



NEWS

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UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS URGE EXPANDED CAMPUS OVERSIGHT OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST IN RESEARCH

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The Association of American Universities, which represents 63 leading North American research universities, today released a report that makes specific recommendations for strengthening universities' oversight of potential financial conflicts of interest in research. The goal of the report is to help universities sustain public confidence in their research activities in a time when commercialization of university research is becoming more common.

The report deals with conflicts of interest affecting both individual researchers and whole institutions.

For *individual* conflicts of interest, the report focuses on improving existing university management systems and regulatory compliance. The report breaks new ground in this area by providing, for the first time, suggested operating guidelines intended to help reduce the variation among institutions in their approaches to this issue. Several specific guidelines go beyond current federal regulations by calling for the following:

- annual disclosure of all relevant financial interests
- disclosure of financial interests related to nonfederally sponsored research as well as federally sponsored research
- not allowing researchers to have financial interests in research involving human participants unless there are "compelling circumstances" to justify an exception.
- connecting conflict of interest review processes with Institutional Review Board processes.

The entire section of the report dealing with *institutional* conflicts of interest breaks new ground, since there is currently no federal regulation or even guidance in this area and no university group has previously addressed this issue in such a comprehensive manner. The report defines institutional conflict of interest as involving conflicts between campus research and a university's equity holdings or royalty arrangements as well as the financial holdings of

senior university officers. The report urges that campuses develop policies governing disclosure, management, and occasional prohibition of all such financial interests.

The report was produced by a task force of AAU-university presidents who in June 2000 developed an AAU report on protections of human participants in research. The task force is co-chaired by University of Southern California president Steven B. Sample and University of Nebraska president L. Dennis Smith. Other members include Columbia University president George Rupp, University of Iowa president Mary Sue Coleman, and Robert C. Dynes, chancellor of the University of California, San Diego. The report has been endorsed by the association's executive committee and is being transmitted this week to the presidents and other key officials of the association's member institutions.

The report is available on the association's website at www.aau.edu. Printed copies can be requested from Karen Bath in the AAU office at 202-408-7500.

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