

	Brandon University Conflict of Interest in Research Policy	<i>First Approved: June 23, 2012</i>
		<i>Updated: June 23, 2012</i>
Board of Governors Policy	<i>Approved by</i> <i>Board of Governors</i> <i>Administered by</i> <i>Senate</i>	<i>Reviewed: June 23, 2012</i>

Purpose:

Brandon University (BU) has an interest in ensuring that the conduct of research is not compromised by real or perceived Conflicts of Interest (COI). This policy is intended to ensure and maintain the public’s confidence in research. Brandon University holds trust relationships with participants, research sponsors, researchers and society. As such, BU may have financial or reputational interests including, but not limited to, the provision of education and the promotion of research that conflict with the University’s obligations to protect and respect human dignity as characterized by the core principles of this Policy.

This policy is intended to:

- a) promote transparency, thereby increasing public trust in the research enterprise;
- b) create a culture of trust in the research community;
- c) help to educate the University’s community;
- d) strive to reduce the negative impact of COI;
- e) ensure visibility and consistent application of measures to prevent and deal with COI; and
- f) assist researchers in recognizing COI and to establish principles to ensure that COI are properly disclosed, and consistently assessed and managed.

Scope:

This policy applies to faculty members, undergraduate students taking part in research, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and all other personnel involved directly or indirectly in research, including, but not limited to, professional associates, librarians, research associates, instructional associates, adjunct professors, visiting professors, and University administrators and officials representing the University.

Conflict of Interest:

Conflict of Interest (COI) may arise when activities or situations place a person or the University in a real, perceived or potential conflict between their duties or responsibilities related to research and their personal, University or other interests. Conflict of Interest may occur when individuals’ or University’s judgments and actions in relation to research are, or could be, affected by personal, University or other interests, including, but not limited to, business, commercial or financial interests, whether of

individuals, their family members, their friends, or their former, current or prospective professional associations – or of the University itself.

COI that create divided loyalties may distract researchers, research ethics boards (REBs), and the University from concerns for the welfare of participants and are contrary to the core principles of research ethics. Failure to disclose and manage conflicts may impede the informed and autonomous choices of individuals to participate in research. Prospective participants need to know about real, potential or perceived COI in order to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. COI may also undermine the respect for participants.

It is preferable to avoid or prevent being in a position of conflict of interest, if possible. When it is not possible to avoid a COI, then it shall be disclosed to the appropriate people and steps taken to minimize or manage the conflict. Researchers, their University and REBs should identify and address COI – real, potential or perceived – to discharge professional and University obligations, maintain public confidence and trust, and ensure accountability. In some cases, the conflict cannot be managed and the University, the researcher or the REB member may need to abandon one of the interests in conflict. When necessary, researchers may have to manage a conflict of interest either by disclosing it to participants or by removing themselves from the research.

Examples of Conflict of Interest in Research:

In the area of research, particular vigilance is required to preserve public confidence in the outcomes of research. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some examples of COI in Research:

- a) where a researcher, or a proximate third party has a financial interest (e.g. the receipt or expectation of receipt of anything of monetary value, including pay or salary or other payments for services (for example, consulting fees or honoraria), equity (for example, shares or options), security or other ownership interests, and intellectual property rights (for example, patents, copyrights, royalties or options related to such rights) or personal interest (the receipt or expectation of receipt of any personal benefit (workplace or otherwise) of a non-monetary value. in the outcome of his or her research;
- b) where a researcher conducts research for a business or organization in which the person or related party has a financial interest, personal interest or holds an executive position;
- c) where a researcher undertakes research to evaluate a drug or device when the researcher or proximate third party has a financial interest, personal interest or holds an executive position in the business or organization producing the drug or device under evaluation;
- d) where a researcher directs research to serve the needs of a business or organization in which the researcher has a financial interest, personal interest or holds an executive position;
- e) where a person uses research trainees (e.g. students, post-doctoral fellows) or support staff of the University to perform services, for a business or organization in which the researcher has a financial interest, Personal Interest or holds an Executive Position; and

- f) where a researcher influences the purchase of equipment or services from a business or organization in which the researcher or Related Party has a Financial Interest, Personal Interest or holds an Executive Position.

University Conflict of Interest

A University conflict of interest involves a conflict between at least two substantial University obligations that cannot be adequately fulfilled without compromising one or both obligations. Conflicts may occur when pursuing particular goals, for instance, the pursuit of two different “goods,” such as an effort to obtain general infrastructure funding from a donor that conflicts with an effort to promote research that the donor does not wish to support.

University COI may compromise duties of loyalty and lead to biased judgments. Conflicts may also undermine public trust in the ability of the University to carry out its missions, operations and ethical responsibilities in research.

Brandon University may be in conflict of interest, for example, when we:

- a) sponsor a research project;
- b) manage the intellectual property that forms the basis of a research project or stand to benefit from intellectual property resulting from the research;
- c) hold equity in companies and/or receive major donations; or
- d) have conflicting roles carried out by one University official (e.g., the Vice-President (Academic and Provost) who is responsible for the promotion of research activity and funding and also for oversight of research).

Acting in a professional role within the University, individuals (e.g., University president, vice-president, dean of a faculty or department head) are in a conflict of interest when they are subject to competing incentives or functions. These may significantly interfere with the impartial exercise of duties, including legal and ethical obligations within the University structure. The conflict may be chronic, relating to recurring situations resulting from the University structure, or it may be triggered by a unique situation that is not likely to recur.

Senate Research Committees and Conflict of Interest

Senate Research Committees (e.g. Senate Research Committee, Brandon University Research Ethics Committee, Brandon University Animal Care Committee) as entities, or in the persons of the members who make up the committees, also hold trust relationships with participants, research sponsors, researchers and society. Members must also be aware of their own potential for real or perceived COI.

For example, members are in a conflict of interest when their own research projects are under review by their committee, when they are a co-investigator, or when they are in a supervisory or mentoring

relationship with a graduate student applicant. Members may also be in a conflict of interest situation when they have interpersonal or financial relationships with the researchers, or personal or financial interests in a company, labour union or not-for-profit organization that may be the sponsor of the research project, or that may be substantially affected by the research.

COI based on collaborations or disputes with colleagues, students or others may be ongoing or of limited duration. Committees have an obligation to ensure that the fairness and transparency of research ethics review is not compromised by real, potential or perceived COI.

Researcher Conflict of Interest

Researchers and research students hold trust relationships, either directly or indirectly, with participants, research sponsors, Universities, their professional bodies and society. These trust relationships can be put at risk by COI that may compromise independence, objectivity or ethical duties of loyalty. Although the potential for such conflicts has always existed, pressures on researchers (e.g., to delay or withhold dissemination of research outcomes or to use inappropriate recruitment strategies) heighten concerns that COI may affect ethical behaviour.

Researchers' COI may arise from interpersonal relationships (e.g., family or community relationships), financial partnerships, other economic interests (e.g., spin-off companies in which researchers have stakes or private contract research outside of the academic realm), academic interests or any other incentives that may compromise integrity of the research. Conflicts may arise from an individual's involvement in dual and multiple roles within or outside a University. While it may not be possible to eliminate all COI, researchers are expected to identify, minimize or otherwise manage their individual conflicts.

Dual Roles

Dual roles of researchers and their associated obligations (e.g., acting as both a researcher and a therapist, health care provider, caregiver, teacher, advisor, consultant, supervisor, student or employer) may create conflicts, undue influences, power imbalances or coercion that could affect relationships with others and affect decision-making procedures (e.g., consent of participants).

To preserve and not abuse the trust on which many professional relationships rest, researchers should be fully cognizant of COI that may arise from their dual or multiple roles, their rights and responsibilities, and how they can manage the conflict. When acting in dual or multiple roles, the researcher shall disclose the nature of the conflict to the participant in the consent process.

Financial Conflicts of Interest

Real, potential or perceived financial COI may affect any type of research. Researchers should be aware of, and consider, the possibility of financial COI. They should seek to ensure that financial considerations do not serve to diminish respect for the scientific validity and transparency of research procedures.

Financial incentives have the potential to distort researchers' judgment in ensuring the design and conduct of research is ethical. When researchers partner with organizations whose primary motive is profit, they must be aware of the potential for COI. Consideration for the profitability of the research may threaten the ethical integrity of research design and conduct. Not all research sponsored by for-profit organizations gives rise to financial COI.

Principles

The University's policy for addressing COI in Research is based on the principles of Recognition, Disclosure and Management as articulated in Board of Governors' By-Law No. 10:

Recognition: COI in Research must be defined and identified to permit appropriate disclosure and management. COI reflect the situation, not the character of the researcher.

Disclosure: Researchers must take initiative in disclosing COI to the responsible person as defined in Board of Governors' By-Law No. 10 Full and complete disclosure of COI is a key element in protecting the integrity and reputation of the researcher and the University.

Management: Only COI in Research that can be managed in a manner that considers, protects and serves the interests, integrity and reputation of the researchers and of the University and that will withstand the test of reasonable and independent scrutiny will be allowed. COI that cannot be managed will not be allowed.

Related Documents:

Board of Governors' By-Law No. 10
Senate Policy on Academic Integrity
Senate Policy Human Research Ethics

Approved by Senate on June 19, 2012