

Case Study: Research Integrity, Disaster Equity, and Political Pressure in Higher Education

Background

A team of faculty researchers at a public university in Florida is conducting a multi-year study examining the impact of hazards and disasters on communities across the state. The research focuses on preparedness, response, recovery, and long-term community resilience following events such as hurricanes, flooding, extreme heat, and environmental emergencies.

As the study progresses, the research team identifies a clear and recurring pattern: communities of color are disproportionately impacted by disasters due to factors such as limited infrastructure, housing vulnerability, economic instability, reduced access to transportation, and fewer recovery resources. The data also reveals that these communities often experience longer recovery times and require additional targeted support and resources before, during, and after disasters.

At the same time, the political climate in the state has shifted significantly, with policies limiting the use of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-related language, initiatives, and programming in public education institutions.

As the research team prepares its final report, disagreement emerges among the faculty members. Some researchers argue that the findings should be revised, softened, or partially omitted to align with current state policy expectations and avoid potential political backlash, funding concerns, or institutional scrutiny. Others strongly disagree, arguing that altering or excluding the findings would compromise the integrity of the research and violate ethical responsibilities to accurately report the data.

The disagreement creates tension within the team regarding academic freedom, ethical research practices, political pressure, and the responsibility of scholars to present truthful findings even when they conflict with prevailing state policies.

Group Task

As a team, determine:

- What action should the research team take regarding the final report?
- How did your group arrive at this decision?
- What values, considerations, or concerns most influenced your decision-making?
- How did your team navigate differing perspectives during the discussion?