



Frequently Asked Questions Complying with Conflict of Commitment – Faculty SMU Policy 1.23

Conflicts of Commitment – Definitions, Purpose, and Application

Q1. To whom does the Conflict of Commitment Policy apply?

A1. The policy applies to all University faculty.

Q2. What is a Conflict of Commitment for purposes of this policy?

A2. A Conflict of Commitment¹ may exist when a faculty member engages in activities outside their University Responsibilities, paid or unpaid, that may interfere, or appear to interfere, with the fulfillment of the faculty member's obligations to the University.

Q3. Why does SMU have a Conflict of Commitment Policy?

A3. This Policy establishes and conveys the expectation that faculty members must commit their professional skills, work effort, and University resources primarily to the fulfillment of the University's mission and must not allow Outside Activities to interfere with their University Responsibilities. This policy provides guiding principles to University faculty whenever a Conflict of Commitment issue arises.

Q4. To whom are Conflicts of Commitment or Potential Conflicts of Commitment reported?

A4. A faculty member who becomes aware of an actual or potential Conflict of Commitment must promptly make a full disclosure to an appropriate supervisor, which can include the Provost, Dean, and/or Department Chair.

Q5. What activities are covered by the Conflict of Commitment Policy?

A5. The Conflict of Commitment Policy applies to "Outside Activities" which include "External Activities" and "Outside Professional Activities." External Activities are services to a non-University Entity, including public, private, and not for profit entities, whether or not related to the faculty member's professional expertise. Outside Professional Activities are services to a non-University Entity, whether compensated or uncompensated, which involve a faculty member's expertise or the practice of their profession and are not a part of the faculty member's position responsibilities or Ordinary Institutional Activities.

Q6. What is meant by "Ordinary Institutional Activities?"

A6. "Ordinary Institutional Activities" are activities in which faculty members are expected to engage as part of that faculty member's professional portfolio and University Responsibilities of teaching, research, scholarly activity, and service to the University. For example, Ordinary Institutional Activities include attending or presenting at symposia, participating in peer reviews, serving on federal government review panels, and University-related public engagement.

Q7. Can Ordinary Institutional Activities create a conflict of commitment?

A7. Yes, Ordinary Institutional Activities can create a Conflict of Commitment when time committed to such activities interferes with the faculty member's University Responsibilities of teaching, research, scholarly activity, or service to the University and results in a disproportionate distribution of time and effort.

¹ Capitalized terms used in this FAQ are defined in the Conflict of Commitment – Faculty Policy.

Disclosure Requirements

Q8. What am I required to disclose?

A8. You should disclose in advance any Outside Activities that may interfere with your University Responsibilities. Outside Activities must be disclosed if they require a Substantial Commitment of Time, or if they compromise, or have the appearance of compromising, a faculty member's ability to carry out their University Responsibilities.

Q9. When am I required to submit the disclosure?

A9. You must complete in January of each year an Annual Report of Outside Activities in the form provided by the University in the Interfolio Faculty Activity Reporting System: "Institutional 1.23 Conflict of Commitment—Faculty." Any change to Outside Activities must be reported as soon as you become aware of such change through a written request to your immediate supervisor.

Handling Conflict of Commitment Disclosures

Q10. How is a proposed Conflict of Commitment handled if it is permitted?

A10. The Dean or the Dean's delegate may impose such terms and conditions they deem appropriate to manage the Conflict of Commitment, including the implementation of a management plan. Any such management plan will be developed in collaboration with the faculty member and should specify the actions necessary to address the Conflict of Commitment.

Q11. What if I have additional questions about the Conflict of Commitment Policy or its implementation?

A11. You should contact the General Counsel or the Office of Faculty Success to discuss any questions or concerns regarding this Policy or its implementation.

Examples of Particular Conflict Situations

Q13. Can I teach a course at another university if it requires less than one day per week and does not interfere with my University classes?

A13. No. Teaching at another University requires prior approval from your Dean or the Dean's delegate regardless of any actual or anticipated time commitment.

Q14. Are there other activities that require prior approval regardless of time commitment?

A14. Yes. Activities such as the following require prior approval, regardless of time commitment: (i) applying for or accepting grants or other funding in association with a non-University Entity for research or scholarship; (ii) teaching a course at another college or university; (iii) accepting employment at a non-University entity; (iv) consuming University resources for a non-University project; (v) missing instructional obligations (e.g. a class or regularly scheduled office hours); (vi) missing regular faculty meetings or failing to complete University service responsibilities; or (vii) engaging in any activity that has a required disclosure per University Policy 2.9, Consulting and Sponsored Projects.

Q15. Is using university resources for outside activities a Conflict of Commitment?

A15. Yes, using University facilities, equipment, technology, or staff for personal or external projects is a Conflict of Commitment. Such an activity must be disclosed to your Dean or the Dean's delegate and approved in advance of such use.

Q16. Do academic activities like serving on an academic society board or a government advisory panel count as conflicts of commitment?

A16. Generally, no. Professional or community service that is related to your academic expertise—such as leadership in scholarly societies, editorial boards, or government advisory committees—is ordinarily encouraged as part of faculty service and not considered a Conflict of Commitment. However, if such service becomes sufficiently time-consuming that it interferes with your teaching, research, or other University Responsibilities, it may constitute a Conflict of Commitment and should be disclosed.