witness the agreement.
- D. Philly should determine if Manny has tried to bribe other instructors.
- E. Philly should try to get Manny to broaden his offer to other faculty and thus remove the connection to his grading.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 4: Cheating, Dishonesty, Plagiarism

### Case of the Compromised Computer

#### Scenario

Victoria has been a more or less permanent part-time instructor for five years in a chemistry department largely focused on teaching. She believes there is a "good-old-boy" network among some of the male faculty and staff who have been in the department for a much longer period of time, resulting in less respect than she feels she deserves.

On a Monday, she comes into her office and discovers someone has been using her computer to access and alter some teaching files. The altered files point to a member of the tenured faculty, Professor Devion, as the most likely person accessing those files. When Victoria confronts Devion about entering her office and bypassing her computer password without permission, he admits to doing it, but says he needed the information to get ready for class. Victoria decided to contact the chair about this issue.

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken?

- A. The chair talked to Devion and was convinced that he did nothing improper.
- B. The chair put a note and official letter in Devion's employee file.
- C. Since Victoria was not permanent, it was easier to not renew her contract than to pursue charges she made against Devion.
- D. The chair initiated a series of ethics training for all staff and faculty to enhance collegiality within the department.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. File internal theft charges against Devion.
- B. File theft charges with the local police against Devion.
- C. The chair should convince Victoria that this was a simple mistake and not an actual crime.
- D. Install new locks on all faculty computers and offices.
- E. Remove Victoria from the part-time instructor list.
- F. Tell Victoria that replacing Devion in this climate would be nearly impossible so he will be warned not to do anything like this again or risk being fired. Meanwhile Victoria should not mention the event.
- G. The chair should fire Devion.

# ACS Ethics Case Studies

## Category 4: Cheating, Dishonesty, Plagiarism

### Case Between Bribery and Gratuity

#### Scenario

George is a chemist in charge of technical sales of a struggling company. His first assignment is to travel overseas to secure a contract with one of the Persian Gulf nations, where he meets his contact, a highly placed government official. George's advance work has shown that his contact is particularly amenable to bribes. In fact, it is well known by George's industry (and by competitors for this contract) that bribery in this Persian Gulf country is "how things get done."

George's company has a well-established reputation of honest dealings, and he is confident that he can compete effectively for this contract. Upon meeting the government official with whom he needs to negotiate, however, George is rebuffed. The government official graciously accepts George's proposal, but puts it aside without looking at it. He inquires about his "gratuity", as he calls it. George informs him that his company's policy strictly prohibits bribery of any kind. The government official points to a stack of proposals from competitors and says "They understand how business is done here." The official then dismisses George.

Upon returning to his hotel, George receives a message from his boss telling him that a different contract proposal that the company was counting on has been awarded to a competitor. George's boss says that 150 people were counting on him for their next paycheck. He also gives him "complete discretion" over the contract proposal, signing off with "We desperately need this contract for the company to survive."

#### Stage 1

##### What action do you think WAS taken?

- A. George made another appointment with K; reiterated his company's no-bribe policy; but offered to re-work the proposal numbers.
- B. George called his boss back and discussed specifically a one-time departure from the company no-bribe policy.
- C. George reported the government official's response to an international trade group.
- D. George assumed unilateral control of the contract negotiations and provided the official with a gratuity that he rationalized was not an actual bribe by strict definitions.

#### Stage 2

##### What action do you think SHOULD have been taken?

- A. George should resign immediately
- B. George should convince his boss to provide funds for a gratuity that met legal definitions.
- C. George should have worked with the official without telling his boss, so he could protect his company.
- D. George should assume unilateral control over the contract negotiations and signal the government official his willingness to discuss an appropriate bribe.