

Conflict of Interest Cases

1. Dr. Knight at Research University has developed a genetically engineered vaccine. The work was supported by federal grants, and much of the research was carried out by graduate teaching assistants as part of their degree requirements. Research University negotiates a contract with Large Company to develop and market the vaccine. The contract pays 20% of Dr. Knight's salary for a commensurate part of Dr. Knight's effort. Dr. Knight owns 3% of Large Co.'s stock, is on the board of directors of Large Co., and is a paid consultant to the research director of Large Co. Members of the board of directors receive a modest \$50 per day and all expenses for participating in the two-day board meetings held quarterly. You are asked to review and comment on Dr. Knight's disclosure report to her institution.
2. Dr. Cox at Research University is a renowned clinical pharmacologist. He has a large, productive research program in experimental therapeutics, sponsored by federal grants and industrial contracts. His reputation is such that his participation in a conference attracts news media attention and a large attendance. Big Company engages Dr. Cox for a series of lectures at conferences designed to promote Big Co.'s new therapeutic agent. Dr. Cox is paid a speaker's fee of \$25,000 and all expenses for each presentation. Dr. Cox is free to select his topic and the contents of his presentation. Dr. Cox makes five to six appearances per year at Big Co.'s conferences. Comment on potential conflicts associated with the lecture series.
3. Dr. Allan at Research University has invented a biomedical instrument to monitor and record data on injured subjects being transported in an emergency vehicle to a hospital. Dr. Allan meets Mr. Ball, who is a venture capitalist. Mr. Ball is interested in Dr. Allan's invention and forms a company to develop and market the invention. Dr. Allan is given stock in the new company, and is assigned responsibility to monitor technical development of the invention. The new company enters into a contract with Research University to develop Dr. Allan's invention. Dr. Allan assigns his master's student, who is a graduate teaching assistant, to work on the project. Mr. Ball objects to the inclusion of some of the student's results in the master's thesis, and Dr. Allan removes the section in question. The student is required by Dr. Allan to complete additional work to meet degree requirements. Is this fair to the student? What types of conflict might come into play?
4. Drs. Sterling and Crystal at Research University have been collaborators for a number of years. Each is funded as a principal investigator, with the other as co-investigator, from federal agencies. Drs. Sterling and Crystal develop strong differences, largely of a personal nature. Dr. Sterling, who is more senior, believes she "owns" the data and experimental materials derived from the collaboration. Dr. Sterling takes steps to deprive Dr. Crystal of access to the materials. Dr. Crystal appeals to the research administrator of Research

University to intervene. The research administrator calls Dr. Sterling and Dr. Crystal together and asks them to “work it out.” Drs. Sterling and Crystal cannot reach an agreement and Dr. Crystal decides to leave Research University. Dr. Sterling charges Dr. Crystal with intent to remove research materials from Research University without authorization. These accusations are brought to the attention of the federal funding agencies. You are asked to conduct an inquiry. How do you proceed?

5. Professor Maple at Research University is active in applied research and graduate training. He is funded primarily by research and development contracts from federal agencies. The project officer for one of the federal agencies, Mr. Rose, has a bachelor’s degree and requires a master’s degree for career advancement. Mr. Rose applies for, and is admitted to, the graduate program at Research University in which Professor Maple is a faculty member. Professor Maple works out an easy course of study for Mr. Rose, who quickly completes the required courses. Professor Maple then provides Mr. Rose with progress reports to be used as the bases for his master’s thesis. Mr. Rose is grateful for the opportunity and is a strong advocate for renewal of Professor’s contract with the federal agency. Is this a conflict of interest? What other types of conflict may be involved?

Cases are from:

Macrina, Francis L. 1995. *Scientific Integrity: An Introductory Text with Cases*. Washington, D.C.: ASM Press.