

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST POLICY

ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (ASHE)

This policy was unanimously approved by the ASHE Board on June 23, 2015.

In June of 2014, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Board adopted the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conflict of interest policy for use on an interim basis. The extant policy uses large sections of the AERA policy, with some minor changes to reflect the ASHE structure and context.

The conflicts of interest policy adopted by the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) guides the handling of conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest when members of the Association are serving in decision-making positions for the Association. A conflict of interest relates to those circumstances where individuals may benefit themselves, others, or institutions or organizations with which they have an affiliation or might make decisions where their objectivity is affected by biasing circumstances (positively or negatively) in performing their service or duties.

ASHE, like AERA, has adopted as overall guidance the conflict of interest definition set forth by The National Academies:

The term “conflict of interest” means any financial or other interest which conflicts with the service of the individual because it (1) could significantly impair the individual’s objectivity or (2) could create an unfair advantage for any person or organization. (June, 2003)

In establishing this general policy, the Association sets forth circumstances that *require* ASHE members to refrain or recuse themselves from participation and circumstances where ASHE members need to *consider* whether the nature of their relationship creates the actuality or appearance of a conflict. Discretionary areas are circumstances where individuals need to decide whether it would be prudent for them and for the Association if they withdrew from service or limited their participation to avert concerns about conflicts.

The ASHE conflicts of interest policy is a general one that incorporates policies that are specific applications on conflicts of interest that guide actions within the organization. Under this general policy, the board may also from time to time adopt other specific policies to clarify the expectations of the Association for those involved in service as individuals or as part of a committee, task force, council, etc. Current ASHE conflicts of interest policies that guide the ASHE Award Selection Committees (Appendix A), and ASHE Publications Committee (Appendix B) are examples of specific applications of this general policy.

Scope of Policy

The scope of this policy relates to decisions that involve the allocation or withholding of benefits to others or oneself or may otherwise compromise serving the Association. It covers ASHE officers and the board, Councils, standing committees, ad hoc committees or task forces, and appointed positions (e.g., editor).

Scope of Policy, Continued:

It pertains to such service as reviewing and selecting proposals for participation at the ASHE annual meeting, nominating persons for elective office, reviewing manuscripts for publication in ASHE publications, serving as editor or in an editorial role in making decisions on manuscripts for publication, or making appointive decisions for editorships.

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive of all the ASHE functions where conflict rules may apply but aims to outline the types of service where a conflict or the appearance of conflict triggers the policy and its intended scope. In areas where a constituted ASHE body or those serving ASHE have questions or ambiguity, those involved in such situations are asked to consult with the ASHE Executive Director. In situations needing additional consultation, the ASHE President also can advise and make a determination.

The purpose of this policy is to make clear the expectations of the Association regarding conflicts of interest rules, what is required, and where discretionary judgment can be applied. The conflicts of interest policy applies to those serving the Association in elective or appointive positions and to the ASHE staff. Conflicts of interest include the conferring or withholding of benefits not just to individuals but also to institutions or organizations with which individuals have an affiliation that might be selected to work on behalf of the Association or otherwise have a relationship or connection to ASHE. They also include situations where ASHE members could themselves personally benefit from such service. The conflicts policy is intended both to guide conduct and to alert those serving the Association about situations that might cause conflicts of interest so they can anticipate these situations and take appropriate actions in advance or when they arise.

Circumstances Where Service May Benefit Others

1. *Required Circumstances.* The following conditions require individuals to withdraw or recuse themselves from service that involves decisions related to other individuals or institutions. They include persons who are:
 - a. current or former chair of a dissertation committee or current or former student of a chair of a dissertation committee;
 - b. family member, spouse, or partner;
 - c. anyone with whom one has a current business or financial relationship (e.g., business partner, employer, employee);
 - d. research collaborator or co-author who is currently in that relationship or has been within the last five years; or
 - e. anyone working at the same institution or having accepted a position at the same institution.

2. *Discretionary Circumstances.* Other conditions may lead individuals to determine that they have conflicts or potential conflicts of interest that require withdrawal or recusal from service and to act on that determination if they believe that service could affect the fairness of the selection or decision-making process. Under such circumstances, individuals should make those situations known and withdraw from participation.

Circumstances Where Service May Benefit Self

Avoidance of Personal Gain

1. The required circumstances for withdrawal or recusal from service (outlined above) not only eliminate or reduce the occurrence of potential bias in the provision of benefits to others but also eliminate or reduce the possibility of personal gain by averting the actuality or appearance of an individual's serving the interests of other individuals or institutions to which they are closely connected. Recusal or withdrawal from service as outlined above contributes to the avoidance of personal gain.
2. Under all circumstances, individuals do not use or otherwise seek to gain from information or material received in a confidential context (e.g., knowledge obtained from reviewing a manuscript or serving on a proposal review panel), unless they have authorization to do so or until that information is otherwise made publicly available.
3. Under all circumstances, individuals do not share information or engage in special treatment of or arrangements with other individuals, organizations, or institutions that could bias outcomes or lead to others' being beholden to them.

Circumstances Where Dual Role May Compromise Serving the Association

It is understood that ASHE members may have simultaneous service or commitments that professionally relate to the work or service they perform for the Association. There are circumstances where those serving the Association need to address their dual roles and (a) recuse themselves from participation, or (b) make known their dual interest so that other disinterested parties can determine the appropriate level of participation, if any. The ASHE Executive Director, or the ASHE President may serve in this role for ASHE, alone or in cooperation. There are two types of dual roles that can present a conflict and need to be disclosed.

1. *Financial Interest.* Those serving the Association may be involved in a decision or action that could involve a financial benefit to an organization or institution where they have an investment, financial interest, or compensation arrangement or are considering such an arrangement. In general, persons should recuse themselves where financial or business arrangements with an institution, organization, or entity may affect decisions, judgments, or guidance to ASHE. In some circumstances when the relationship or benefit is remote, disclosure to an ASHE disinterested party may be sufficient to determine whether recusal is needed.

2. *Positional Interests.* Those serving the Association may have obligations to other organizations or institutions (e.g., service on another organization's council or board) that undertake work closely related to the work or purposes of the Association. There is ordinarily no conflict of interest in such service and often such arrangements serve a common end or goal. It is the responsibility of members serving ASHE to make known such positions when issues are being considered that could bias or be perceived as biasing advice, counsel, or decisions; assist the other entity in making its decisions; or divert opportunities or resources away from ASHE. Those who have dual roles should be aware of the potential for such conflicts. In situations of uncertainty, individuals in these circumstances should consult with a disinterested ASHE party.

Implementation Procedure

1. The conflicts of interest policy is to be widely publicized and readily accessible to ASHE members.
2. Those elected or appointed to positions in the Association will be informed of the conflict rules and acknowledge their acceptance of the policy as part of their acceptance of the position or appointment.
3. All ASHE bodies that allocate benefits or make decisions that can have positive consequences for some and not for others are expected to observe recusal rules and seek clarification from the ASHE Executive Director in cases of ambiguity. With bodies that require fuller procedures than can be accounted for by the general policy, the Executive Director or the President should be so informed.
4. Individuals in elective, appointed, or staff positions who may be faced with a potential conflict of interest or appearance of conflict of interest should take appropriate steps to recuse themselves from the activity or action and should either ask an alternate to serve in that role (a chair asking a chair-elect, an editor asking an associate editor) or inform those who otherwise would be responsible for making an alternate appointment (a staff member informing the executive director or an associate editor informing an editor).

APPENDIX A

Conflicts of Interest Policy for Awards Selection

Introduction

The following policy was adopted by the Association for the Study of Higher Education to guide the handling of conflicts of interest for award committees and other entities in the selection of awards. This policy applies to all ASHE award selection committees including council award selection committees. The purpose of this policy is to avert to the extent possible biasing circumstances, or the appearance of biasing circumstances, in the selection of ASHE awardees.

Ethical Standards

1. *Award Eligibility.* Members of award selection committees are not eligible to be candidates for that award during their terms of service.
2. *Required Circumstances.* Certain biasing or potentially biasing relationships to an award nominee require committee members to withdraw from service on award selection committees. They include:
 - a. current or former chair or current or former student of a chair;
 - b. family member, spouse, or partner;
 - c. anyone with whom one has a current business or financial relationship (e.g., business partner, employer, employee);
 - d. research collaborator or co-author who is currently in that relationship or has been within the last five years; or
 - e. anyone working at the same institution or having accepted a position at the same institution.
3. *Elective Circumstances.* Members of award selection committees *may* for other reasons determine that they have conflicts or potential conflicts that require elimination from service and then act on that determination if they believe that service could affect the fairness of the selection process.

Implementation Procedures

1. The conflict of interest standards and implementation procedures for award committee service should be widely publicized and readily accessible to ASHE members.
2. ASHE presidents, presidents-elect, and others appointing members of award selection committees should make potential committee members aware of these ethical standards and the implementation procedures.
3. Alternates should be appointed by or readily accessible to those appointing members of selection committees so that substitute appointments can be readily made if any committee member or members need to step down from service.
4. Upon completion of the nomination process, committee members need to make known whether they can continue service on the award selection committee or whether they are in a circumstance that mandates withdrawal from service.
5. If vacancies occur on award selection committees due to withdrawal of members from service, those vacancies should be filled promptly by those in a position to fill such vacancies on committees.
6. Any award selection chair or committee member with questions or ambiguous circumstances or who finds the full implementation disruptive should seek the advice of the Executive Director, who will, where necessary, consult with the President on this policy and its implementation.

APPENDIX B
Conflicts of Interest Policy for Publications Committee

Committee Deliberations

The Publications Committee observes conflict of interest rules in its deliberations. In the consideration of editor candidates, members of the Committee recuse themselves if a familial or personal relationship or institutional affiliation creates a biasing conflict. The conflict of interest guidelines are as follows: Committee members will not participate in evaluation of applications from their own institutions. Members will also not evaluate applications in cases where they have co-published articles or volumes with applicants, or in cases where they are currently collaborating with applicants in directing projects jointly or have done so within the past five years. A member will also not evaluate an application if he or she chaired the doctoral committee of that candidate. Any committee member may additionally declare a conflict based on any positive or negative judgments that the committee member determines are sufficiently strong to be biasing. Committee members with conflict of interest will not be included in Committee discussions of applications where these conflicts arise. Committee members may be present during stages of decision making when ranking of applications occurs but may not participate in ranking those applications or comment on the ranking of those applicants.

Benefiting From Position

Members of the Publications Committee may not be seen as being in a position to profit from the use of confidential information to which they have had access because of their service on the Committee. Thus, should privileged information regarding a particular ASHE publication contract come before the Committee, members shall not use or disclose the information until it becomes public. In addition, if confidential information regarding an article or publication (e.g., the discussion of a grievance, or the review of a controversial editorial decision) come before the Committee, members of the Committee shall not speak or write directly in an independent capacity (e.g., by publishing a critique) about the article or publication in question.