Principles for Student/Post Doc Engagement in Faculty Enterprises

In the course of reviewing disclosures, the Conflict of Interest ("COI") Committee is sometimes confronted with the issue of having students (which include undergraduate students, graduate students, and/or post docs) work for faculty owned companies. In many instances this can be challenging due to the fragile nature of this relationship. On one hand it serves as a gateway to “real world” experience and can provide the student with valuable knowledge. However, on the other hand, these situations may be difficult to manage and there is the possibility that the work could negatively affect, or be perceived to affect, the student’s academic progress. These Principles are intended to address these concerns and permit thoughtful and productive engagement of students in faculty enterprises, including startup companies and consulting activities, while protecting the academic interests of such students.

As part of Penn State’s commitment to the academic pursuits and integrity of its students, the University’s COI Committee requires notice and approval of student engagement in faculty enterprises through receipt and signed acknowledgment of these Principles. The COI Program will also query students engaged in activities such as those covered under these Principles on a semi-annual basis through the student monitoring requirements laid out in the terms and conditions of Committee approved management plans.

(Faculty member name) wishes to engage (student name) in the following activity:

(Please provide the name of the company and a description of the work being performed)

During the period from: (start date, month, and year to end date, month, and year)

Both student and faculty member understand and agree that:

1. Students always have the voluntary choice of whether or not to participate in faculty enterprise activities. Coercion in any form by faculty is strictly forbidden.

2. The work assigned to the student in the faculty enterprise should promote education and professional growth.

3. The work of the student in the faculty enterprise must not interfere with his/her academic progress. Publications should never be restricted, and a graduation date should never be delayed because of faculty enterprise or consulting activities.

4. The magnitude of student work in a faculty enterprise should be kept to a reasonable level. Students may negotiate specific limitations with their Department Head, COI appointed student monitor, or his/her student advisor, if the student advisor is not involved in the outside enterprise.

5. If during the engagement the student finds the enterprise work to be in conflict with academic progress, he/she has the right to cancel the arrangement at any time without penalty.
6. A faculty member supervising the thesis work of a student concurrently involved in that faculty member’s outside enterprise cannot have sole signature authority on the student’s thesis during the period of the student’s outside engagement. An additional and disinterested faculty member must be assigned as co-signer. If the faculty member has a supervisory role in a class taken by a student concurrently involved in that faculty member’s outside enterprise, to the extent possible, a teaching assistant should conduct the grading. If there is no teaching assistant available to conduct the grading, the COI appointed student monitor should discuss any grading concerns in their monitor meetings with the student(s).

7. Students funded on federal grants must deliver the work effort for which they are paid, and faculty enterprise activities may not displace grant-supported work. Effort reporting procedures must assure this.

8. Faculty must disclose consulting and enterprise activities as required on conflict of interest disclosures in COINS. Student engagement in these activities should be explicitly reported. Students subject to University conflict of interest disclosure requirements must also disclose their activity in faculty consulting and enterprise activities in COINS.

9. The COI Program will maintain copies of the signed Principles.

Students have the right to contact the COI Program and/or his/her assigned monitor if they feel that any of the Principles outlined in this document are not being followed. The COI Program, in coordination with the COI Committee, will review the matter. Additionally, students may contact the Penn State Ethics and Compliance Hotline (1-800-560-1637) if they feel that any of these principles have been violated.

_________________________________  __________________________
Student Signature and Date          Print Name

_________________________________  __________________________
Faculty Signature and Date          Print Name

_________________________________  __________________________
Department Head Signature and Date  Print Name

_________________________________  __________________________
Student Monitor Signature and Date  Print Name