We are two faculty members relatively early in our careers. One of us is a recent Associate Professor and the other an Assistant Professor. Our department comprises three programs of research and graduate study: Clinical, Counseling, and Experimental Psychology. The Clinical and Counseling programs are accredited programs of the American Psychological Association (APA). As mandated by the APA accreditation, all graduate students in these two programs must take a course on Professional Ethics in Psychology. Todd Moore is a faculty member in the Clinical Psychology program, and teaches this class once each year. The Experimental Program is not an accredited program, and is made up of three research areas: Biological, Developmental, and Social. The Biological Research area involves students and faculty members who study human and non-human animal behavior, and the Developmental and Social research areas involve students and faculty who exclusively study human behavior. Since the Experimental Program is not accredited, there is no mandate in our program for graduate students to take an ethics class and, perhaps not surprisingly, virtually none of them do. Todd Freeberg is a faculty member in the Experimental Psychology program, in the Biological research area, and would be interested in offering a Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) course for Experimental Psychology students, but faculty reactions to such a class have spanned a range from strongly positive to negative. In the commentary that follows, we first describe the structure of the current mandated ethics course—its strengths and limitations. We then describe how, in the context of little programmatic support for a formal research ethics course, we have tried to increase student engagement with ethical issues in the conduct of Experimental Psychology research, with an emphasis on research involving non-human animals.
Our required course in ethics in the Clinical and Counseling programs focuses on current ethical, legal and professional issues inherent in the conduct and process of the science and practice of psychology, with a special emphasis on issues relevant to counseling/clinical psychologists. The course critically analyzes a range of traditional and emerging areas in professional psychology, including confidentiality, ethical competence, prescription drug privileges, duty to warn, expert testimony, managed care, and supervision. The course aims to promote sound ethical decision making and judgment by helping students become more confident and skilled at recognizing ethical challenges and addressing them in a competent manner.

Whereas the course focuses on both the science and practice of psychology, the course devotes less than ideal attention to the issue of ethics in research. Though ethical issues discussed throughout the semester often generalize to the research domain, only one week of the 15-week course is devoted specifically to ethics in research. During that time we discuss major issues of informed consent, deception, authorship credit, and plagiarism, as well as the less often discussed issues of data analytic methods (e.g., a priori vs. post-hoc), debriefing, inducements to participate, and sharing data. However, it is a struggle to give each of these issues sufficient attention to ensure that students incorporate a set of values related to conducting research in a truly ethical manner. The hope is that the content and quality of discussions during the entire course will generalize to each specific domain, but student feedback consistently involves requests for more hypothetical scenarios of potential ethical dilemmas, especially in the research area. We interpret this as students expressing strong interest in gaining more experience engaging ethical issues in scientific research, so that they may be better prepared to handle new situations that may arise in their scientific efforts. Another limitation of the course is that it is required of students in their first or second year in their respective programs. Often times, this occurs before they have had ample exposure to conducting clinical work and before conducting independent research. Thus, they frequently view the course as a beginner to ethics training as opposed to a course in which they bring to the table a host of experiences (and perhaps ethical mistakes) to discuss and use for future reference (though there are merits to providing some ethical training prior to beginning clinical and research work).

As described in our opening remarks, the Experimental Program in our department currently has no research ethics course requirement.
Some faculty members in the Experimental Program view this as a real deficiency in the education of graduate students in our program. However, many faculty members seem to view a formal research ethics course for our students as, at best, an unnecessary but acceptable elective for students who might be interested. At worst, a small percentage of our faculty view it as a course that will simply take away from students’ abilities to carry out their research and to take the courses that are directly relevant to their research program. A common viewpoint raised by people in these latter two groups is that ethical issues in research are better left to discussions in smaller contexts, such as lab meetings.

In the current absence of a formal RCR course, we have considered holding monthly or twice-monthly brown-bag seminars on RCR issues that would be open to all faculty and students in our department. We worry, however, that since most faculty and many of the graduate students already attend two or more research-related meetings weekly (research seminar series, weekly colloquium, lab meetings, etc.), there would be enough time conflicts and constraints that many students and faculty would simply choose not to participate in such an RCR seminar. The course Moore teaches is open to Experimental Program students, but given the necessary focus of that class on practice-related issues that are central to Clinical and Counseling Program students, there have been very few Experimental students who have taken the course. Our view is that the ideal situation to work towards would be an RCR course that most if not all Experimental Program graduate students (and interested graduate students in Clinical and Counseling Programs, as well as undergraduate Psychology majors) would take as they progress through our program. In the absence of such a course, however, we have aimed to bring research ethics to our students in different ways.

Freeberg holds weekly lab meetings with graduate and undergraduate students working in his lab. At least one of those lab meetings each semester is devoted to an RCR topic. Topics in the past couple years have spanned ethical issues on the use of animals in field research, authorship considerations, and academic misconduct. Additionally, we have discussed three case studies developed by Freeberg as part of ethics training for a ‘Research Experience for Undergraduates’ in Animal Behavior at Indiana University (the Julia Coltrane case involving animal care whistle-blowing, the Molly Waters case involving field behavioral ecology and pressure to publish, and the Walter Guthrie case involving handling of data outliers: http://www.indiana.edu/~animal/REU/reuethics.html).
Similarly, Moore holds weekly lab meetings with graduate students working in his lab. Moore uses these meetings to reinforce what is taught in the ethics class and to engage in more in-depth discussions regarding specific dilemmas arising in research. Students often are more willing to engage in discussion of their views on research ethics in the smaller lab setting and it allows the opportunity to further evaluate their ethical competence and to round out their knowledge should they appear weak in a given area.

Three years ago, the Biological and Developmental research areas in Experimental Psychology began to hold joint weekly research seminars. The primary motive for these weekly seminars is for graduate students in our areas to gain experience presenting and defending their research. In fall of 2010, we decided to begin holding at least two of the seminars each semester on professional development and RCR issues, and have done so for fall 2010 and spring 2011. We plan to maintain these efforts each academic year.

As another means of trying to get students thinking about issues in research ethics, each fall semester Freeberg teaches a one-credit First-Year Seminar on key issues in animal rights. The First-Year Seminars at University of Tennessee are designed to have small groups of first year undergraduates interact with professors in small discussion sections once a week, with the ultimate aim of increasing retention and graduation rates in these students. In Freeberg's sections on key issues in animal rights, we cover some of the core arguments for and against the use of animals by humans, including deontological, utilitarian, feminist, and conservation ethics views. Although the students in this section typically want to read about vegetarianism, hunting, and product testing, each semester we spend one or two of our 10 meeting times on ethical issues related to the use of animals in research. In fall semester of 2011, Freeberg will lead a First-Year Seminar to focus exclusively on ethical questions related to the use of animals in research. Finally, Freeberg teaches a dual-level (senior undergraduate and graduate students) laboratory course on animal behavior every other year. One of the class meeting times each semester is devoted to ethical issues in the study of animal behavior, and many times during the semester we discuss potential ethical issues involved in the research we are studying or actually practicing.

Finally, Freeberg and Moore recently worked with other faculty members to create a statement to include in our departmental by-laws regarding faculty-student intimate relationships. Given the potential negative impact that relationships between faculty and graduate
students have in multiple domains, including the research process (e.g., determining authorship), it was important that our department establish clear guidelines regarding appropriate relationships. We believe that fostering a culture within departments regarding these kinds of issues is yet another way to maximize the benefits to students and faculty in conducting ethical research.

Taken together, there are different routes by which our students (primarily graduate, but also undergraduate) can gain knowledge and experience in, or at least come into contact with, issues in the responsible conduct of research in psychology. We feel that our programs would be strengthened by moving beyond the ‘compliance education’ framework we now inhabit. We are cognizant of the fact that NSF and NIH guidelines are changing to make such RCR training a requirement for graduate ethics education, and hope that we can get our department ‘ahead of the curve’ on this point. We aim to continue to work to help make our department an academic environment where RCR is seen as a crucial component of graduate student—and perhaps even senior undergraduates in our major—training and academic and professional development.