**VPFR: Conflict of Interest in Collegial Committees**

A conflict of interest occurs when personal, financial, or professional relationships interfere with an individual’s ability to act impartially in collegial decision-making. In academic settings, maintaining the integrity of collegial processes, such as appointments, tenure, promotion, and salary reviews, is essential for reputation, equity, and transparency.

**Collective Agreement Definitions (**[**10.9 Conflict of Interest**](https://careers.usask.ca/agreements/usfa/usfa-10-technical-clauses.php#109ConflictofInterest)**)**

There may be a real, perceived, or potential conflict of interest when the faculty member:

1. would receive professional or personal benefit resulting from a collegial process; or
2. would have a direct or indirect financial interest in the outcome of a collegial process; or
3. would benefit from a decision being made with respect to a person with whom the faculty member has a personal relationship.

**Common Practices around Conflicts of Interest**

* Just because you are on friendly terms (colleagues/friends) with an individual doesn’t necessarily make it a conflict.
	+ Still discuss this relationship with the committee though and document the committee’s decision. Typically, a conflict exists when a personal relationship interferes with the assessment of the evidence.
* Publications or Co-PI in the last 5 years is typically considered a conflict.
* If a committee member ever supervised a post-doc or served on the PhD Committee this is typically considered a conflict.
* If you are going into a collegial process initially and already have a specific outcome in mind (a specific candidate you want to hire, someone who you want to be promoted without looking at their file, an individual you would like to leave the university) this may indicate a conflict of interest.
* If you feel pressured to make a certain choice from outside influences, this may be a conflict of interest.

**Potential Outcomes of Ignoring a Conflict of Interest**

* Individuals can state there was a biased process which will lead to delays, elevated emotions, and potential reputational risks.
* A decision can be overturned which can lead to processes needing to re-start, work needing to be re-done, and frustrations to build.

**Responsibilities & Authority of the Committee**

Identification: The committee, faculty members potentially affected, and the Provost’s Office share responsibility for recognizing conflicts.

Disclosure: Any perceived conflict must be declared before substantive discussions begin.

Discussion: Discuss potential conflicts of interest and document the discussions. The committee shall determine whether a conflict of interest is sufficient to compromise the integrity of the collegial process exists.

In the recruitment process, any member of the Forum may request an appointments forum ([Article 13.5.2 Appointments Forum](https://careers.usask.ca/agreements/usfa/usfa-13-appointments.php#135ProceduresforAppointments)) and discuss the potential concerns.

If desired, faculty members, no later than one week following the decision, who dispute the determination may make a written appeal to the Vice-Provost, Faculty Relations, who shall decide the matter.

Action: If a conflict is identified and substantiated, faculty members must recuse themselves from participation and voting.

**VPFR Support**

Conflicts of interest are often very complicated and can be difficult to navigate. It can make a big difference to bring in someone who is external from the situation to provide neutral advice. If you have questions or would like support, please reach out to the office of the Vice-Provost, Faculty Relations, vpfaculty.realtions@usask.ca.