MSU Conflict of Interest Guidance:

Educational / Research Supervision and Conflict of Interest

See also: Guidance: MSU Contract with Entity in which MSU Employee Holds an Interest

The purpose of this guidance document is to ensure fair and objective supervision of:

- Undergraduate students,
- Graduate students (master’s or doctoral),
- Postdoctoral trainees, and
- Support staff

….when involved in research funded by or related to an entity in which the research supervisor holds a significant financial interest.

A faculty member with a supervisory role in academic research has the obligation to foster and protect the collective trust of the community of scholars by acting responsibly and being impartial and open in collecting, synthesizing, and sharing information, and by disclosing situations that might lead others to question their independence of judgment. Students who are supervised or mentored by a faculty member are entitled to impartial stewardship of opportunities for intellectual growth and advancement.

MSU’s Policy on Conflict of Interest requires that faculty or academic staff persons who are investigators in University research projects disclose significant financial interests related to the project and/or to their institutional responsibilities; and all faculty/academic staff must disclose a conflict of interest affecting their university duties. In addition, the terms of any contract between MSU and a MSU employee or entity in which a MSU employee holds and interest must be approved by the Board of Trustees. The MSU Faculty Conflict of Interest Officer (FCOI) has the responsibility for evaluating these situations, and managing or resolving conflicts of interest, often by implementing a Conflict Management Plan (CMP). (See coi.msu.edu for more information about conflict of interest at MSU.)

Managing a potential conflict of interest is critical when the faculty member holding a financial interest in an entity has supervisory or mentoring oversight of people conducting research related to that entity. If, for example, a faculty member with a financial interest related to a project intends to serve as a project director and plans to have research conducted by a graduate student or postdoctoral trainee under their supervision, the student or trainee may be vulnerable to pressure because of their subordinate role.

Therefore, oversight and added protections must be provided to students, postdoctoral trainees, and other staff conducting research or scholarship that is funded by, or related to, an entity in which the faculty supervisor holds a significant financial interest. This additional protection and oversight should be imposed as one condition of a Conflict Management Plan. Also, as an alternative condition of a CMP, the chair or dean may consider appointment of another faculty member to assume leadership responsibilities for the project or supervision of affected graduate students or postdoctoral researchers.

Issues to Consider in Relation to Educational or Research Supervision:

- Does the faculty member hold supervisory or educational responsibility for a graduate student, postdoctoral trainee, or support/academic staff person who:
  - Works on a research project that could materially affect an entity in which the faculty member holds an interest, or one of its competitors.
  - Is employed by, or receives other payments from, an entity in which the faculty member holds a significant financial interest?
  - Is being recruited for employment by an entity in which the faculty member holds a significant financial interest?
- Will a student’s or post-doctoral trainee’s efforts contribute to the completion of work related to the conflict of interest situation?
- Will the student’s work contribute to their thesis, dissertation or other project for academic credit?
- Are there any constraints or restrictions imposed on reporting or publication by graduate students or postdoctoral trainees as a result of their efforts related to the conflict of interest situation?
- Does the faculty member plan to serve as graduate committee chair or member of the graduate committee for these graduate students?

Graduate and Other Student Rights:

Article 2 of Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR) articulates the key rights and responsibilities that form the foundation for "a proper relationship between instructor and student…fundamental to the University’s function." Among these, the graduate student:

- Shares the responsibility with faculty “for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility”;
- "Has a right to be protected from personal exploitation and to receive recognition for scholarly assistance to faculty”;
- Has the responsibility “to form a guidance committee with the concurrence of the unit chairperson / director or designated representative.”

While not prescribed by policy, there is a parallel professional and moral responsibility to postdoctoral trainees as well as graduate students.
Before the academic unit initiates an appointment for a graduate student / postdoctoral trainee for research involving a conflicted entity, the chair and dean shall jointly schedule a meeting with the student(s) / postdoctoral trainee(s) to be appointed, including a representative of the Graduate School and the Faculty Conflict of Interest Officer. Meeting participants shall discuss details of the conflict situation to ensure that the student(s) / postdoctoral trainee(s) understand their rights and responsibilities. **The attached form must be signed by all parties as a prerequisite for initiating the appointment.**

When the conflicted faculty member supervising the graduate student does not serve on the student’s guidance committee, a copy of the checklist with requisite signatures will be made available to the chair of the guidance committee.

**Contact:**
For consultation and assistance, please contact:

Brian Mattes, Faculty Conflict of Interest Officer  
408 W. Circle Drive, 105D Olds Hall  
fcoio@msu.edu  
517.884.7000 office / voice mail  
517.432.9555 fax
MSU Conflict of Interest
Checklist for Ensuring Fair and Objective Supervision of Student / Postdoctoral Trainee Research

Name: ___________________________ ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
☐ Undergraduate Student ☐ Masters Student ☐ Doctoral Student ☐ Postdoctoral Trainee

Campus Address ___________________________ Email ___________________________

Academic Unit / Graduate Program ___________________________

Name(s) of faculty research supervisor with a related financial interest: ___________________________

Academic Unit ___________________________

Name of entity in which there is a related financial interest: ___________________________

Name of Guidance Committee Chair (if different): ___________________________

Scope of work funded by, or related to, entities in which the research supervisor holds a personal financial interest:

Please describe and attach a description

Time period for student/postdoctoral trainee research/scholarship: ___________________________

Source of support for student/postdoctoral trainee research/scholarly activities: ___________________________

Checklist for Discussion

- Conflict of interest requirements and disclosure of the faculty member’s personal financial interest;
- Graduate student rights, responsibilities and resources (human & information) for guidance and assistance (e.g., academic advising, Office of the Ombudsman, Research Integrity Officer, etc.);
- Terms and conditions governing financial support that may restrict or limit publication or sharing of resulting research or scholarship results;
- Student / postdoctoral trainee expectations and responsibilities for:
  - Research / scholarly work activities (program scope and extent of time required);
  - Management and retention of research/scholarship data;
  - Determination of authorship credit for publication of research/scholarship results;
  - Use of resulting research/scholarship results in a thesis/dissertation.

By signing this checklist form, I verify that I have met with the individuals named below to discuss and clarify any question that I have concerning my rights and responsibilities related to participation in the research/scholarship described above. I understand that the professor who will supervise my work has a personal financial interest related to the research.

I choose to participate in this research project by my free consent, and I am free to discontinue participation at any time without recrimination.

Student / Postdoctoral Trainee ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

By signing this checklist form, we verify that we have met to discuss and clarify questions concerning graduate student/postdoctoral trainee rights and responsibilities related to the research/scholarship described above. We will ensure, to the extent possible, that research supervision provided is fair and objective according to MSU policies.

Academic Unit Chair ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Academic Unit Dean ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Faculty Conflict of Interest Officer ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
Representative of the Graduate School: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________