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Dear Dr. Glover and Dr. Norton:

I have been following the recent sequence of emails about reporting outside activities, foreign influence etc. with considerable confusion and increasing disquiet.

I somehow had the feeling that universities were thrilled when they had faculty who had reached such levels of prominence and distinction that they were invited to give lectures at other institutions both at home and abroad, were asked to serve on review panels for major funding agencies such as the NSF, DOE or NASA, served the nation by participating in National Academy studies, took on major editorial positions for academic journals, etc. Indeed, activities like these are expected even from junior faculty looking to get tenure.

Now it seems that these activities are sufficiently suspect that we must obtain prior approval to take them on and must report them diligently, simply because the expenses that we incur might be reimbursed by the host organization. Somebody has evidently concluded that we faculty members so love being mistreated by TSA, are so enamored of flying on hateful airlines, and so enjoy sleeping in cheesy hotel rooms, that we are complete suckers to undue influence by other entities (foreign or otherwise) who dangle these travel opportunities in front of us, promising to pay only for our out-of-pocket expenses (but not for the time we have spent nor the aggravations we have endured).

Speaking for myself, the activities that fall under this rubric vary from year to year, but have ranged from 10 to 30 cases annually. I am now ordered to complete the form "Disclosure Of Outside Activities And Financial Interests Form" for every colloquium invitation, every committee duty, every commentary I write for Nature, every trip on National Academy of Sciences business, every NSF review panel. Since the rules appear to require this even if no compensation is on offer (see the answer to question #1 in the 28 January memo from Dr. Glover, although it evidently conflicts with item 26.4(a)(3) of the current UFBOTT-UFF Collective Bargaining agreement), I presume that I must complete a form every time I agree to referee a paper (or perhaps only when the journal is a foreign publication). This all is in addition to travel authorizations that I must file for every trip.

After completing the form in advance for every such activity, I am then told to print the form and send between three and five copies to various offices (you would think that these forms would be fillable online and viewable by anyone having the authority, not some cheaply formatted PDF document, last revised in 2013).

Note that I am not including here activities with serious remuneration, such as honoraria or consulting fees, or involvement with outside companies or start-ups, or activities involving substantial time commitments. Regular disclosures of such activities are necessary and important. It's the zero-sum professional activities that we all take on as part of our routine careers that now are being parsed by the bureaucratic classes. To call reimbursement of travel expenses "compensation" is ludicrous, and to suggest that such reimbursements make us susceptible to undue influence is, quite frankly, insulting.

