

Richard Harris, noted science correspondent for National Public Radio, is coming to Cornell on October 16 to give a university-wide lecture on one of the great challenges facing the scientific enterprise today. The lecture, entitled “Rigor Mortis. Returning delight and rigor to science” will be at 4:30 pm in B25 Warren Hall.

Harris shows that the pressure to publish quickly in order to continue getting grants has resulted in a reduction in rigor. Ironically, setting the competitive bar higher has resulted in moving it lower. This lecture will describe the problem, the consequences of the misinformation on society, and the policies and practices that make the problem inevitable. But it will also provide insight into bringing back delight to doing science.

Mr. Harris’ 2017 book, *Rigor Mortis*, and recent reporting criticize the societal issue of low-quality research. But he also looks at the social and policy structure that is the root cause of the problem. The latter affects the community of researchers and researchers-in-training at Cornell deeply. The lecture will examine these practices, both in research evaluation and in training graduate students and postdocs. Rather than view scientists as powerless, he calls for them to act according to the rigorous values that most hold. “Each field of science has its own particular culture, so each will have to develop its own ways to improve rigor. Importing solutions from clinical research the laboratory is not likely to work. Norms change over time, but they don’t transmit easily from one field to another.”

The lecture will be followed by two faculty panels on Tuesday, October 17. Those panels will provide perspective on how Cornell can provide leadership in restoring rigor by counteracting some of the problematic dynamics. Faculty perspectives include issues associated with getting published in top journals, acquiring the appropriate merits for tenure and promotion, and for proposing projects so innovative that they get funding. The first panel will be at 9:15 AM in Veterinary Lecture Hall 101 and feature professors Margaret Smith, Plant Breeding and Genetics; Luis Schang, Baker Institute, and Avery August, Microbiology and Immunology. The second panel will be at 11:15 AM in the Whetzel Room, 404 Plant

Science and professors feature Marjolein vander Meulen, Biomedical Engineering; Tony Bretscher, Molecular Biology and Genetics; and Paula Cohen, Biomedical Sciences.

The lecture and discussion should provide solutions for those in positions to influence policy to improve the situation, for those conducting research to improve their approach, and for those in training to have a deeper understanding of what they're getting into. As a result, those doing research can experience more of the delight that brought us to the profession in the first place.

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University Lecturer Richard Harris will speak at 4:30 pm on Monday October 16 in B25 Warren Hall.

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