

Breakout Session: Ethics Awareness

Reported by Michael Thoennesen, session chair

Marshall Thomsen (Eastern Michigan) introduced the ethics program for physics students at Eastern Michigan. It consists of a module in a special topics course equivalent to a one-credit course (see <http://www.rcr.emich.edu>). Another good resource is the OpenSeminar developed by the LANGURE (Land Grant University Research Ethics) collaboration (<http://www.chass.ncsu.edu/langure/>).

Ethics training should be a requirement of any graduate program. It was felt that a full course only focusing on ethics would be too much. The more general aspects should be covered within the science college and does not necessarily have to be reinvented. However, this is clearly not sufficient. Continuous refreshers closer to the research activities are necessary, for example colloquium or seminar about ethics issues, and discussion of case studies in research group meetings. One critical question is how to monitor and document these informal activities.

It was noted that raising ethics awareness with the faculty is just as important as educating the students. Faculty have to act as role models and lead by example. One example of a very relaxed attitude towards plagiarism is the common practice of posting powerpoint presentations on the web. Quite often, graphs and data shown are not properly referenced and get distributed without given proper credit.

It was suggested that the AAPT/APS new faculty workshops (<http://www.aapt.org/Events/newfaculty.cfm>) should include a discussion of ethics awareness. It is important not only how to convey ethical behavior to the students but also to present a refresher of research ethics to the new faculty themselves.