

 Policies of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth	Chapter 8 Research and Innovation
8.105 Research Conflict of Interest	

Policy Statement and Purpose.

It is the policy of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth (“HSC”) that no proposed, awarded, or ongoing HSC Research shall be biased by any conflicting interests of HSC Investigators responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of that Research. This policy is applicable to all HSC Investigators and applies to all Research regardless of funding. The purpose of this policy is to assure objectivity in Research.

Texas state law has long included prohibitions against conflicts of interest involving state faculty or staff members, including university faculty and staff. These laws are located in Chapter 572 of the Texas Government Code. HSC has adopted an Employee Ethics and Standard of Conduct Policy, as well as a Conflicts of Interest Policy, that also address conflicts of interest. Regulations issued by certain federal government agencies, such as the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), require universities that apply for Research funding to ensure that the objectivity of Research will not be biased by any interest of an Investigator responsible for the Research. This policy should be read and applied in conjunction with applicable state law, federal regulations, and other HSC policies.

Growing interaction between industry and HSC has created new possibilities for the occurrence of conflicts of interest. These conflicts arise when there are opportunities for faculty or staff members to benefit either from the outcome of Research or from activities conducted in the course of fulfilling Institutional Responsibilities. HSC believes that with clear guidelines and principles, in conjunction with appropriate supervision and monitoring, it is possible for interaction between industry and academia to take place in a manner that is consistent with the highest traditions of medical and scientific Research and in a way that energizes scientific creativity.

Investigators are expected to make reasonable inquiry as to whether their relationships and activities fall within the provisions of this policy. It is not the intent of this policy to eliminate or prohibit all situations involving a potential conflict of interest. This policy is intended to enable Investigators to recognize situations that may pose a conflict of interest, to report these situations to the Research Conflict of Interest Committee (“RCOI Committee”), and to ensure that the RCOI Committee reviews, supervises or monitors these situations, where necessary. An integral part of this policy is an annual disclosure mechanism whereby Investigators regularly review their activities. This policy is intended to maintain the professional autonomy of scientists and physicians inherent in the self-regulation of science.

This policy will provide assurance to the Investigators, HSC, sponsors of institutional Research, and most importantly the public, that relationships with industry have been examined and that related research activities will be conducted in a manner consistent with institutional and public values.

Application of Policy.

All HSC personnel, including, but not limited to, administrators, faculty, staff, post-doctoral fellows, student employees, interns, or residents, whose institutional responsibilities include the design, conduct, or reporting of Research, funded, or proposed for funding.

Definitions.

Entity: “Entity” means any corporation, business, partnership, sole proprietorship, firm, franchise, association, organization, holding company, limited liability company, joint stock company, receivership, trust, or any other for-profit commercial operation, but excluding HSC. An Entity also includes organizations where HSC may participate on the Entity’s board of directors or hold stock in the Entity; any not-for-profit organization acting, directly or indirectly, as an agent for, a commercial organization; or any other legal concern organized for profit or charitable purposes.

Conflict Management Plan: “Conflict Management Plan” means a formal document approved by the RCOI Committee that directs the Investigator’s management of Financial Conflicts of Interest or other potential conflicts of interest.

Financial Conflict of Interest: “Financial Conflict of Interest” means a Significant Financial Interest that could directly and significantly affect the design, conduct, or reporting of Research.

Institutional Responsibilities: “Institutional Responsibilities” means an Investigator’s professional responsibilities on behalf of HSC, which may include activities such as Research, consulting, teaching, professional practice, institutional committee memberships, and service on panels such as data and safety monitoring boards.

Investigator: “Investigator” means a HSC principal investigator, faculty member, or any other person, regardless of title or position, who is responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of Research, funded, or proposed for funding, by an external sponsor. This may include Research assistants, project directors, lab personnel, collaborators or consultants.

Malign Foreign Talent Recruitment Program: “Malign Foreign Talent Recruitment Program,” is any foreign government run or funded program targeting scientists, engineers, academics, researchers, and/or entrepreneurs of all nationalities that are working or educated in the United States in a foreign-state-sponsored attempt to unethically or unlawfully acquire U.S. scientific research or technology. The definition of the term “Malign Foreign Talent Recruitment Program” is more fully described in the CHIPS and Science Act’s definition of Malign Foreign Talent Recruitment Program, see 42 U.S.C. § 19237, and any associated regulations, as may be amended or changed by the federal government.

Relative: “Relative” means an Investigator’s spouse, dependent children, and other family members living in the same household, together with all individuals related within the second degree of affinity or third degree of consanguinity.

Research: “Research” means a systematic investigation, study or experiment designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge relating broadly to public health, including behavioral and social sciences research. The term encompasses basic, applied and clinical research, as well as product development. The term includes any such activity for which research funding is available or proposed from an external sponsor.

Significant Financial Interest: “Significant Financial Interest” means any financial interests of an Investigator, the Investigator’s spouse, or the Investigator’s dependent children that appear to be related to the Investigator’s Research or Institutional Responsibilities, including:

salary or other income, whether for consulting, paid authorship, lecturing, honoraria, service on an advisory board or for any other purpose paid by an Entity, when aggregated, exceeds \$5,000 in the twelve months preceding disclosure; or

any remuneration received from a publicly traded Entity in the twelve months preceding disclosure and the value of any equity interest in the Entity as of the date of disclosure, when aggregated, exceeds \$5,000. Equity interest includes any stock, stock option, or other ownership interest; or

any remuneration received from a non-publicly traded Entity in the twelve months preceding disclosure that in aggregate exceeds \$5,000, or any equity interest held by the Investigator in such Entity, regardless of amount; or

any intellectual property rights and interests (patents, copyrights, trademarks) and income related to such rights and interests; or

service as an officer, manager, executive, member of a board of directors, or in any other fiduciary or managerial role for an Entity, whether or not remunerated; or

for Investigators who have applied for or are receiving PHS funding, any occurrence of reimbursed or sponsored travel not reimbursed or sponsored by:

a federal, state, or local government agency,
an Institution of higher education as defined at 20 U.S.C. 1001(a),
an academic teaching hospital,
a medical center, or
a research institute that is affiliated with an Institution of higher education.

A Significant Financial Interest does not include:

salary, or other remuneration paid by HSC to the Investigator if the Investigator is currently employed or otherwise appointed by the HSC;

income from investment vehicles, such as mutual funds and retirement accounts, as long as the Investigator does not directly control the investment decisions;

income from seminars, lectures, or teaching engagements sponsored by a federal, state, or local government agency, an institution of higher education, an academic teaching hospital, a medical center, or a research institute that is affiliated with an institution of higher education;

income from service on advisory committees or review panels for a federal, state, or local government agency, an institution of higher education, an academic teaching hospital, a medical center, or a research institute that is affiliated with an institution of higher education.

Reimbursed or sponsored travel for researchers having no PHS-funding involvement.

Policy and Responsibilities.

A potential conflict of interest may exist whenever an Investigator possesses, or the Investigator's spouse or dependent children possess, a Significant Financial Interest in an Entity that may impact proposed, awarded or ongoing HSC Research involving the Investigator. However, potential conflicts of interest are not limited to financial interests. A potential conflict of interest may also exist whenever an Investigator, or a Relative of the Investigator, possesses an interest in an Entity that appears to be related to the Investigator's Institutional Responsibilities. In general, a potential conflict of interest will be considered to exist whenever professional judgment concerning the performance of Research or Institutional Responsibilities of an Investigator could be unduly influenced by a secondary interest. A potential conflict of interest also exists when Research will have a material adverse impact on institutional resources or on subordinate faculty, students and staff.

Disclosure and Review of Situations Involving Potential Conflicts of Interest:

- In order to help in the identification of potential conflicts of interest, each Investigator shall be required to complete at least annually an "Annual Disclosure of Conflict of Interest Statement" (hereinafter referred to as "Annual Disclosure Statement") regardless of support. The Annual Disclosure Statement requires the Investigator to disclose any Significant Financial Interests, or other potential conflicts of interest that may be related to the Investigator's Research or Institutional Responsibilities. The Annual Disclosure Statement shall be made on a form approved by the Division of Research and Innovation. Throughout the year, the Annual Disclosure Statement must be amended by the Investigator to disclose material changes as well as new Significant Financial Interests or other potential conflicts of interest as they arise.
- *Annual Disclosure Statement:* Annual Disclosure Statements shall be submitted to the Division of Research and Innovation by the first working day in October each year. Preliminary review of the Annual Disclosure Statement will be conducted by the Division of Research and Innovation. Individual Investigators will be notified of any additional information and supporting documentation that is necessary to complete review of the Annual Disclosure Statement. Information necessary to complete the process shall be submitted within 15 calendar days from the date requested unless this time deadline is extended by the Division of Research and Innovation. Regardless of review by the Division of Research and Innovation, it remains the responsibility of the individual Investigator to fully disclose all relevant information on the Annual Disclosure Statement.
- After the preliminary review, Annual Disclosure Statements will be divided into two categories by the Division of Research and Innovation:
 - Annual Disclosure Statements that do not involve a Significant Financial Interest or other potential conflicts of interest will require no further review. Records will be maintained showing that a preliminary review has taken place and no further action is needed.
 - Annual Disclosure Statements that involve a potential Significant Financial Interest or other potential conflicts of interest will require full review and written approval by the RCOI Committee.

The Division of Research and Innovation will inform the Investigator and the Investigator's supervisor whenever an Annual Disclosure Statement is submitted to the RCOI Committee for review.

- After conducting a full review, the RCOI Committee may make one of the following determinations:

- No conflicts of interest exist;
- A Financial Conflict of Interest or other potential conflict of interest exists and Investigator may conduct such Research only if the Investigator divests the conflicting interest or severs the relationship that creates the conflicting interest;
- A Financial Conflict of Interest or other potential conflict of interest exists and, the Investigator must work with their supervisor to propose a Conflict Management Plan(s) for the identified conflict of interest(s) to ensure appropriate management of the conflict. The Conflict Management Plan must be acceptable to the RCOI Committee in order for the Research to proceed.

The RCOI Committee shall inform the Investigator and the Vice President for Research of its determination related to an Annual Disclosure Statement.

- *Amendment to Annual Disclosure Statement:* Throughout the year, Investigators are required to submit amended Annual Disclosure Statements to the Division of Research and Innovation within 30 days of discovering or acquiring a new Significant Financial Interest or other potential conflict of interest. An amended Annual Disclosure Statement must also be filed prior to any modification of a Conflict Management Plan. Amended Annual Disclosure Statements will be reviewed by the RCOI Committee in the same manner as Annual Disclosure Statements.
- For Investigators who have applied for or are funded by PHS, an amended Annual Disclosure Statement must be filed with the Division of Research and Innovation within 30 days of the occurrence of any sponsored travel that is not reimbursed through institutional funds. At a minimum, Investigators will report the purpose of the sponsored travel, monetary value, the identity of the sponsor, the destination and the duration of the trip. However, an amended Annual Disclosure Statement is not required to be filed for travel that is reimbursed or sponsored by:
 - a federal, state, or local government agency,
 - an Institution of higher education,
 - an academic teaching hospital,
 - a medical center, or
 - a research institute that is affiliated with an institution of higher education.

The Research Conflict of Interest Committee:

- A standing RCOI Committee shall consist of not less than five members which will include: (i) representation from HSC colleges and schools; (ii) one or more representative(s) from HSC's Institutional Review Board or the Office of Research Compliance; (iii) Vice President for Research or designee, who will only vote in the case of a tie; (iv) at least one representative from each of the following: Office of Research Development and Commercialization, and the Office of Sponsored Programs. The RCOI Committee will be appointed by the Vice President for Research. Members shall serve three-year terms, which will be staggered. Committee members shall elect a Chair annually and may appoint an additional member as Vice Chair. Should any member fail to complete a term, the Vice President for Research shall appoint a replacement for the remainder of that member's term. The Vice President for Research may remove a committee member at any time for failure to perform committee duties adequately or as required to serve the best interests of the institution. A member shall recuse him or herself in areas where the member has a personal or professional interest. The UNT System Chancellor shall resolve any conflict of interest issues involving the President of HSC.

The RCOI Committee will meet as needed for disclosure reviews, preferably on a monthly basis. A quorum of three members is required for the RCOI Committee to perform its functions. Each member has one vote and decisions are to be made by a majority vote. The Vice President for Research (or designee) shall resolve any ties in voting. The RCOI Committee chair (or Vice Chair if the Chair is involved in the potential conflict) along with a designated individual from the Office of Research Compliance may expeditiously review a disclosure and make a determination to ensure timely review. All expedited reviews will be reported to the RCOI Committee at the next convened meeting.

Responsibilities of the Division of Research and Innovation:

- In addition to other responsibilities as specified in this policy, the Division of Research and Innovation shall be responsible for:
 - providing Investigators with a copy of the HSC Research Conflict of Interest Policy;
 - providing training on Financial Conflict of Interests to HSC Investigators, which shall at a minimum meet all of the requirements of 42 CFR Part 50, Subpart F and 45 CFR Part 94;
 - monitoring compliance of Investigators with the Annual Disclosure Statements, Conflict Management Plans and this policy;
 - performing a retrospective review of an Investigator's activities to determine whether Research was biased in design, conduct or reporting within 120 days of determining that the Investigator has failed to disclose a Significant Financial Interest or other potential conflict of interest or comply with an applicable Conflict Management Plan. This retrospective review shall be documented in accordance with 45 CFR Part 94; and
 - overseeing the establishment of adequate enforcement mechanisms to promote conformance with this policy.

Responsibilities of Investigators:

- In addition to other responsibilities as specified in this policy, HSC Investigators shall be responsible for:
 - reading, understanding and complying with this policy;
 - certifying in the conflict of interest disclosure form required by the Division of Research and Innovation prior to engaging in any funded research that they are not a participant in a Malign Foreign Talent Recruitment Program. HSC expressly prohibits university employees, students, and faculty members who engage in funded research from participation in/with malign foreign talent recruitment or malign foreign talent-like recruitment programs.
 - informing all co-investigators, staff, students, contractors, subrecipients, and other individuals responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of the Investigator's Research of their obligation to comply with this policy;
 - cooperating with the RCOI Committee and the Division of Research and Innovation to ensure compliance with all requirements set forth in this policy;
 - complying with the terms and conditions of Annual Disclosure Statements and Conflict Management Plans, including providing required annual status reports in a timely manner and updating information as needed; and
 - completing required initial and subsequent training at annually or as determined to maintain compliance related to this policy.

Research with Human Subjects:

- In addition to the Annual Disclosure Statement required to be filed under this policy, Investigators who plan to participate in the design, conduct or reporting of human subject research must submit individual, protocol-specific conflict of interest disclosure forms to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC). In the event that a Financial Conflict of Interest or other potential conflict of interest needs to be addressed, ORC and the North Texas Regional Institutional Review Board will manage the potential conflicts as needed to comply with human subject protection policies and procedures. ORC will forward their and Institutional Review Board findings to the RCOI Committee for review.

Sponsored Project Proposals:

- No sponsored project application seeking funding from a PHS agency may be submitted, unless HSC has received from each Investigator who would conduct Research under the proposal, current Annual Disclosure Statements. No award from any funding source may be finalized, and no account may be set up unless HSC has received from each Investigator who would conduct Research under the proposal, current Annual Disclosure Statements. In addition, the Office of Sponsored Programs will not set up sponsored project accounts until potential conflicts of interests have been managed or resolved to the satisfaction of the RCOI Committee. Investigators shall be responsible for confirming at the time of any proposal submission that their current Annual Disclosure Statement is accurate in regard to the proposal and shall be responsible for amending the Annual Disclosure Statement if it is not accurate in regard to the proposal.
- The Division of Research and Innovation will ensure compliance with all federal regulations that require certifications and reporting including that each application for funding to the PHS include specific certifications and agreements in regard to this policy and financial conflict of interest.
- Investigators shall make the following certification to HSC and to the granting agency prior to the submission of the grant proposal or contract application:

"I have read and understand the University of North Texas Health Science Center Research Conflict of Interest Policy. I certify that this is a complete disclosure of all current Significant Financial Interests and other potential conflicts of interest related to my Research and Institutional Responsibilities. I have used all reasonable diligence in preparing this disclosure and it is, to the best of my knowledge, true and complete. I understand that I have a responsibility to immediately update the above information throughout the fiscal year or during the Research program period if my circumstances change. I will comply with any conditions or restrictions imposed by HSC to manage, reduce or eliminate actual or potential conflicts of interest."

Consulting Agreements Involving Employees:

- Investigators who are contemplating outside professional activities for which they will be paid, such as consulting, must submit a written request for approval to their supervisor. Faculty and staff members must exercise caution in entering into consulting agreements. Many such agreements provide that new inventions and ideas will be assigned to the company employing the faculty or staff member as a consultant. Care should be exercised to ensure that no HSC facilities are used in any way in the performance of the consultant agreement and that the subject matter of inventions to be assigned to the company pursuant to the consulting agreement is not within the scope of the Institutional Responsibilities of the faculty or staff member.

- Rights in inventions within the scope of the faculty and staff member responsibilities to HSC developed using HSC's facilities or funding are owned by HSC pursuant to the HSC Intellectual Property Policy irrespective of the terms of the consulting contract. Each consulting agreement must have written into it or attached to it the paragraph below recognizing HSC's overriding rights:

"The Company recognizes that the consultant is a faculty or staff member of the University of North Texas Health Science Center ("HSC") (and as such, a faculty or staff member of the State of Texas), and has existing and overriding contractual obligations to HSC. Nothing in this agreement shall be construed as requiring the consultant to violate those obligations. The Company specifically recognizes that the consultant has a contractual obligation that assigns to HSC all Intellectual Property at the moment of creation pursuant to the HSC Intellectual Property Policy, when the Intellectual Property is related to the consultant's employment responsibilities to HSC."

Educational Requirements:

- Investigators who are required to submit an Annual Disclosure Statement to HSC must complete training on the HSC Research Conflict of Interest Policy, procedures, and applicable federal regulations prior to engaging in applicable Research; thereafter, at least annually; and immediately when any of the following circumstances apply:
 - HSC revises its research conflict of interest policies or procedures in any manner that affects the Investigators;
 - a new Investigator moves to HSC; or
 - HSC finds that an Investigator is not in compliance with applicable federal regulations, the HSC Research Conflict of Interest Policy, or a Conflict Management Plan.

Subrecipients:

- Subrecipients of HSC Research funding originating from a PHS agency that are not employed by or otherwise affiliated with HSC must comply with this policy by providing a written assurance that their employing institution has enacted a conflict of interest policy that is in compliance with the applicable federal regulations, including 42 CFR Part 50, Subpart F and 45 CFR Part 94 dated August 2012 or later. Furthermore, the subrecipient institution must provide written assurance that any conflicts related to the project under consideration have been managed, reduced or eliminated pursuant to the institution's policy. A subrecipient's institution can provide the appropriate written assurances by submitting to HSC a subrecipient form provided by the HSC Office of Sponsored Programs. Subrecipient institutions or individuals must contractually agree to report identified Financial Conflicts of Interests or other potential conflicts of interest to HSC in reasonably sufficient time to allow HSC to meet its reporting obligations.

Reporting Obligations:

- For PHS funded Research, the Division of Research and Innovation will be responsible for notifying the awarding component of the federal agency of the identification and management of any Financial Conflict of Interest within 60 days of the initial determination by the RCOI Committee that a Financial Conflict of Interest exists. For PHS funded and all other types of Research, if required by a federal or state agency or as determined appropriate by the Vice President for Research, the Division of Research and Innovation will report any Financial Conflict of Interest or other potential conflict of interest to the funding source prior to expending any funds, and any interest identified as conflicting subsequent to the initial report will be reported within 60 calendar days of identification. If an Investigator's noncompliance with this policy may have biased the design, conduct or reporting of Research, the Division of Research and Innovation will promptly notify the awarding agency of the corrective action taken or to be taken by the University, if required. For PHS funded research, the mitigation report will contain the information required under 45 CFR Part 94. Thereafter, the Division of Research and Innovation will submit Financial Conflict of Interest reports annually, if required by federal or state law.
- A copy of all notifications to external agencies will be kept in the Division of Research and Innovation and in the Office of Sponsored Programs' files to which the notification pertains.
- For PHS funded Research, HSC will make Financial Conflict of Interest information available within five business days to any requestor upon receipt of a written request. For all other types of Research, HSC will make Financial Conflict of Interest information required to be released by law available within the time frame required by the Texas Public Information Act.

Record Retention:

- If there is a federal requirement, all records related to disclosures and actions taken to manage potential conflicts of interest will be maintained for three (3) years from the date of submission of the final expenditure report at the completion of the award, for the time periods specified in 48 CFR part 4, subpart 4.7, or for the minimum amount of time required under HSC's Records Management Policy, whichever is longer. All other records related to disclosures and actions taken to manage potential conflicts of interest will be maintained for at least the minimum amount of time required under HSC's Records Management Policy or as otherwise required by federal or state law, whichever is longer. Retained records shall be made available to funding agencies for audit as required by federal and state law.

Enforcement:

- The Division of Research and Innovation shall conduct audits of Investigators and Annual Disclosure Statements to determine compliance with approved Conflict Management Plans on file and with this policy.
- The RCOI Committee will review all reported breaches of this policy, including:
 - failure to make required disclosure(s);
 - incomplete or inaccurate information in any disclosure;
 - failure to update a disclosure when required to do so;
 - non-compliance with a Conflict Management Plan; or
 - non-compliance with any other directive of the RCOI Committee.

- If the RCOI Committee concludes that a breach of this policy has occurred, it will so notify the applicable Investigator in writing and such Investigator will be given the opportunity to respond in writing or in person to the RCOI Committee and take corrective action within a reasonable time period, typically 15 calendar days. If such corrective action is not taken within the specified time period, the RCOI Committee may recommend sanctions to the Vice President for Research.

Sanctions:

- The Vice President for Research, in consultation with the RCOI Committee, may recommend sanctions and disciplinary actions when an Investigator fails to disclose Significant Financial Interests or other potential conflicts of interest or otherwise fails to comply with this policy. Sanctions may include a letter in a personnel file, restrictions on future submission of Research proposals, and other disciplinary actions up to and including dismissal in accordance with other HSC policies. Recommendations of the Vice President for Research shall be made to the appropriate HSC official depending on the status of an Investigator.
- If a determination is made by a federal funding agency that clinical research funded by PHS to evaluate the safety or effectiveness of a drug, medical device or treatment has been designed, conducted, or reported by an Investigator with a Financial Conflict of Interest that was not managed or reported by HSC as required by federal regulation, then HSC shall require the Investigator to disclose the Financial Conflict of Interest in each public presentation of the results of the research and to request an addendum to previously published presentations that address the Financial Conflict of Interest.
- In addition, Investigators may also be subject to criminal sanctions or civil liability under federal or state law. Violations of full and prompt disclosure may result in the loss of grant funding and sanctions regarding future funding from federal agencies.

Reference.

Resources, Forms & Tools:

- [HSC RCOI Webpage](#)
- [HSC RCOI Standard Operating Procedures](#)
- [HSC RCOI Disclosure Form](#)

Applicable Laws, Rules and Regulations:

- Chapter 572 of the Texas Government Code
- 42 CFR Part 50, Subpart F
- 45 CFR Part 94
- CHIPS and Science Act of 2022
- 42 U.S.C. § 19237

Related Policies and Procedures:

- HSC Employee Ethics and Standards of Conduct
- HSC Conflicts of Interest, Outside Activities and Nepotism
- HSC Records Management
- HSC Intellectual Property

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