

Policy for Managing Undue Influence in Research Committees and Groups

The Office of the Vice President for Research is comprised of various research committees and administrative oversight and compliance entities (ORSP, IACUC, IRB, OSP, ORCE, OIP, and others), all charged with facilitating and supporting the research mission of VCU. It is conceivable that staff or an individual member of one of these entities could be approached by outside faculty or staff with the intent to exercise undue influence in order to facilitate a favorable decision or vote. This policy describes how the Office of the Vice President for Research intends for such matters to be reported and investigated. Such a policy is necessary in order to ensure that:

1. members and staff of these committees are free from undue influence so that they may function as objectively as possible, and
2. to ensure that all VCU researchers are treated fairly.

Undue Influence Concerns:

Staff and members of all research committees and entities within the Office of the Vice President for Research are encouraged to consider areas of potential undue influence and exclude or abstain themselves from their role/vote if such a possibility exists. Concern over having been subjected to undue influence may be reported to the chairperson or Director of the committee or research entity. The report may also be made in writing to the Vice President for Research. Alternatively, there may be occasion where another staff or member of a research entity suspects that a fellow staff or member is subject to undue influence for purposes of favoring a particular individual or group. Such suspicion ought to be reported to the chairperson or Director of the research entity, or directly to the Vice President for Research, in writing.

Reporting to the Vice President for Research:

Any staff or member of a research committee or entity within the Office for Research may bypass reporting suspected undue influence to the relevant chairperson, Senior Chair of the IRB Leadership and Enhancement Committee (ILEC), or Director. In bypassing the chairperson or Director, a written report of actual or suspected undue influence directed at oneself or involving fellow staff or members of research entities within the Office for Research is submitted to the Vice President for Research. These reports will be handled confidentially and expeditiously through the investigation process explained below. A written acknowledgement of the report will be returned, omitting confidential details.

Investigation:

Reports of potential undue influence will be investigated by the Vice President for Research's Office of Research Compliance and Education, as appropriate. These investigations will follow the VCU Scientific Misconduct Policy format for investigations, initiated through an informal inquiry and continuing to a formal investigation process and remedy proposal, as indicated by the situation.

It is the responsibility of the members, faculty, and staff of the administrative and compliance and oversight entities within the Office of the Vice President for Research to be sensitive to attempts and potential for undue influence. They are expected to exclude themselves and/or report such attempts and potential influences and participate in the investigation of such. It is the responsibility of the Vice President for Research to oversee this policy.

References:

VCU Scientific Misconduct Policy