

Conflicts of interest and conflicts of commitment

What is the difference between a conflict of interest and a conflict of responsibilities?

“Conflict of interest is the conflict of your research to some external benefit like money, and conflict of commitments is the conflict between two of your research or how to divide your time to do different tasks.”

1. **“Time is money” (Ben Franklin)**
2. **“Money is the root of all evil” (St. Paul)**
3. **“Time is the root of all evil” (syllogistic reasoning)**

(Google finds various postings of this, going back to 1988)

Is there a clear delineation between these two ideas?

- A.** *“No. For example you have two research, and you can get more money if you complete the first. When you decide which one to do first, you are choosing from your research interest in both research as well as how much money you can get.”*
- B.** *“according to OBS and the examples provided therein, the two notions are distinct.”*

"The two concepts could clearly overlap in a scenario where a graduate student (or any instructor) exercises poor professional judgment by severely neglecting his or her teaching and/or departmental obligations to prioritize research responsibilities that carry greater potential for individual benefit. This is a conflict of commitment since it relates to prioritizing competing responsibilities. However, it also constitutes a conflict of interest since the course of action that yields the greatest benefit for the individual might be detrimental to the department."

Give an example of a conflict of interest which might arise in an academic mentor/mentee relationship?

“Romantic relationship between mentor/mentee relationship.”

“Maybe mentor wants his/her mentee to conduct more research on one direction for his own purpose (maybe funding) while mentee likes another direction.”

Give an example of a conflict of interest which might arise for an author of a published paper.

"The funding to researcher sometimes will influence the researcher's research."

"I could think of a case, where an author of a published paper has the power to decide between two articles which one of them is going to be published. One article is very close to his own research and even cites his publication. The other one has nothing to do with his research and doesn't cite him. In that case, I believe the author would be in a conflict of interest."

Can you responsibly agree to review a paper authored by a friend?

A. *"I don't think it would be responsible to review it; separating one's favorable judgment of the author as a person from judgment of the quality of the research itself is possible, but likely so difficult that it would be safer to have someone else review it."*

B. *"I think you can responsibly agree to review the paper. While you likely want to see your friend succeed, it's not clear that you stand to gain anything by giving the paper an unfairly positive review. If anything, you should want your friend's published work to be of the highest quality. Therefore, you can objectively review the paper, check the results, and make sure that your friend's work is worth publishing in the journal."*

C. “[...] if both of us have good reputations in the discipline, it could be acceptable as long as the nature of the relationship is included in the review.”

IF YOU DO DECIDE TO REVIEW, SHOULD YOU DISCLOSE YOUR FRIENDSHIP TO THE EDITOR?

REFEREES HAVE TWO DISTINCT TASKS. (1) LOOK FOR ERRORS AND OMISSIONS; (2) ASSESS THE VALUE OF THE WORK TO THE FIELD. HOW DOES FRIENDSHIP AFFECT THESE TWO TASKS?

Most PhD students have to balance time allocated to teaching (GSI) with their thesis research. Is this a conflict of interest and/or a conflict of commitment? What is your advice on how to manage this balance?

"[. . .] If teaching influence his research a lot, talk with his mentor to find outhow to solve it."

"That is not a conflict of interest for the reason that working as GSI will help PhD students learn well and communicate well."

“ I think it’s reasonable to invest as much time into GSling as you would prefer that your own instructors invest, but ideally no more than that since realistically the thesis is the purpose of the PhD program.”

Give an example of a conflict of interest best managed by avoidance and another best managed by transparency.

“Conflicts of interest related to researchers having romantic relationships with advisees or with authors of a paper they are supposed to review is best managed by avoidance. In this case, transparency doesn't solve the issues that could arise from favoritism. Conflicts of interest arising from researchers receiving funding from certain organizations are best managed by transparency, since this cannot always be avoided.”

“Avoidance: make sure to know all the responsibility and consequence before starting any project.

Transparency: express concerns and seek for advice and help from advisor or department.”