

DARING TO DISCLOSE

Reporting guidelines

Researchers need to know the rules, to disclose conflicts, and avoid those that are worrisome in the first place.

- Contact the office in your institution or academic centre that handles financial disclosures to determine if you need to make a declaration and what you need to file.
- Familiarize yourself with the reporting rules and disclosure limits of your institution and government.
- Assess your potential financial conflict of interest, including any gifts, speaking fees, meals and educational travel you have accepted.
- Attend seminars or view webinars offered by your institution or government to learn more about the reporting process.
- Be aware of potential industry ties that your principal investigator may have and whether they may reflect badly on you.
- Ask yourself questions about how bias could be introduced into your research and guard against those threats. For example, if you receive industry funding, you should declare this, no matter what the result is.
- Decline industry offers to ghostwrite papers, articles or presentations.
- Carefully assess the advantages and disadvantages of attending industry-sponsored educational events, both as an attendee and as a speaker.
- Consider whether serving on an industry board poses a conflict before accepting.
- Make sure you disclose any financial relationships you may have in all reports, presentations and speeches to ensure transparency.
- If your conflicts of interest change, inform your academic institution in case you need to update your disclosure forms. **S.K.**

Long-term relationships between industry and investigators exist, and will continue to do so. Institutions need a robust strategy to manage these conflicts because no one wants to lose industry investment in research. "This is really about managing conflicts," says Rockey. "We try to promote the idea that having a conflict of interest is not something bad or necessarily a negative." ■

Sarah Kellogg is a freelance writer in Washington DC.

TURNING POINT

Jessica Ware

Taxonomist and evolutionary biologist Jessica Ware at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey, has joined 50 scientists who are using insect genomics to trace the origins of social behaviour, flight and herbivory.

Taxonomy is often considered one of the 'greying' sciences. What drew you to it?

I have always been interested in the extreme variety in the behaviour and appearance of insects. As I began my graduate work in entomology, I realized that making sense of this diversity was something that had always been done by taxonomists, so I knew that I needed to learn taxonomy as well as systematics, the study of diversity and its origins. I was also aware of the 'taxonomic impediment' — there are not enough taxonomists to describe species before they go extinct. So I decided to combine my passion for insects with evolutionary biology.

How is the field changing?

Taxonomists are moving away from being hyperspecialists who stick to just one taxonomic group — in part because getting funding now requires research to have a broader applicability. So most budding taxonomists are researching a variety of taxonomic groups or exploring broader evolutionary questions. The increased access to genomic sequencing is drawing younger students by offering new ways to combine evolutionary biology with systematics studies that allow us to address broad questions.

What was your career's biggest turning point?

I received a postdoctoral research fellowship grant from the US National Science Foundation (NSF), which meant I could focus on what interested me. These grants essentially allow postdocs to pursue their own project, whereas other postdoc positions typically involve working on someone else's idea. The grant allowed me to hit the ground running and pursue my interests, including molecular dating, which examines how morphology and genetics are related.

How did you use the grant?

I went to the American Museum of Natural History in New York to work on the systematics of fossil termites, and to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC to work on extant species. Being in both places meant I was able to work on fossils and living taxa so I could, for example, paint a realistic picture of how social behaviour evolved in termites. The best part for me was that I was one of very few women and the only African American working as a curator at these museums, so I felt like a trailblazer.



How have collaborations helped your career?

As a graduate student, I took any project I could that involved collaboration. I worked in Germany, Sweden and South Africa. Every collaboration allowed me to publish outside my PhD research topic. My current collaboration is the result of working with Xin Zhou, who is now at the Beijing Genome Institute (BGI) in China. We were laboratory mates while I was doing my PhD at Rutgers University, and we kept in touch. Among the projects he launched when he moved to the BGI was a large collaborative research initiative looking at insect genomes. He asked me to join. Not all collaborations are easy, but this one seems effortless because everyone is on the same page.

What does the research project involve?

The 1K Insect Transcriptome Evolution project, or 1KITE, aims to generate transcriptomes — sequences of the expressed genes — of 1,000 species of insect to answer the 'who', 'what' and 'why' questions about insect behaviour. We have begun to collect the species, and eventually we will ask questions about the origins of flight behaviour and egg-laying.

How will this collaboration help your prospects as a tenure-track faculty member?

One of the biggest pressures for a new assistant professor is getting grants. The success rate for NSF grants, where I go for funding, is low. 1KITE will give me the preliminary genomics data to use as a springboard for future NSF grants, and we expect it to generate good-quality publications in high-impact journals — and that always helps in gaining a tenure package. ■

INTERVIEW BY VIRGINIA GEWIN