

**Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research
at Vassar College
May 2024**

Overview of Updated Guidance

All members of the Vassar research community, including undergraduates, faculty, senior personnel, and postdoctoral researchers, must adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards as they conduct research and pursue scholarly activities.

Vassar has long affirmed that sound research is critical to advancing knowledge. In recognition of its obligations to current and future generations of researchers as well as the agencies that fund them, the College has provided training in the responsible conduct of research to ensure students and others learn appropriate methodologies, receive guidance and mentoring in ethical standards, and meet all funder requirements.

New federal requirements mandate that Vassar update its guidance and practices with respect to the Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RECR).

For **NSF proposals submitted on or after July 31, 2023** – as a result of the [CHIPS Act \(at §10337, p. 503\)](#) and as required by the [NSF Proposal and Award Policies and Procedures Guide \(PAPPG 23-1\)](#) – **faculty and other senior personnel** must join undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral researchers in completing RECR training.

For NIH proposals submitted on or after September 25, 2022, [NIH's RCR training requirements](#) require that Principal Investigators on all NIH Institutional Research Training Grants, Individual Fellowship Awards, Career Development Awards (Institutional and Individual), Research Education Grants, Dissertation Research Grants, or other grant programs with a training component that requires instruction in responsible conduct of research - as noted in the Funding Opportunity Announcement - meet certain requirements, including the provision of in-person training and the inclusion of specific topics.

Principal Investigator RECR Responsibilities

In line with [NSF guidelines](#), **Principal Investigators (PIs)** should understand that “[t]he responsible and ethical conduct of research involves not only a responsibility to generate and disseminate knowledge with rigor and integrity, but also a responsibility to:

- a. conduct peer review with the highest ethical standards;
- b. diligently protect proprietary information and intellectual property from inappropriate disclosure; and
- c. treat students and colleagues fairly and with respect.”

At Vassar, it is the responsibility of **NSF PIs** to ensure that RECR training is completed by everyone who is participating in that research. This includes the PIs, themselves, as well as all co-PIs, undergraduates, senior personnel, postdoctoral researchers, and/or graduate students.

This training should be completed as early as possible, and no more than three months after new NSF awards and/or after new hires join NSF-funded research projects.

Where individuals are working on NSF projects for a shorter time, such as the summer, training should be completed within the first two weeks of the individual's work on the project.

PIs with **NIH-funded research needing RCR training** must ensure their understanding of all NIH requirements and oversee the completion of training based on those requirements.

Institutional Support & Responsibilities

Vassar's Grants Office is coordinating the collection and maintenance of compliance information. The Grants Office is also available for consultation and/or to assist PIs with scheduling or accessing RECR training opportunities.

For NSF, Vassar is required to have a plan in place to provide appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research for **everyone** who is conducting NSF-funded research, and institutional certification to this effect is now required for each proposal.

Training plans do not need to be included in proposals submitted to NSF, but they must be available for review upon request.

Institutions must designate someone to oversee compliance with the training requirement and verify that everyone who is supported by NSF to conduct research has received training in the responsible and ethical conduct of research.

Vassar's Grants Office is designated as the RECR record-keeper and will monitor each participant's successful completion of training, including verification through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) online system. Gary Hohenberger is the RECR coordinator at Vassar; questions and suggestions can be directed to him at 845-437-5490 or grants@vassar.edu.

Training Plan Information for PIs

RECR can be taught and learned in different formats, and key topics can vary from discipline to discipline. In acknowledgement of the need for flexibility, RECR instruction at Vassar is delivered through multiple activities, and PIs can determine the best use of those resources – beyond the minimum requirements below – in terms of their unique RECR content and delivery needs.

This flexibility, among other things, allows PIs to address unique issues related to human subjects research or animal care; incorporate various discipline-specific information; reflect the length of time that trainees will work on research projects; and leverage individual mentoring relationships.

Minimum Requirements for NSF Researchers at Vassar

All researchers, including the PI/co-PIs, senior personnel, postdoctoral researchers, and undergraduates, must complete Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative ([CITI](#)) tutorials and attend an institutional workshop as part of the RECR training requirement. These two minimum requirements should be met every four years by each individual researcher.

CITI is a consortium of research institutions that has created web-based training in the responsible and ethical conduct of research, among other areas.

1) **PIs should establish course module requirements for all individual researchers** on their respective grants, depending on their discipline and type of research, with **everyone** initially completing these basic courses:

- *Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Basic*
- *Research Misconduct (RCR-Basic)*

2) **All PIs, co-PIs and senior personnel who have responsibility for mentoring others** must also **complete this module**:

- *Mentoring and Healthy Research Environments (RCR-Basic)*

3) **All researchers who are working with human subjects or vertebrate animals** must complete the related CITI modules. See instructions below for how to access those online tutorials.

4) **All researchers** are required to participate in at least one of Vassar's **Institutional Training Workshops**, which are delivered three times each year.

- *Case Studies in RECR*
- [URSI](#) (*Undergraduate Research Summer Institute*) *RECR Training*

Additional Information for PIs

Throughout sponsored research project periods, CITI modules and in-person workshops should be supported by other options and resources, including on-line resources that address specific topics or issues, discussion among faculty mentors/mentees, lab safety training, and departmental dialogue or presentations on related subjects. Combined, all of these training activities should focus on inspiring an ongoing commitment to safe and ethical conduct and research among everyone engaged in sponsored research.

How to Access the Online Tutorials in Responsible Research

Complete the online, interactive modules in responsible research offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) at citiprogram.org:

- 1) Point your web browser to CITI: citiprogram.org
- 2) Click on the “Register” link at the top (**Note:** If you registered previously, e.g., last summer, simply use your existing credentials which can be recovered by clicking “Forgot?” on the log-in page)
- 3) Select Organization Affiliation by entering, then selecting “Vassar College” (here you will be asked to “Agree” and “Affirm”)
- 4) Continue to Personal Information; enter name and email address
- 5) Continue to Step 3; follow guidance to create your Username and Password (be sure to make note of these for future reference!)
- 6) Continue to Step 4; enter country of residence
- 7) Continue to Step 5; complete optional items per your preferences
- 8) Continue to Step 6; enter requested information (including address and other identifiers)
- 9) Continue to Step 7; scroll down to view and select “Responsible Conduct of Research”. Choose the option that best suits your discipline.
- 10) Click “Complete Registration”, then “Finalize Registration”

Now, you may select and proceed with the required modules!

How to Access the Online Tutorials in Responsible Research

Vassar College has long affirmed that sound research is critical to advancing knowledge. Thus, we are obliged to provide training in the responsible conduct of research (RCR) so students and others begin to learn appropriate methodologies and receive guidance and mentoring in the ethical standards for research and publication. Federal regulations require that institutions seeking financial assistance from agencies such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) have in place a plan “to provide appropriate training and oversight in the responsible and ethical conduct of research to undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and other senior personnel who will be supported by NSF to conduct research.”*

Undergraduates Research Summer Institute participants must complete the online, interactive modules in responsible research offered by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) at citiprogram.org

- 1) **Point your web browser to CITI:** citiprogram.org
- 2) **Click on the “Register”** button at the top-right corner (*Note: If you registered previously, e.g., last summer, simply use your existing credentials which can be recovered by clicking “Forgot?” on the log-in page*)
- 3) **Select Organization Affiliation** by entering, then selecting “Vassar College” (here you will be asked to “Agree” and “Affirm”)
- 4) **Continue to Personal Information;** enter name and email address
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- 7) **Continue to Step 5;** complete optional items per your preferences
- 8) **Continue to Step 6;** enter requested information (including address and other identifiers)
- 9) **Continue to Step 7;** scroll down to view and select “**Responsible Conduct of Research**”. Choose the option that best suits your discipline.
- 10) **Click “Complete Registration”,** then “**Finalize Registration**”

Now, you may select and proceed with the required modules!

IMPORTANT: Upon completion of the required modules, you will receive a personalized completion report.

Please send this certificate to grants@vassar.edu !

*All Vassar undergraduate students, graduate students or postdoctoral researchers, faculty, and other senior personnel supported, in whole or in part, by Federal funds (NSF, NIH, etc.) **must** at a minimum complete the required modules and/or attend the annual Responsible Research Workshop, offered during the Undergraduate Research Summer Institute (URSI) program. Note that the CITI site offers numerous other resources on research conduct and training that are worthy of exploration and study.