



Conflict of interest in research

Preamble

Because of the nature of research activities and the limited number of individuals interacting in research activities, situations of conflict of interest (real and perceived) are unavoidable. This policy has been developed in a spirit of collaboration and is intended to protect the rights of all Laurentian University researchers to continue their research activities while at the same time recognizing that there are circumstances when it is essential to declare a conflict of interest in order to ensure fairness in research as well as to protect the academic integrity of the University.

Article 1. Definition

A conflict of interest is defined as a circumstance in which an individual may benefit (or is perceived as benefiting), disproportionately from others, directly or indirectly, from access to information or from a decision over which they might have influence, or, where someone might reasonably perceive there to be such a benefit and influence. There are four types of conflict of interests: 1) when a researcher (faculty member, research assistant or a graduate or undergraduate student) is involved in the project or in the lab in which a project is being proposed or is currently underway, 2) when a faculty member is directly involved in the supervision, in the supervisory committee of a student or in a personal relationship with the other person being evaluated; 3) when some type of benefit (e.g. monetary, authorship, advancement, etc.) can be obtained in the process; or 4) when a person has participated or has collaborated in the past with the researcher (faculty members, research assistant or a graduate or undergraduate student) on a research project similar, related or linked to the one under evaluation (under the Tri-Council policy, the time limit is 10 years).

Article 2. Application

This policy is applicable to all employees (faculty members, staff and assistants), adjunct or affiliate members (professors or visiting fellows), students (graduate and undergraduate) of Laurentian University of Sudbury, and members who sit on Laurentian University Committees as representatives of the community and who are involved in any activity related to research or research committees. No exception may be made without the written consent of the President (or her/his designate).

Article 3. Circumstances

Conflict of interest can occur in any meeting where an evaluation of his/her own a peer or a peer's project will take place, such as Research Ethics Board (REB), Animal Care Committee (ACC), Laurentian University Research Funds Committee (LURF), Biosafety/Lab Safety/Radioactivity Committee, awards committees, etc. In addition, conflicts of interest can occur during a project or the development of a project (research, research contract or services) when someone is Chair of a committee while being in the project. In such cases, the person in

conflict of interest cannot sign and has to designate the signatory authority to someone else (as acting chair or responsible of a committee). In these circumstances, the following policy shall apply.

Article 4. Disclosure

Members of any meeting (as defined in Article 2) have a duty to disclose any conflict of interest (as described in Article 1) in the eyes of another person or project being evaluated.

Article 5. Exemptions

Unless previously discussed for the case (4) of Article 1 and decided otherwise, for any conflict of interest under Article 1 (i.e. cases 1, 2, and 3), members have a duty to exempt themselves from participating in any discussion and voting on matters where they have, or may be perceived as having, a conflict of interest. Exempting from participation means that the member in question will excuse himself or herself from the meeting. Such exemptions should be recorded in minutes of meetings.

Article 6. Discussion when in doubt

When an individual is uncertain as to whether or not an actual or potential conflict of interest exists, the member in question is encouraged to discuss the situation with the Chair of the Committee. If this does not resolve the matter, it should be brought to the attention of the Vice-President, Research.

Article 7. Action for non-disclosure

Any intentional non-disclosure of conflict of interest may lead to the expulsion of the member from the committee in question and/or possible further actions (as decided by the Vice-President, Academic).