STOCKTON UNIVERSITY | RESEARCH & SPONSORED PROGRAMS

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
Conflict of Interest Committee Guidelines

Overview

In the event that a complaint of research misconduct, noncompliance, or a breach of research ethics is submitted against a Stockton University faculty and/or staff member or members, the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) will convene a Conflict of Interest (COI) Committee comprised of faculty members and deans to review all relevant documentation regarding the complaint. The COI Committee will make recommendations to the Office of the Provost for a possible range of action steps. The Office of the Provost will then review the COI Committee's recommendations and determine action steps to address the complaint and resolve the matter. COI Committees do not oversee issues of research noncompliance related to human subjects research, as those incidents fall under the purview of the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Guidelines for Convening a COI Committee

1. If a complaint of the abovementioned nature is issued to the Executive Director (ED) of ORSP by an internal or external source, the ED will collect all documentation within three (3) business days of notification and submit the documentation to the Office of the Provost for a determination of whether the complaint qualifies as a matter to be referred to a COI Committee.

2. If the Office of the Provost determines that a COI Committee should be convened, within five (5) days of notification, the ED of ORSP will create a repository of documentation and begin to recruit members for the COI Committee.

   a. Within the abovementioned five (5) day time period, the ED of ORSP will also inform the faculty or staff member(s) against whom the complaints have been made of the nature of the complaints and request written documentation from the involved faculty and/or staff member(s).

   b. The ED will collect all evidence and ask for written evidence, emails, any time-stamped correspondence and/or formal, written statements from the complainants and the Stockton faculty and/or staff member(s) against whom the complaints have been issued.

   c. The ED will not hold any formal or informal meetings with the faculty and/or staff member(s) in question as the COI Committee should have access to all documentation from the involved parties in order to review the documentation and make recommendations. This process ensures there is no bias, misinformation, or partiality in the process. All evidentiary documentation reviewed by the Committee members will have been submitted by the complainants and the faculty and/or staff member(s) against whom the complaints have been issued.

3. The COI Committee will consist of a minimum of five (5) and no more than seven (7) members of the Stockton academic community, preferably comprised of faculty members and deans. The ED of ORSP will ensure there are no conflicts of interest among the COI Committee members and will require all members to sign a statement of confidentiality ensuring they will not reveal any information related to the COI Committee review either before, during, or after the review.

4. The ED of ORSP will serve as an ex officio member of the COI Committee. The ED is a non-voting, impartial member tasked with convening all Committee meetings, gathering and sharing documentation among Committee members, and overseeing all Committee meetings. The ED also oversees the compiling of the statement of recommendation(s) on behalf of the Committee – with final input and approval of all participating members of the Committee – and the submission of the statement of recommendation(s) to the Office of the Provost.

5. The Research Compliance Officer (RCO) within ORSP will also attend Committee meetings as a non-voting, impartial member. The RCO is tasked with taking notes and storing all relevant documentation on a private, access-controlled SharePoint folder, which will be accessible to all Committee members.

6. One (1) member of the Committee will be from the unit (e.g., School or Division) to which the faculty and/or staff member under review belongs.

7. The Committee members all serve anonymously. The Committee members will not interact with the faculty and/or staff member(s) to preserve impartiality and anonymity. In the event that the COI Committee agrees unanimously to hold a meeting with the faculty and/or staff member(s) in question, the ED of ORSP will schedule and convene the meeting.

8. There will be a minimum of two (2) meetings of the COI Committee. The initial meeting will allow the ED of ORSP to provide an overview of the situation, explain the process for review, and ensure all COI Committee members have access to relevant documentation. The COI Committee will then be given a minimum of ten (10) days but no more than fifteen (15) days to review all relevant documentation.

The COI Committee will reconvene at the second meeting and review the documentation and make recommendations for actions steps. The ED and RCO will both take notes, and the ED will compile a draft statement of recommendation(s) on behalf of the Committee within three (3) days of the second meeting. The Committee members will then have five (5) days to review and make edits to the recommendation. Once finalized, the ED will forward the statement of recommendation(s) to the Office of the Provost.
   a. In their statement of recommendation(s), the Committee members will determine the following: 1) if an incident of research misconduct, noncompliance, or a breach of research ethics has occurred; 2) how the Committee characterizes the incident; 3) what the Committee's recommendations are, if any, for the next steps for the faculty and/or staff members in question to take; and 4) what the Committee's recommendations are, if any, for the next steps for the Office of the Provost to take.

9. After receiving the statement of recommendation(s) from the ED of ORSP, the Office of the Provost will then determine next steps.

10. Committee members will retain access to the SharePoint folder for two (2) weeks after the recommendations have been sent to the Office of the Provost. After that, access to the folder will be removed.