

# Conflict of Interest

## What is a conflict of interest?

Conflicts of interest are a normal part of an active and vibrant university. Conflicts of interest do not necessarily represent any impropriety if they are disclosed and properly managed. The key to identifying a conflict of interest is to evaluate whether there is a potential for personal gain and/or improper advantage to others to the university's detriment resulting from the dual roles an employee plays. Put another way, if an employee has an interest that could reasonably appear to affect his/her teaching, research, or other university activities, or could affect the interests of the external entity in which the employee has an interest, a conflict of interest may exist.

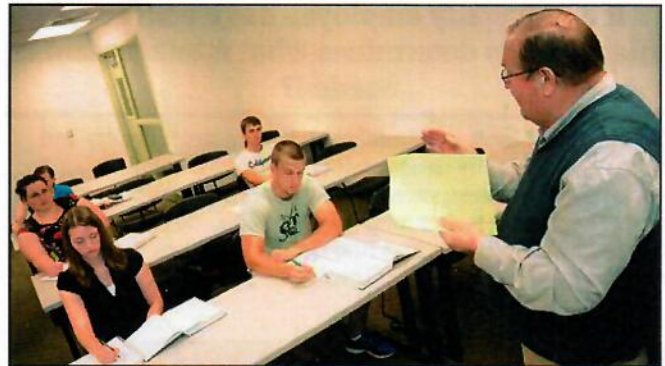
A conflict of interest may arise regardless of an employee's intentions. Perceived conflicts of interest can be as harmful as real conflicts of interest. Therefore, it is the university's policy that all outside interests of an employee related to their institutional responsibilities must be disclosed.

## What is the university's policy on conflict of interest?

University employees shall faithfully discharge their duties and refrain from knowingly engaging in any outside matters of financial interest incompatible with the impartial, objective, and effective performance of their duties. They shall not realize personal gain in any form which would influence improperly the conduct of their university duties. They shall not knowingly use university property, funds, position, or power for personal or political gain. They shall inform their supervisors in writing of reasonably foreseen potential conflicts.

For more information on the university's conflict of interest policy, visit:

[http://umsystem.edu/ums/rules/collected\\_rules/personnel/ch330/330.015\\_policy\\_on\\_conflict\\_of\\_interest](http://umsystem.edu/ums/rules/collected_rules/personnel/ch330/330.015_policy_on_conflict_of_interest)



## What kinds of issues concern conflict of interest reviewers?

Examples include the appropriate and objective use of research, the treatment and roles of students, supervision of individuals working at both the university and a licensee company, and conflict of commitment (i.e., the ability to meet university obligations).

## What are examples of a conflict of commitment?

A conflict of commitment may exist if duties, assignments, or responsibilities associated with a technology license or outside business arrangement have a negative impact on an employee's ability to meet commitments associated with university employment or if these activities exceed the amount of time available. The best approach is for the employee to fully disclose the situation to his/her supervisor and discuss the implications for the employee's job responsibilities with the university.

## How does a researcher disclose any outside interests?

A researcher discloses outside interests, including grants and contracts, overlapping business activities, full-time employment, teaching, faculty-authored textbooks and educational materials, and consultation, by informing supervisors in writing of these potential conflicts of interest.



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## If a university employee has a conflict of interest, who determines what management is needed?

The Conflict of Interest Committee works to assist faculty and staff to appropriately structure their various interests to reduce and eliminate potential risks. No two situations are the same. Therefore, the committee works diligently to understand each scenario to find custom solutions that best meet the needs of the parties involved.



## How does the university manage research and technology transfer transactions?

Technology transfer representatives can advise university employees on conflict of interest issues or direct them to the appropriate Conflict of Interest Committee representative. It is the responsibility of the researcher or faculty member to disclose and document any outside arrangements that constitute disclosable situations or interests as described in university conflict of interest policies. If a conflict of interest is identified, the Conflict of Interest Committee will work with the employee to develop a plan to manage the conflict.

## What happens if a university employee ignores a possible conflict of interest situation?

The University of Missouri's policy requires disclosure of outside interests annually and/or whenever an outside interest arises or changes. Violation of this policy constitutes a breach of the employment contract and may lead to disciplinary action. In some cases, the failure to disclose and manage conflicts of interest is also a violation of state and federal regulations, and mandated sanctions apply.

Furthermore, failing to disclose a potential conflict of interest can result in slowing down grant proposals and other approval processes on campus.

## When should a university employee seek guidance on conflicts of interest?

There are two times in particular when guidance is required: when research proposals are submitted to external sponsors (research) and when a license, option, or material transfer agreement is being considered with a company in which the faculty member, or any university employee, has an equity or management interest (technology transfer).

If uncertainty about a conflict of interest arises, guidance is available from the campus technology transfer office.

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