

# RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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## FACULTY

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# INTRODUCTION

*“Conflict of Interest” ≈ Tension between your personal interest (e.g., financial) and your professional responsibilities (at Harvard for this discussion)*

- Such conflicts are **not necessarily bad...**
  - often an indication of scholarly success & impact
  - e.g., starting a company based on your research
  - e.g., serving as a paid consultant based on your expertise
  
- However, conflicts must be managed properly...  
...that is why we are here!!!!

# WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT CONFLICT... OR [EVEN] PERCEIVED CONFLICT???

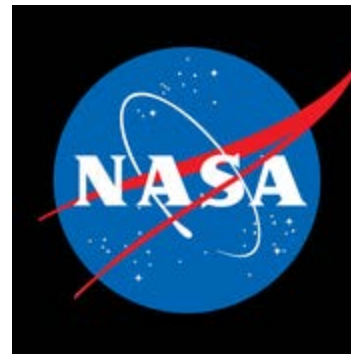
- **Public credibility for research community**
- **Reputation of institution**
- **Reputation of individual scholars**
- **Legality/risk**
- **Optimal training & research without exploitation => progress AND fairness**
- **Optimal translation of knowledge into wider world => add value AND share benefits**

# RON WALSWORTH:

## FAMILIAR WITH HARVARD & CONFLICT

- Harvard PhD in Physics, 1991
- Smithsonian scientist since 1992
- Harvard faculty since 2003
- Research group of ~25 students & postdocs
- PI of millions of \$\$ of Federal research support
- Patents granted & licensed through Harvard
- Industrial funding for research
- Gifts from private entities to support research
- Paid scientific consultant
- Scientific Advisory Board of four companies
- Co-founder of two companies

# CASE STUDY: LEHIGH/NASA ARTICLE



# KEY QUOTES

***Overview: NASA provided funding to ArkLight who, in turn, provided subcontract funding down to Lehigh/Ding.***

“Ding acknowledged working as a consultant for ArkLight...did not say he is an owner of ArkLight. Nor did he mention that his wife is president of the company.”

“...despite Zotova's commitment to work thousands of hours on the project and supervise the Lehigh graduate students conducting experiments and research, she never appeared at the lab.”

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you believe *Lehigh* should have taken additional steps?

*University quote: “if Ding had disclosed those details, it would have triggered a process to mitigate or eliminate the conflict...”*

- What steps should have been taken?
- Would a conflict management plan requiring public disclosure of ownership make a difference?

# CASE STUDY - CLIMATE CONTROL ARTICLES





# KEY QUOTES

“Soon was granted over \$1.2 million from fossil-fuel companies and failed to disclose a conflict of interest in his peer-reviewed publications.... American Petroleum Institute, the Koch brothers, Exxon Mobil and Southern Company...”

“...Soon has received extensive financial support over the past decade from fossil fuel companies and others opposed to government regulation of greenhouse gas emissions– but has not always disclosed those financial links in his technical publications.”

“Soon’s work...is routinely cited by politicians opposed to government action on climate, and widely disputed by mainstream climate researchers.”

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you consider this an *actual* or *perceived* financial conflict?
- Do you believe *Soon* should have taken additional steps to avoid an actual or perceived conflict of interest?
- Do you believe the *Smithsonian* should have taken additional steps?

# CASE STUDY – NUTS ARTICLE



# ARTICLE REVIEW

***Overview: Harvard research stated that eating nuts can reduce a person's risk of dying from cancer, heart disease, and a number of other causes. Funding was obtained from the International Tree Nut Council Nutrition Research and Education Foundation, "a nonprofit organization that represents nine tree nut industries." Background note: Researcher followed financial disclosure institutional policies and journal requirements.***

**Quote from researcher:** "We don't ignore the funding source but it's actually not one of major issues in our decision-making process."

**Quote regarding journal:** "American Journal of Clinical Nutrition... seven [editorial board members] list financial disclosures with major food manufacturers..."

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you consider this an *individual* financial conflict?
- Do you perceive there may be biasness in the research results? Why is this important?
- Are there any steps the *researchers* could have taken in order to alleviate the perception of biasness?
- Do you believe the *journal* is biased?

# Conflict Scenario

What does a conflict look like?

- Biasness in research decisions
- Reallocation of resources to financial interest

Who helps protect?

- Scientific “arbitrator”
- COI officer
- Ombudsmen, Whistleblower

What protections are in place?

- Harvard policies and procedures
- Management plans
- Journal COI policies

# COI-Related Considerations

Can I start my own small business?

How do I do this and what steps do I consider?

Can my small business obtain federal funding – e.g., Dept of Defense?

Can I receive research funding for my Harvard research from my small business?

Can I receive a gift from my small business to benefit my Harvard research?

**\* Coordinated with other offices including Office of Technology Development**

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**UNIVERSITY POLICY ON CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:**

[HTTP://VPR.HARVARD.EDU/FILES/OVPR-TEST/FILES/HARVARD\\_UNIVERSITY\\_FCOI\\_POLICY\\_0.PDF](http://vpr.harvard.edu/files/ovpr-test/files/harvard_university_fcoi_policy_0.pdf)

**FAS/SEAS CONFLICTS OF INTEREST WEBSITE:**

[HTTP://RESEARCH.FAS.HARVARD.EDU/CONFLICTS-OF-INTEREST](http://research.fas.harvard.edu/conflicts-of-interest)