



## Responsible Conduct in Research Case Study:

### Personal Conduct & Harassment

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Penelope and Hera are graduate students working under the guidance of Dr. Ulysses at the famous Institute for Marine Sciences (IMS). Penelope has a personality that makes most people feel at ease with her. Hera often finds that she inadvertently intimidates people, but she does not know whether it is because she has already published influential work from her Master's thesis or because she is a tall black woman. Scientists at the Institute are planning an exciting conference that will bring many important researchers from around the world together at IMS. Dr. Ulysses is offering all the graduate students at IMS the opportunity to serve as guides for the visiting scientists at the conference and is trying to match students with visitors as closely as possible by research interests. He asks Penelope if she would like to be Dr. Perp's guide while he is at the Institute since her research is closely related to Dr. Perp's, and she is sure to impress this eminent scientist. Dr. Perp is a famous scientist, in the second half of middle age who is well known among his colleagues for being a flirt and a womanizer. [*Biographical note: Dr. Perp has been married for 35 years*]. Dr. Ulysses matches Hera with Dr. Dis, a rising star in the field who is so aggressive and dismissive of graduate students that Dr. Ulysses thinks only Hera will be able to garner respect.

Once the list of participants is made available, a colleague of Dr. Ulysses, Dr. Hermes, phones him to warn him that these assignments may not be in the best interest of his graduate students. Dr. Hermes tells Dr. Ulysses about having been the target of racist jokes by Dr. Dis and mentions that his own graduate student, Persephone, has had to fend off unwelcome sexual advances from Dr. Perp. Dr. Ulysses is torn. On one hand, he is concerned that Penelope's easygoing personality may make Dr. Perp's advances likely. On the other hand he feels that Penelope would benefit from the scientific interaction and he is conflicted: warning her about potential misconduct might create an unwarranted prejudice against Dr. Perp. Finally, he feels that an open discussion with Dr. Perp about inappropriate behavior based on hearsay may jeopardize the two colleagues' relationship (Dr. Ulysses and Dr. Perp). Dr. Perp has already been invited so he will be attending the conference unless told otherwise.

### Questions for discussion

- (1) What should Dr. Ulysses do?
- (2) What should Dr. Hermes do?
- (3) Does IMS have any responsibility?
- (4) Who might be hurt by the revelation of information about Drs. Perp and Dis? Are any of the people who might be hurt more in need of protection than any others?
- (5) Do the graduate students have responsibilities and if so what are they? How should the students weigh this responsibility against the risk of upsetting a powerful, influential senior scientist in their field?

- (6) If Penelope is exposed to unwanted advances by Dr. Perp, how can she best handle the situation to protect herself and her career?
- (7) If Dr. Ulysses ignores Dr. Hermes' warning, what will Penelope and Hera need to do? If Dr. Ulysses decides not to put his graduate students with the visitors he had intended, how can Penelope and Hera get exposure in their fields?
- (8) If the graduate students are exposed to these behaviors during the conference, what is the best strategy for handling their awkward situations?
- (9) Is doing nothing an option?