

# 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 ~20 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 – NUTS ARTICLE



# KEY QUOTES FROM ARTICLE

*“...questioned the researcher’s decision to get partial funding from a foundation that represents tree nut suppliers...”*

*“We don’t ignore the funding source but it’s actually not one of major issues in our decision-making process.”*

*“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?
- Are there any additional steps the *institution* should have taken in order to alleviate the perception of biasness?

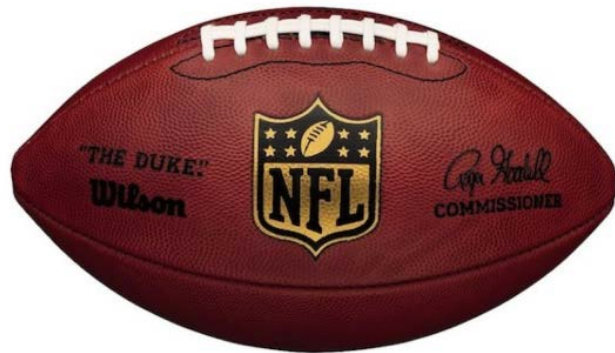
# FURTHER THOUGHTS...

*“...a 2007 study found that more than half of nutrition studies involving beverages were funded by drink makers and that none of the studies that was fully funded by beverage manufacturers reported negative results — compared with 37 percent of studies that did not rely on industry grants...”*

- **Do you feel there may be biasness?**
- **Do you feel the editors need to reduce or eliminate the conflict? How?**



# CASE STUDY – NFL ARTICLE



# KEY QUOTES FROM ARTICLE

“...The National Football League will provide \$30 million in funding for medical research to the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH)...unrestricted gift...”

“Dissemination of funding from this grant will be governed by federal law and policy... NIH funding recipients will be urged to disseminate the results of research to optimize the value of the science to the research community and the public. The NFL will have no early or special access to scientific study data.”

# QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Do you believe this helps eliminate research biasness?
- What other organizations should consider donating to the NIH, NSF, or other federal agencies?
  - Pharmaceutical companies
  - Medical device companies
  - Other

# CASE STUDY - CLIMATE CONTROL ARTICLES



# KEY QUOTES FROM ARTICLES

“...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 the *researcher* and/or the *institution* should have taken additional steps to avoid an actual or perceived conflict of interest?

# Conflict Scenario

## Conflict ID

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

## Who

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

## What


- 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?



# 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 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND CONFLICTS OF COMMITMENT WEBSITE:**

[HTTP://RESEARCH.FAS.HARVARD.EDU/CONFLICTS-INTEREST-AND-COMMITMENT](http://research.fas.harvard.edu/conflicts-interest-and-commitment)