

**Syracuse University Senate Committee on Research  
Report of April 2017**

**I. Original Committee Charge**

“The Committee on Research shall be responsible for stimulating, assisting and coordinating the various University groups interested in research. It shall also observe and report on research activities with respect to the maintenance of principles of academic freedom and open disclosure of research findings. It shall recommend policy regarding research leaves. It shall strive to promote a proper balance between research and teaching.”

**Source:** BYLAWS OF THE SENATE OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, Article V. Standing Committees, Section 14, as amended during the 2006-2007 session of the University Senate

**II. January 2017 Charge from the Senate Agenda Committee**

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Senate Research Committee, along with the Senate AFTPE Committee, received the following charge from the Senate Agenda Committee:

Given the concerns of some members of our community about the implications of gifts to the university from the Koch Foundation, the Agenda Committee charges AFTPE and the Committee on Research with 1) determining that the gifts from the Koch Brothers to SU are fully in accordance with academic freedom and other values of the university and 2) to develop guidelines to help guide future solicitation and acceptance of gifts from donors whose practices might conflict with SU values.

After further consultation, the Senate AFTPE Committee decided not to pursue this charge, since it was possible that faculty involved with funding from the Charles Koch Foundation (CKF) would have concerns about their academic freedom. Thus, the two tasks described above were left to the Senate Research Committee alone.

What we present below is an interim report on these issues. As we detail, there are many remaining questions about both the specifics of CKF funding and the wider issue of guidelines for future solicitations from donors.

**Charge 1: “determining that the gifts from the Koch Brothers to SU are fully in accordance with academic freedom and other values of the university.”**

- SU does not formally identify its “values.” We can evaluate whether CKF funding is in accordance with academic freedom. It is more difficult to evaluate whether it is in accordance with university values, which are not officially specified.
- The primary “gift” from the CKF to SU was actually a \$1.75 million grant awarded to a faculty member, Prof. Maria Minniti, in the Martin J. Whitman School of Management. Throughout SU publicity on this award, there are inconsistencies in how it has been presented: in some

instances, it is described as a gift while in others it is described as a grant.

- While this large grant awarded to a Whitman faculty member was the most visible CKF funding on campus, there are other, smaller amounts of CKF in additional colleges and schools.
- The grant agreement related to the CKF award to Prof. Minniti was ultimately reviewed by the Office of Sponsored Programs and is reported to have met all the required standards for academic freedom, intellectual property rights, transparency, and mutual termination of funding that are standard in any external grant received by SU faculty. We have been assured by both the Interim Vice-President for Research and the Director of the Office of Sponsored Programs (*OSP*) that everything in the CKF grant is in accordance with standard OSP practice.
- The CKF grant to Prof. Minniti, however, originated, not in OSP, but in Corporate and Foundation Relations (*CFR*), which is part of the Office of Development. Although the CKF grant was ultimately reviewed and approved by OSP, it began, not under the purview, standards, and guiding principles of OSP,<sup>1</sup> but under the purview, standards, and guiding principles of development and fund-raising for the university.
- The Office of Development, at least its Corporate and Foundations component, can submit research proposals to foundation or corporate sources, provided that they are not contractually binding the University. These proposals can be submitted independent of OSP. However, should any such proposals contain a required budget component, CFR will consult with OSP prior to proposal submission for accurate representation of University costs.

### *Lingering questions related to Charge 1:*

- We were unable to learn anything further about how the CKF grant came to be or how it was handled by the Office of Development. I (*Jamie Winders*) had a meeting scheduled with Sara Wason, Assistant Vice-President of Corporate and Foundation Relations in the Office of Development, but that meeting was cancelled the day before we were set to meet. Ms. Wason's email assured me that "The contract in my opinion is benign and there are no restrictions that inhibit academic freedom" (4-16-17) and advised me to direct any questions to Prof. Maria Minniti or to Provost Wheatly.
- I reached out to Prof. Minniti to request a meeting on Tuesday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I have not received a response.
- Our committee was not able to find the Office of Development's guidelines for pursuing and accepting gifts and grants. Thus, we cannot directly confirm or disconfirm anything related to this first charge.
- Our committee also has not seen the contract agreement for the CKF in question. Thus, we cannot directly confirm or disconfirm anything related to this first charge.

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<sup>1</sup><http://sponsoredprograms.syr.edu/develop-and-submit-proposals/the-basics/fundamental-principles/>. Accessed 23 April, 2017.

**Charge 2: “to develop guidelines to help guide future solicitation and acceptance of gifts from donors whose practices might conflict with SU values.”**

This charge was more complicated to address in part because the line between grants and gifts is blurry in places. When funding related to research is channeled through OSP, clear rules, regulations, and guidelines apply, all of which have roots in the model of federal funding. When funding related to research is channeled through the Office of Development, it is less clear what guidelines and regulations apply.

To address this charge, our Committee attempted to review SU policies related to ethics and giving and to ethics and research funding, as well as available policies at our peer institutions. From that work, we make the following tentative recommendations:

- (1) The different paths and routes by which money related to research can enter SU are complicated, with some originating in OSP and some originating in the Office of Development. Each of these routes comes with different sets of guidelines and oversight. ***We recommend that any funding earmarked for research, discovery, or creative scholarship begin in the Office of Sponsored Programs and be assessed from the start by standards in place in OSP.*** In other words, we recommend that any grant submitted by SU be handled and reviewed by OSP *prior to submission*. This practice would standardize grant applications, increase transparency concerning external funding of all sorts, and ensure that all funding related to research meets the high standards put in place by OSP.
- (2) **We recommend an ad-hoc Senate Committee be formed to look deeper into this issue.** In our review of grant and gift policies elsewhere, it became clear that other institutions often have university-wide ethical guidelines, as well as ethical guidelines related to gifts. While OSP’s principles and guidelines are clear and easily accessible, we did not find a similar policy for the Office of Development. Since the Office of Development can submit grants, we recommend that the Senate look further into this issue *and* identify best practices at other institutions that SU might adopt. We recommend an ad-hoc committee in part because it is a large task that reaches beyond the questions of research and in part because the work would need to take place over the summer, when some members of our committee will be unavailable.
  - In our review, we identified the guidelines established by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, an international professional association serving educational institutions and the advancement professionals who work on their behalf in alumni relations, communications, development, marketing and allied areas, as a good place to start.<sup>2</sup>
- (3) **We recommend that gifts/grants to establish courses and programs proceed only after approval from the Senate Committee on Curriculum and the Graduate College** (*in the case of Master and PhD degree tracks and programs*). We also recommend that donors not be involved in decision-making related to curricula, the selection of fellows, or dissertation topics. While questions of curriculum development are beyond the scope of our committee (such as

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.case.org/Samples\\_Research\\_and\\_Tools/Principles\\_of\\_Practice.html](http://www.case.org/Samples_Research_and_Tools/Principles_of_Practice.html)

whether curricular documentation should be revised to facilitate the disclosure of external funding), we raise this issue in the hopes that the Curriculum Committee will look into it in the near future.

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