

Conflict of Commitment Examples

University Policy 4021: Outside Professional Activities and Conflict of Commitment

- The new University Policy 4021: Outside Professional Activities and Conflict of Commitment will impact all faculty and researchers at Mason. As a result, we should all expect to have conversations about whether engaging this or that activity would conflict with one's commitments and obligations to Mason.
- To better surface the variety of issues in this area, here are three short cases for example. Please feel free to reach out with questions or thoughts and email rampcoi@gmu.edu.

Consider how you would answer the following questions for each of the three short cases below:

1. What are the relevant considerations or concerns? How likely is a conflict of commitment to arise
2. What should the faculty member do/have done, and when?
3. Under what conditions, if any, is this activity permissible under the new 4021 policy?

Case 1: Co-Direct a laboratory at another institution

Prof. Monroe is an associate professor of pharmacology at Mason. Prof. Monroe travels frequently to conferences and to collaborate with other scientists. Echo University recently invited Monroe to be co-director of a lab at Echo. This position will require Prof. Monroe to spend, on average, one day per week working on projects at Echo. Prof. Monroe will submit grant proposals through Echo in which Monroe will be listed as Key Personnel. Prof. Monroe also will chair a doctoral student's thesis committee at Echo.

Case 2: Consultation to perform company research

Prof. Madison is a professor of ceramic engineering at Mason. Prof. Madison also is a consultant for Delta Company, a cutting-edge ceramics manufacturer. Prof. Madison works for Delta one day a week, on average, providing scientific advice. Delta asks Prof. Madison to begin performing research work for the company, and this new activity would increase the time she works for Delta to 20 hours per week.

Case 3 Founding a non-profit spin-out

Prof. Harrison is a department head who endorsed an institutional 'affiliation' with a non-profit entity – the Juliette Company – spun out of a departmental program he created without Mason's review and approval. Prof. Harrison is listed as a co-founder and advisor at the Juliette Company. Juliette Company's mission is to help underprivileged youth and students gain access to training opportunities in the biotech sector, an area unrelated to Prof. Harrison's research at Home Institution or to the research interests of his department.

At the very public announcement by the Juliette Company of this "collaboration," the mayor of the city where Juliette Company is headquartered expressed his excitement at collaborating with Prof. Harrison and Home Institution. Prof. Harrison was present at the event with his Home Institution credentials on full display. Also present at the 'launch' with her Home Institution credentials on display, was Prof. Tyler, a senior researcher who reports to Prof. Harrison at Home Institution. Prof. Tyler also serves as the vice-president and co-founder of the Juliette Company.