



To: Deans, Directors, Chairs, Faculty and Staff

From: Dr. William R. Duncan, Vice Provost for Research

Date: April 6, 2020

Re: Foreign Influence in Federally Funded Research

Federal funding agencies including NIH and NSF recently have issued statements and updated policies clarifying applicant and grantee requirements to disclose 'financial conflicts of interest', 'other support' and 'foreign components' when applying for or receiving federal grants and contracts. Agencies also are reminding peer reviewers of their obligation to maintain confidentiality. Failure to disclose foreign affiliations and activities precludes funding agencies from fully evaluating the application for scientific, budgetary, and commitment overlap, and represents a potential conflict of interest that could affect the objectivity of the research and peer review process.¹

U.S funding agencies have heightened scrutiny of these requirements due, in part, to concern over potential foreign influence in federally funded research. Spurred by the Department of Justice (DOJ) China Initiative, which aims to identify and prosecute "those engaged in trade secret theft, hacking and economic espionage," including ". . . researchers in labs [and] universities . . . coöpted into transferring technology contrary to U.S. interests,"ⁱⁱ NIH has investigated more than 180 scientists for potential violations of confidentiality in the peer review process, diversion of intellectual property to foreign entities, and, foremost, failure to disclose other funding sources and conflicts of interest from and with foreign entities.¹ To date, DOJ investigations of researchers at institutions including [Harvard](#) and [Emory](#) Universities, and the Universities of [Kansas](#), [Tennessee](#) and [Texas-MD Anderson Cancer Center](#) have resulted in [actions including debarment from federal funding, termination of employment, and criminal charges ranging from](#) fraud to conspiracy and espionage.

In the coming months, ETSU will review its policies and practices to ensure congruity with agency guidance and industry best practice. We will further educate our research community with online resources (https://www.etsu.edu/research/orspa/foreign_influence_in_research.php)

and training, continue to investigate potential violations, and monitor and communicate developments pertaining to concerns over foreign influence in U.S. research. *Questions about sponsor disclosure and confidentiality requirements, or concerns about foreign influence at ETSU should be directed to Wendy Eckert at eckertw@etsu.edu or 423-439-6052.*

¹ Statement on Protecting the Integrity of U.S. Biomedical Research. <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-protecting-integrity-us-biomedical-research>. Accessed 2/13/2020.

ⁱⁱ Department of Justice China Initiative Fact Sheet. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/page/file/1122686/download>. Accessed 2/13/2020.