

## **Policy on Conflict of Interest**

## **1.0 Purpose**

This policy addresses conflict of interest (COI) to ensure highest standards of ethics and integrity and to protect organizational interests and reputation and to prevent its work and protect Board members and its employees from potentially damaging instances of impropriety arising from conflict-of-interest issues. The objective is that members must carry out their work in an environment that is free from any suggestion of improper influence and take all reasonable steps to avoid being in an actual, apparent or potential conflict of interest.

The conflict of interest may arise in a situation where financial, or other personal or professional considerations compromise an individual's objectivity, professional judgment, and ability to perform his or her professional responsibilities to the University.

## **2.0 Scope**

This conflict-of-interest policy applies to all employees working in any capacity at MNS University of Agriculture Multan (MNSUAM), and to postgraduate students participating in university research. The policy applies to all activities where a conflict of interest might arise, including teaching, research, engagement, commercial or business operations.

## **3.0 Policy Statement**

The University recognises that a well-established system for identifying, disclosing, and managing conflicts of interest increases its public accountability and reduces the risk of corruption, misconduct and bias in its operations and decision-making processes.

### **3.1 Identifying Conflict of Interests**

University members must ensure that any conflicts between their private interests and their university duties are promptly identified and managed.

A conflict of interest may arise due to filial relationship or business relationship of employees. In such cases, an individual's private interests compete with his/her professional obligations to an organization, which may result in the exercise of biased judgment for considerations of personal financial gains. Such situations can have potentially damaging consequences for the integrity and reputation of the organization. Thus, conflict of interest can compromise an individual's ability to perform his/her duties and responsibilities objectively.

The key to recognizing and dealing with conflict of interest is disclosure. Members have an obligation to address both the substance and the appearance of conflict of interest and, if they arise, to disclose any possible conflict of interest to the appropriate University authority and withdraw from debate, voting, or other decision-making process where a conflict of interest exists or might arise.



## **3.2 Conflict of Interest Categories**

Conflicts of interest can be categorised into:

- Family Relationship
- Research and Academics
- Financial Interest

### **3.2.1 Family Relationship**

Family relationships should not interfere, or be perceived to interfere, or influence working practices and decisions.

University members must disclose actual, potential, or perceived conflicts of interest arising from the existence of blood Relatives (under NADRA ordinance regulation 9(1) i.e., children, siblings, parents, spouse). This requirement is based on the potential for, or perception of, a decision being considered biased or prejudiced, either in favour of or against, a person with whom there is a family relationship. The University will ensure that no undue advantage or disadvantage occurs because of the existence of a family relationship.

University members must immediately cease to be involved in any decision making in respect of the person with whom they have a family relationship until the competent authority determines how the conflict of interest should be managed.

### **3.2.2 Research and Academics**

This category is relevant for conflicts of interest relating to research work, research project and course work.

University faculty should not be the major supervisor of immediate family members during postgraduate research. University faculty will also not engage in evaluating their immediate family members studying at university. In such cases, it is obligatory for the relevant supervisor/course instructor to disclose the conflict of interest to the immediate authority (Dean/Director/Chairman) and / or Graduate Research Office preferably at the time of appointment of supervisors.

A researcher who fails to appropriately handle a conflict of interest may be considered to violate this policy.

### **3.2.3 Financial Interest**

This category is relevant for any financial gain or loss. It will also include the paid consultancies without the approval from the competent authority.

The financial interest does not include the following types of financial interests:



- a. Salary, royalties, or other remuneration paid by the Institution to the Investigator if the Investigator is currently employed or otherwise appointed by the Institution, including intellectual property rights assigned to the Institution and agreements to share in royalties related to such rights.
- b. Income from seminars, lectures, or teaching engagements by university or funding agencies.
- c. Any paid for or reimbursed travel by university or funding agencies.

### **3.3 Disclosing a Conflict of Interest**

When an employee identifies a conflict of interest, they must disclose the conflict and submit it to Competent Authority.

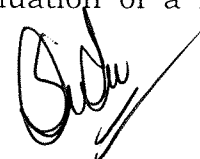
Where a conflict of interest arises during a meeting, the employee must verbally disclose it and have it formally noted (e.g., in minutes of the meeting).

Where an authority becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest that has not been disclosed by employee, they should discuss the matter with the employee and ensure the conflict is disclosed and managed appropriately.

Where circumstances affecting an existing or previously disclosed conflict of interest change, the employee must amend the disclosure and submit a revised disclosure.

#### **Examples of Disclosure:**

- a) Unofficially entering a contract on behalf of the University with a company or firm in which MNSUAM employee has a financial interest.
- b) Influencing the purchase of equipment, materials, or services for the University from a company or firm in which MNSUAM employees have financial interest.
- c) Accepting gifts, benefits, or favours from individuals or firms with which the University does business, except as token courtesies.
- d) Directing students or university employee to carry out work for a company or firm in which MNSUAM employees have a financial interest.
- e) Using the University's resources or facilities for a personal benefit or the benefit of family member (in accordance with Section 27(4) MNSUAM Act 2013).
- f) Participating in the appointment, hiring, promotion or evaluation of a related person.



### **3.4 Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest**

University employees must avoid conflict of interest that impacts their ability to fulfill their duties at the University.

Examples may include but not limited to, faculty members concealing their relationship with a family member for facilitating the appointments at the University or Head of Department misusing their authority for getting their names inserted in the research paper/projects as an author. Disclosure of author contribution is also encouraged to prevent such cases. Such cases will be evaluated during the performance review meetings.

### **3.5 Managing Conflict of Interests**

All employees of the University are considered to be in a position of trust by virtue of their employment with the University and therefore have a responsibility to identify and disclose known or potential personal interests which may interfere, or be perceived to interfere, with an individual's ability to properly discharge his or her duties to the University to ensure that such conflicts are seen to be properly managed or avoided.

It is the duty of every university employee to disclose any conflict of interest or any circumstances that might reasonably give rise to the perception of conflict of interest to the Registrar as the case may be. All employees' inquiries regarding any aspect of COI policy should be directed to Registrar's Office.

The general rule is that disclosure should be made at the time the conflict first arises, or it is recognized that a conflict might be perceived, in writing to the Registrar.

A Board Member having any interest in any matter to be discussed or decided by the Board or a Committee shall disclose, prior to any discussion of the matter to the Board or a Committee, as the case may be, the fact of his interest and the nature thereof.

A disclosure of interest shall be recorded in the minutes note for record or other appropriate record-keeping documents and member concerned will not take part nor be present in any deliberation or decision-making process of the Board or the Committee.

Compliance with this Policy is compulsory. A university employee who fails to comply may be subjected to violation of this policy.



### 3.6 Violations of the Conflict of Interest (COI) Policy

Where a conflict of interest was intentionally not disclosed by a university employee or student, the action will be taken as per the existing university policy.

#### 4.0 Definitions

For the purposes of this policy and related policy documents, the following definitions apply:

**Conflict of Interest:** It is a conflict between a university employees official duties to act in the best interests of the University, and his private interests.

**Perceived Conflict of Interest:** A perceived conflict where it could reasonably be perceived, or give the appearance, that a competing interest or obligation, whether personal or involving a third party, could improperly influence the performance of a employees' duties and responsibilities to the University.

**Potential Conflict of Interest:** A potential conflict of interest where a university employee has an interest or obligation, whether personal or involving a third party, that could conflict with the employees duties and responsibilities to the University.

**Actual Conflict of Interest:** An actual conflict where employee has a competing interest or obligation, whether personal or involving a third party, that directly conflicts with the employees' duties and responsibilities to the University.

#### Private interests:

A private interest can be direct or indirect:

- A direct interest is a conflict of interest by a university member.
- An indirect interest is a conflict of interest held by a relative or close associate of a university member, for example:
  - an immediate family member (e.g. spouse, partner, child, parent, siblings)
  - a regular household member (e.g. someone who normally resides with the University member), or
  - another close associate (e.g. friend, relative, business associate, rival, enemy).

A private interest can also be financial, non-financial, or a mixture of both:

- **Financial interest** – includes actual, potential, or perceived financial gain or loss. Money does not need to change hands.

