

Managing Conflicting Interests

Core Values for Researchers

- Integrity
 - Ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the research record.
- Accuracy
 - Reporting findings precisely and taking care to avoid errors.
- Efficiency
 - Using resources wisely and avoiding waste.
- Objectivity
 - Letting the facts speak for themselves and avoiding improper bias.
- Trustworthiness
 - Following through on commitments.

“Researcher workers are subject to multiple demands on their time, have preferences on scientific approaches, have beliefs about social values, are competing for recognition in scientific achievement, and may possess information of substantial economic value. Mature scientists, technicians, and trainees alike are faced with balancing conflicting interests.”

Introduction to Macrina, F.L., Scientific Integrity (3rd Ed), Chapter 7, by S. Gaylen Bradley

Conflicting Interests

- Professional life of a scientist is filled with choices between potentially conflicting expectations, obligations and opportunities.
 - Assigned teaching versus engaging in research
 - Giving seminars and speaking at meetings; organizing symposia
 - Serving as a reviewer
 - Consulting
 - Entrepreneurship (starting a company)
 - Seeking industrial funding for research
 - Etc

Conflicting interests

- Conflicts of commitment (effort)
- Conflicts of interest
 - Personal
 - Professional
 - Financial
- Conflicts of conscience

Conflicting Interests Can Create Threats to Objectivity

- Potential that opportunities for personal, family, or professional gain could bias judgment in decisions relating to:
 - Priorities for allocating time and effort
 - Evaluation of persons or proposals
 - Design and interpretation of research
 - Nature and timing of publication
 - What and whether to publish
 - Other professional decisions

Conflicting Interests

- Are these conflicting interests with their embedded threats to objectivity evil and avoidable; or are they inevitable for the active, engaged, and productive professional?
- My experience is that they are not only inevitable, but also often the basis on which we are evaluated, promoted, given raises, and awarded tenure!
- You will be encouraged to accumulate them!

So, what do you do?

- Three steps:
 - Recognize the conflicting interests
 - Disclose them when asked
 - Participate in management of them when necessary to preserve professional and public trust
- If you fail to recognize and disclose conflicts and/or deny them, the assumption is that you are hiding them for some evil purpose.

Outside Activities

- Universities recognize the value gained from faculty involvement in certain consulting activities related to their discipline or area of research/scholarship. Knowledge of the corporate environment can make faculty more productive researchers and better teachers.
- Many/most universities allow faculty to spend up to one day a week consulting.
- You may need to request permission to engage in outside activities, such as consulting, that may conflict with your assigned responsibilities.

Indiana State Statute

- Requires that all employees of state government disclose annually to their employer any financial interest of the employee, their spouse, or their dependent children, in any contract, procurement, investment or loan by their employer. Disclosed financial interests are transmitted to the State Board of Accounts.
- Employees who fail to disclose financial interests commit a felony.

Revised PHS Financial Conflict of Interest Regulation

- Effective: 24 August 2012
- Investigators: everyone responsible for proposing, conducting, reporting research
- Requires disclosure of Significant Financial Interests (SFI) prior to submission of proposal
- Revised definition of SFI
 - Lower threshold = \$5K
 - Includes sponsored/reimbursed travel
- Training in FCOI required before PHS/NIH funds are expended
- Information on FCOIs reported to NIH before expending PHS funds; must make publicly available

Purdue Policy

Policy III.B.1: Conflicts of Commitment and Reportable Outside Activities

[<http://www.purdue.edu/policies/ethics/iib1.html>]

Policy III.B.2: Individual Financial Conflicts of Interest

[<http://www.purdue.edu/policies/ethics/iib2.html>]