Research on the Boundary of Disciplinary Service Responsibility in Academic Misconduct

Qiumeng Pan[1], Shan Miao[2, *]**

[1] School of Public Administration, Xiangtan University, Xiangtan 411105, China
[2] School of Continuing Education, Shantou University, Shantou 515061, China
*Corresponding author: Shan Miao

Abstract: Academic misconduct severely undermines the academic ecosystem, and disciplinary services play a crucial role in academic research. This article explores the boundaries of "preventive liability" and "joint liability" in disciplinary services, including literature retrieval, data management, and citation guidance. By constructing a three-dimensional "responsibility-capability-risk" analytical framework, this study proposes ethical guidelines and legal recommendations. Through the analysis of real cases, it provides references for clarifying the responsibility boundaries of disciplinary services. Currently, research on delineating disciplinary service responsibilities in academic misconduct remains insufficient. This study addresses this gap by examining preventive and joint responsibilities in various aspects of academic misconduct. The findings offer theoretical foundations and practical guidance for the standardized development of disciplinary services, aiming to improve the academic governance system and foster a healthy academic environment.

Keywords: academic misconduct; subject services; responsibility boundary; case analysis

1 Introduction

In contemporary society, the rapid advancement of science and technology has brought unprecedented opportunities and transformations. From breakthroughs in quantum technology to achievements in aerospace, these developments demonstrate the growing research capabilities and vigorous academic activities [1]. However, behind this progress, academic misconduct persists, eroding academic integrity and threatening the health of the academic ecosystem. In recent years, there has been significant emphasis on research integrity construction, with numerous policies introduced to address these issues. Relevant departments have also formulated relevant documents and launched corresponding measures, effectively curbing misconduct in scientific research [2].

Despite these efforts, academic misconduct continues to occur. Cases reported in 2025 by the National Natural Science Foundation of China, including violations such as plagiarism, data fabrication, and fraudulent submissions, have raised renewed concerns within the academic community.

In the academic research process, subject services play a vital role. They support researchers through literature search, data management, and citation guidance [3]. However, with increasing academic competition and research pressure, the responsibility boundaries of disciplinary services in preventing academic misconduct have become blurred. On one hand, effective disciplinary services can serve as the first line of defense against academic misconduct; on the other hand, the extent of their joint liability when misconduct occurs requires further exploration [4].

Given the intense competition for limited academic resources and the diverse demands on researchers, some may compromise academic ethics in pursuit of quick results [5]. Additionally, disciplinary service personnel face significant work pressures, making it challenging to ensure every service meets academic integrity standards. Furthermore, as academic exchanges globalize, the impact of academic misconduct transcends national borders, affecting the international reputation of academic communities [6].

In this context, disciplinary service responsibility boundaries in academic misconduct holds practical significance. This study aims to establish a "responsibility-capability-risk" three-dimensional analytical framework to clarify the boundaries of "preventive responsibility" and "joint liability" in disciplinary services. Through case analysis, it proposes actionable ethical guidelines and legal recommendations, providing theoretical and practical guidance for the standardized development of disciplinary services and contributing to the improvement of the academic governance system [7].

2 Research Status

2.1 Research Status of Academic Misconduct

Recent years have seen increasing research on academic misconduct both domestically and internationally. Scholars have explored its definitions,

types, causes, and impacts. It is widely recognized that academic misconduct includes plagiarism, forgery, tampering, and improper authorship, which not only damage academic reputation but also waste research resources and hinder healthy academic development.

Domestic research on academic misconduct has evolved through budding, rapid development, accumulation, and stable growth stages. The number of publications continues to rise, with research focusing primarily on defining, preventing, and addressing academic misconduct [8]. Hot topics include misconduct in academic papers and its detection and prevention.

However, current research has limitations. While cause analysis is comprehensive, the interrelationships among causes are underexplored. Additionally, although governance strategies are thoroughly discussed, evaluations of their effectiveness are lacking, and a unified governance system has yet to be established.

2.2 Research on the Relationship between Subject Services and Academic Misconduct

Discipline services provide essential support in academic research, and their relationship with academic misconduct has gained attention [9]. Studies indicate that the quality and standardization of disciplinary services significantly impact research integrity in areas such as literature search, data management, and citation guidance.

In literature retrieval, some researchers obtain materials through informal channels, such as third-party ghostwriters, which relates to ineffective guidance from disciplinary services. In data management, the lack of strict review and supervision mechanisms can lead to data fraud [10].

Scholars emphasize that disciplinary services should take greater responsibility in preventing and addressing academic misconduct, such as strengthening academic integrity education and improving data management standards. However, research in this area remains insufficiently systematic and in-depth.

2.3 Research Status of Responsibility Boundary Division

Current research on responsibility boundaries primarily focuses on identifying responsible parties for academic misconduct, typically including authors, supervisors, and journal editors. However, the division of responsibility boundaries for disciplinary services is less explored. Some studies suggest that disciplinary services, as auxiliary forces, should bear certain joint liability, especially when preventive responsibilities are not fulfilled effectively [11]. Yet, clear standards and norms for defining preventive responsibilities and the scope of joint liability are lacking.

Practical cases reveal blurred responsibility boundaries for disciplinary services. For example, in instances of plagiarism or data falsification, determining the extent of disciplinary service responsibility poses challenges for misconduct governance.

In summary, research on the boundary of disciplinary service responsibility in academic misconduct is still in its early stages, requiring further exploration and development.

3 Research Innovation Points

3.1 Building a Novel Analytical Framework

This study introduces a three-dimensional "responsibility-capability-risk" analytical framework to systematically examine the responsibility boundaries of disciplinary services in academic misconduct. Unlike previous studies that adopted single perspectives, this framework integrates responsibility with service capabilities and risks, providing a more scientific and reasonable definition of preventive responsibility and joint liability. It offers new perspectives and methods for research.

Based on this framework, the study proposes a theoretical model for dividing disciplinary service responsibility and joint liability in academic misconduct. This model helps clarify specific responsibility boundaries at different stages, addressing a theoretical gap in disciplinary service responsibility boundaries.

3.2 Multidimensional Analysis of the Relationship between Disciplinary Services and Academic Misconduct

This study explores the interaction between disciplinary services and academic misconduct from multiple dimensions, including literature search, data management, and citation guidance. Compared to previous research, it provides a more comprehensive and detailed analysis, offering accurate guidance for standardizing disciplinary services.

Beyond theoretical frameworks and models, the study conducts in-depth case analyses to propose innovative and actionable ethical guidelines and legal recommendations [12]. These suggestions help disciplinary services better fulfill their responsibilities, prevent and respond to academic misconduct, and provide practical references for improving the academic misconduct governance system.

4 Theoretical Framework

4.1 Dimension of Responsibility

Responsibility includes preventive responsibility and joint liability. Preventive responsibility refers to proactive measures taken by disciplinary services, such as guiding researchers to use formal channels for literature retrieval, standardizing literature use, strictly reviewing data sources, ensuring data authenticity and completeness, and providing in-depth explanations of citation standards to prevent academic misconduct [13]. Joint liability refers to the responsibility borne when academic misconduct occurs due to ineffective preventive measures, with the degree of liability depending on service capabilities and risks.

4.2 Capability Dimensions

The professional competence and technical level of disciplinary services in literature retrieval, data

management, and citation guidance determine their ability to prevent academic misconduct. For example, excellent data analysis and identification skills can effectively detect data fraud; professional literature search guidance can reduce the risk of obtaining materials through illegal means.

4.3 Risk Dimensions

Risks faced by disciplinary services are considered based on the academic environment, the academic integrity of service recipients, and service process complexity [14]. For instance, data fraud is more common in certain fields, increasing risks in data management; during paper submissions, a high volume of third-party submissions raises risks in literature search and citation.

5 Case Studies

5.1 Case Background Introduction

5.1.1 Case background and core issues

In October 2024, the Hainan Provincial Health Commission identified serious research integrity issues in a paper submitted by Dr. Lu, an attending physician at Haikou People's Hospital, during a scientific research project review. The paper, titled "Dynamic Changes and Influencing Factors Analysis of Medical Delay in Patients with Jaw Cystic Disease," was published in "Smart Medicine" and confirmed as academic fraud. Verification revealed that "Smart Medicine" was a fake publication mimicking a legitimate English core journal, constituting a "duplicate publication" trap 4.

Investigation showed that Lu contacted a fake publication intermediary via Baidu search, paid a fee, and did not report the submission to the hospital's research management department. The paper contained multiple violations: (1) Data fabrication: untraceable research data, self-filled questionnaires, missing experimental data and analysis charts; (2) Process violation: lack of internal approval, deleted chat records with the intermediary; (3) Subjective intention: attempt to evade supervision by not reimbursing the fee.

5.1.2 Processing results and social impact

According to the "Investigation and Handling Rules for Research Dishonest Behavior", Lu was identified as "fabricating research processes and forging research results" and received penalties: public announcement, scientific research integrity warning talks; five-year prohibition from applying for projects, professional title promotion, and academic awards; revocation of awards and fund recovery; disciplinary action. The case exposed systematic loopholes in medical institution research management, with Haikou People's Hospital criticized for "lax review and lack of system," highlighting the role of disciplinary services in academic supervision.

5.2 Analysis of the Role and Behavior of Subject Services in Cases

5.2.1 Literature retrieval process

Disciplinary services should provide accurate and comprehensive literature retrieval services and guide proper literature use. However, Lu obtained literature through third-party agencies instead of relying on school disciplinary services. This reflects inadequate guidance and supervision from disciplinary services, leading to improper literature acquisition and use.

5.2.2 Data management process

Data management is crucial in academic research, and disciplinary services should ensure data authenticity and integrity. However, Lu's experimental data came from a third-party organization, with questionable authenticity. Disciplinary services did not strictly audit data sources or establish effective supervision mechanisms, failing to detect data fraud promptly. This indicates insufficient capability and execution in data management responsibilities [15].

5.2.3 Reference standard guidance section

Disciplinary services should provide correct citation guidelines to ensure compliance with academic ethics. Although Lu's paper did not explicitly show citation issues, peer review fraud reflected insufficient guidance and supervision. Disciplinary services did not strictly review citation behavior, allowing improper practices to go uncorrected, indicating omissions in citation standard guidance.

5.3 Definition of Responsibility Boundaries

5.3.1 Definition of prevention responsibility

Disciplinary services should bear preventive responsibility in literature search, data management, and citation guidance. In Lu's case, they failed to fulfill this responsibility effectively: not guiding formal literature retrieval channels, not strictly reviewing data sources and quality, and not timely discovering and correcting improper citation behavior. These negligence provided opportunities for academic misconduct, warranting corresponding preventive responsibility [16].

5.3.2 Definition of joint and several liability

Due to ineffective preventive measures, disciplinary services should bear joint liability for Lu's academic misconduct. Based on the "responsibility-capability-risk" framework, disciplinary services possessed professional capabilities but did not fully utilize them to prevent misconduct, facing high risks in data management and literature retrieval. Thus, they should bear significant joint liability for failing to guide proper literature retrieval, audit data sources, and review citation behavior.

6 Conclusion and Suggestions

6.1 Summary of Research Conclusions

Disciplinary services bear important preventive responsibilities in academic research. They should provide accurate literature retrieval services, ensure data authenticity through strict auditing and supervision, and

offer correct citation guidance with rigorous reviews. Fulfilling these responsibilities can reduce academic misconduct at the source.

When academic misconduct occurs due to ineffective preventive measures, disciplinary services should bear joint liability. The "responsibility-capability-risk" framework determines liability magnitude based on service capabilities and risk levels. In Lu's case, disciplinary services had adequate capabilities but faced high risks, warranting significant joint liability.

Clarifying responsibility boundaries for disciplinary services in academic misconduct is crucial for academic governance. The "responsibility-capability-risk" framework provides a scientific and reasonable method for defining preventive responsibility and joint liability, offering clear guidance for standardized development and effective tools for misconduct governance.

6.2 Suggestions for Discipline Services

6.2.1 Strengthen capacity building

Subject service personnel should continuously update professional knowledge and improve skills in literature retrieval, data management, and citation guidance through training and academic seminars. They should enhance sensitivity and identification abilities for academic misconduct, remaining vigilant to review suspicious research behavior and data.

6.2.2 Improve service processes

Establish standardized literature retrieval processes to ensure researchers use formal channels. Implement strict data audit standards and supervision mechanisms for data source, collection, organization, and analysis. Develop citation standard review mechanisms to examine and correct citation behavior promptly. Proactively communicate with researchers to understand needs and provide targeted guidance.

6.2.3 Strengthen responsibility awareness

Clarify responsibilities and tasks for preventing academic misconduct, with detailed work standards and procedures. Establish accountability mechanisms to hold personnel responsible for failing preventive duties, encouraging effective performance and service quality improvement.

6.2.4 Carry out academic integrity education

Organize regular academic integrity training lectures by experts to explain ethical norms and consequences of misconduct. Promote academic integrity through various channels, such as posters, brochures, and online articles, fostering a culture of integrity.

6.3 Suggestions for the Academic Community

6.3.1 Strengthen the governance of academic misconduct

Improve laws and regulations to increase penalties for academic misconduct, clarifying definitions and punishment measures. Establish multi-departmental collaborative supervision mechanisms involving

academic journals, research institutions, and universities to jointly address misconduct seriously.

6.3.2 Clarify the responsibility boundaries of each subject

Establish a responsibility system covering authors, supervisors, disciplinary services, and journal editors, with detailed rules and responsibility lists to avoid shifting blame and regulatory gaps. Strengthen collaboration among parties, such as between disciplinary services and mentors, to guide and supervise academic behavior.

6.3.3 Creating a good academic environment

Promote the spirit of scientists, guiding researchers to adopt correct values and academic pursuits. Reform research evaluation systems to focus on quality and innovation rather than quantity, providing good research conditions and reducing pressure to minimize misconduct motivation.

6.3.4 Strengthening international cooperation and exchange

Engage with the international academic community to learn from advanced experiences in misconduct governance, such as integrity education systems and research integrity databases. Strengthen international cooperation to address transnational academic misconduct through joint investigation mechanisms and information sharing.

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