



STATEMENT ON CONFLICT OF COMMITMENT – February 2, 2009

This is one of those times when the counsel of good colleagues speaks with a clear voice, and the voice we hear recommends that we review, reconsider, or simply abandon the draft policy document as it addresses Conflict of Commitment (COC). The reasons offered for this are in the end compelling: the need for appropriately robust faculty engagement; the impact of COC disclosure on academic and personal freedoms; whether existing policy, procedures, and practices are in fact adequate or not to deal with COC matters; and whether the strategy of universal disclosure is wise or needed. I believe the very best thing we can do today is to abandon the COC components of the current draft document just as proposed by a significant number of thoughtful colleagues.

The recently appointed Senate ad hoc committee on Conflict of Interest/Commitment (COI/C) unanimously agreed to focus on COI policy in recognition of the inherent challenges of combining research compliance issues related to COI with a broader range of COC issues traditionally administered within Academic Affairs. The existing ad hoc committee will focus on financial COI, exploring a simplified approach to disclosure. Initial recommendations on financial COI should be reported at the March Senate meeting.

As of today, the COC portions of the draft document on COI-C should be considered withdrawn from further action. Instead, the Office of Academic Affairs, in collaboration with the University Senate President, will form a Joint Academic Affairs/Senate Working Group on Conflict of Commitment. This group will be composed of tenure related faculty, career NTTF, deans, department heads, and officers of administration (and supported as appropriate by legal counsel, AAUP, and others). We will ask the group to identify and consider issues that fall under the general area of conflict of commitment and to suggest ways to address matters it finds do need attention. We will form this group immediately and report out to the wider academic community by the middle of Spring Term.

The best resolution of these matters, specifically for COC, is to be found in embracing the concerns of one's peers, scrapping the original document for something wiser. Let us move forward with a better effort, beginning today.

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