

Tuesday afternoon keynotes: Training and Education, Tuesday, Sep 23 2025, 14:00-15:30

Location: Main Hall

Session: Keynote Lectures

Chair: Marija Bešter Rogač

KY-04

Training ethical researchers and creating a culture of integrity, wishful thinking or achievable goals?

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Research integrity and responsible conduct of research trainings are formal opportunities to raise and discuss research ethics and integrity topics with researchers. These trainings are expected to equip researchers with skills to conduct their research selflessly for the higher good, become better advocates for their communities and ultimately enhance the public trust in science. When emphasizing integrity in science and scholarship, we essentially demand researchers to always go the extra mile, make themselves vulnerable by being open and honest, respect and give the benefit of the doubt to colleagues and think proactively about possible harms to science and society. And this is all on top of the self-evident asks: conduct creative and original research, compete for grants and follow field-specific trends and also maintain a healthy work-life balance. This is a tall order, and let's not forget, all of this is demanded in inherently unequal environments with legacy hierarchies and power dynamics which may sometimes create complicated scenarios.

My main argument in this talk is that research integrity trainings are exploding with content touched at a surface level, and yet, in recent years, these short (and sometimes elective) trainings have created unreasonable expectations. In the best-case scenario, researchers who have attended a single course or training may learn, for example, what the ICMJE definition of authorship is, what open science entails or what constitutes misconduct, but can this knowledge be useful in practice and help them make the right decision when they face an ethical dilemma? Can they even recognize that they are facing an ethical dilemma? In fact, is it reasonable at all to expect them to know all of this? Beyond the expectations at an individual level, a "culture of integrity" is supposed to describe how larger (be it homogenous or heterogeneous) groups conduct their research. While this is an ambiguous concept in dire need of disentanglement, using it in a nonchalant manner by administrators and research integrity experts suggests a deterministic attitude towards researchers that may not always be helpful.

Thanks to champions who advocated for research integrity to become part and parcel of many curriculums and syllabi's, we have come a long way, but we can and should do more to promote research integrity. Thinking more pragmatically about research, and considering research integrity education as a continuous process are among solutions.