Cooper
October 16, 2015

Physics 596 – Fall 2015

Scientific Ethics Case Study #6*

"If I ask someone to write a letter of recommendation for me to get into grad school, and they say: 'Write it yourself, then I'll sign it,' how far down the ethical slope have I traveled if I do write this letter, but under the following conditions: a) the letter itself, written by me, is truthful in content and contains no false statements (except when I say I am someone else) or exaggerations; b) the letter is read closely by the signer for accuracy and proximity to the signer's own ideas; c) the letter may or may not matter in the selection process and could either be a more or less articulate of saying the same thing that the signer would write."

"If I were to answer the question myself, I definitely would say I would be unethical in this case, certainly in an absolute sense; however, I feel the letter might be so similar to what the signer would have written, and maybe much less enthusiastic than what the signer could have said, that in the end I say I would gain no real advantage. But how can I say? If I were to go through with this and mail a graduate office a ghostwritten letter, I believe the ethical thing to do would be to withdraw my application."

***Before discussing the case:** Identify people in the group for the following presentation duties: (i) A person to present the 'case' in their own words to the rest of the class; (ii) a person to present one point of view in this study; (iii) a person to present the opposing point of view; and (iv) a person to lead a class discussion of the case. Feel free to take notes as necessary to present your discussions to the class.

Take 15-20 minutes to discuss this case study and prepare to relate your discussions to the rest of the class.