

**Guidance for Completing the Online Affirmation of Awareness  
and Disclosure of Potential Conflicts of Interest and Conflicts of Commitment  
including Frequently Asked Questions**

The Affirmation of Awareness and Disclosure of Potential Conflicts is now an annual requirement for FAS faculty. It has three purposes:

- to ensure that FAS appointees understand and agree to adhere to all relevant FAS and University policies;
- to identify any financial or other relationships that could present a conflict of interest or conflict of commitment, or other conflicts with FAS or University policies that govern research, instruction, and other professional activities;
- to comply with federal financial disclosure requirements for Investigators (see below) who have or seek funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) or one of the Public Health Service (PHS) agencies (NIH, NIMH, etc.), or certain private sponsors with specific disclosure requirements.

The web-based Affirmation and Disclosure asks the questions necessary to accomplish the above purposes. Although online completion is preferred, there is also a paper version of the web-based form for individuals who do not have access to a computer. If you require a paper version, you may obtain one from Dean Gallant (495-2628, 1414 Massachusetts Avenue, Room 250).

**Question 1**

Individuals completing the Affirmation and Disclosure must indicate whether they are engaged in *any* activity that presents the potential for a conflict as defined by FAS or University policy, and that has not yet been reported to the Committee on Professional Conduct—either directly or through the Affirmation and Disclosure process—or that has changed since having been reported previously. Conflicts fall primarily into two broad categories: *conflicts of interest* and *conflicts of commitment*.

**Conflicts of interest** can arise when an appointee has the opportunity to design or modify research or teaching activities in ways that could significantly and inappropriately benefit external activities and/or personal finances (including those of a member of his or her immediate family), or influence the University's business decisions in ways that could lead to personal gain or give improper advantage to family members or associates. For example, a member with a personal financial interest in a company (through a consulting agreement, equity ownership, or service on a Scientific Advisory Board) may be conducting University-based research in an area that is related to the company's business interests. By definition, this situation may create a conflict of interest and should be reported.

*A conflict of interest is dependent upon the situation—not upon the individual.* Note that the potential for a conflict of interest does not mean that the activity is unallowable, but it may mean that measures need be taken to ensure that the conflicting interest does not inappropriately influence the design or conduct or reporting of University-based research.

**Conflicts of commitment** include situations in which members' external activities could interfere, or appear to interfere, with their obligations to the University. For example, FAS rules stipulate that full-time faculty members may devote no more than 20% of their time to extramural research and/or consulting, and may not assume significant executive responsibilities for an outside organization.

Faculty or investigators who answer “yes” to Question 1, signifying that their circumstances may present a conflict, will be asked to provide details of the situation on page 2 of the Affirmation and Disclosure form.

## **Question 2**

Individuals completing the Affirmation and Disclosure must also indicate whether they serve as **Investigator** on a current or pending grant or contract from the NSF, from a Public Health Service agency (NIH, NIMH, etc.), from the American Heart Association, or from the American Cancer Society, or whether they plan to apply to one or more of those sponsors during the next year. The term “Investigator” includes the Principal Investigator and any other person(s) responsible for the design, conduct, or reporting of research funded by the relevant sponsor. Although no individuals—other than the PI and any co-PIs—are automatically deemed “investigators” under the federal regulations, the prevailing opinion among federal agencies is that Key Personnel listed on grant proposals, as well as others with hands-on research responsibility, should all be considered as “investigators.” Individuals who answer “yes” will then be asked if they, or their family members, have any significant financial interest(s) that would reasonably appear to be affected by activities funded or proposed for funding by those sponsors. If so, they will be asked to describe the nature and basis of the financial interest(s), and to detail steps that are being taken or will be taken to oversee and/or manage any conflict of interest.

## **Question 3**

This question asks if there are any other activities not previously described that may create a conflict, and, if so, asks for additional details, including an explanation of steps being taken to oversee or manage those activities. This would include conflicts involving research sponsored by entities other than those cited in Question 2; University-based research without external funding but related to an individual’s private financial interests or consulting or advisory board obligations; or situations presenting a conflict of commitment (e.g., an appointment at or teaching responsibilities for another educational institution, or an executive role with an outside company or organization).

## **Certification Statement**

Submission of the Affirmation and Disclosure constitutes acknowledgment that you are familiar with relevant FAS and university policies, as detailed in *Principles and Policies that Govern Your Research, Instruction, and Other Professional Activities* (a.k.a. the “Greybook,” available online at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research/greybook>); that you have reported any circumstances presenting the potential for a conflict of interest or conflict of commitment and have consulted with designated officials as required; and that you agree to update your Affirmation and Disclosure statement promptly if relevant circumstances change, or upon request.

## **Completing the Affirmation and Disclosure online**

You may access the Affirmation and Disclosure through a secure website at <https://asperin.fas.harvard.edu/disclosure/web/> (PIN login required). If you wish to review the questions on the website before you complete the form, a fully-functional demonstration version is also available at the same site. (No PIN login is required for the demonstration version and no information you enter in the demonstration version will be saved.)

## **Examples and Frequently Asked Questions**

Q: Do I need to declare income from royalties on a textbook I've written?

A: No. Authoring textbooks is considered part of a faculty member’s normal duties.

Q: Do I need to declare my, or my family's, holdings in mutual funds?

A: No.

Q: What about stock in large publicly traded companies (Apple, AT&T, GE, HP, etc.) that produce equipment we use in our laboratory?

A: There is ordinarily no need to declare holdings in such companies, unless the stock was received as compensation for consulting or advisory services.

Q: Do I need to declare stock options that currently have no actual cash value?

A: Yes, if the business of the company could reasonably be perceived as being related to your university-based research.

Q: If I have a financial interest in a company that wants to sponsor research in my laboratory, what do I need to do?

A: You must disclose any proposed arrangements to the Committee on Professional Conduct (CPC). For such an arrangement to be allowed to proceed the details will need to be worked out with the CPC and, and, where appropriate, the Office for Technology Development (OTD). An acceptable arrangement may not always be possible without some alteration to the financial interest or to the research plan; regardless, the details must be arranged *prior* to the acceptance of any research funds. Any such financial relationship must also be disclosed to all staff who will be involved in the proposed research, and mentioned in any publications arising from the work; under certain circumstances, the Harvard Corporation must also be informed of the proposed arrangement.

Q: I am a founder of a privately-held startup company to which Harvard has licensed some technology developed in my lab. I hold equity in the company. Can my graduate students or postdocs work for that company?

A: Decisions about the best academic interests of students and trainees must not be made by individuals who may stand to gain financially from their efforts. Such situations should be discussed with the CPC and advice sought from individuals who are in a position to judge with impartiality, such as the departmental director of graduate studies or the appropriate dean.

Q: I reported a significant financial interest via the Affirmation process some time ago, but it was not related to research I was then conducting. Now I am thinking of doing some work in that area. What should I report?

A: You should indicate on your Affirmation and Disclosure form, at Question 2 or 3, depending on the source of funding for the proposed research, the relationship between your financial interest and the proposed research, and what steps, if any, you are taking to manage that relationship. You may also confer with the Chair of the CPC directly, if you prefer.

Other examples of conflicts of interest or conflicts of commitment can be found at

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research/greybook/policies.html> In general, if you have any question about whether an activity is acceptable per FAS or University policy, or whether special arrangements need be made, you should consult with the CPC Secretary (Dean Gallant, [drg@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:drg@fas.harvard.edu)), or with the FAS Research Integrity Officer, Ken Carson ([kcarson@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:kcarson@fas.harvard.edu)). Professor Dennis Thompson, CPC chair, is also available for further consultation ([dennis\\_thompson@harvard.edu](mailto:dennis_thompson@harvard.edu)).