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FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

## Salary Offsets

### Year

2002

### Description

This case discusses issues surrounding the misuse of grant funds by academic institutions.

### Body

Carolyn is a mechanical engineering (ME) professor at a prestigious university. She has received a three-year research award to develop prosthetic limb technology. The \$250,000 grant is awarded by a government institution and funds supplies, equipment, professional travel, salary offset and graduate student support.

Carolyn's 30 percent salary offset amounts to 0.3 full-time equivalents and is intended to reduce her teaching load by 30 percent per year so that she can devote more of her time to research. As is standard practice, the ME department pools the salary offsets of each professor in the department and is supposed to hire the appropriate number of adjunct faculty based on the accumulated total of full-time equivalents. However, these monies typically go into a nondesignated departmental fund that is used not only to pay for adjunct faculty, but also for teaching assistants (TAs), staff, scholarship awards and general operating costs. Naturally, there are other sources of income for this fund, such as tuition, donations and endowment income. Because the salary offsets are deposited in this nondesignated fund, the resulting number of full-time equivalents often gets "lost" as the money from the different sources gets pooled in the fund.

For the 2000-01 academic year, Wilhelm, the department chair, hired 6 full-time adjunct teachers to reduce the class load of his faculty members as well as 20 TAs to assist with all of the ME classes. Money from this departmental fund also was awarded to four scholarship recipients and paid the salaries of the 12 staff administrators. For this academic period, Carolyn taught five classes, one more than is required for full professors. She had assistance from one TA in two of those classes. Consequently, she was unable to allocate the expected time to her research that her salary offset afforded her. This scenario was true for several other ME faculty members and has been a chronic problem in the eyes of these professors.

Disturbed by the fact that she was teaching more than the normal course load, Carolyn surveyed the ME faculty to determine the number of full-time equivalents being contributed to the departmental fund by their salary offsets. She learned that her colleagues' grants contributed a combined 12 full-time equivalents. Carolyn also discovered that the number of adjunct faculty in other departments at her university fell short of the number allocated by their salary offsets.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Should federal grant money that funds a reduction in class load for a professor be used solely for this purpose?
2. What are some administrative solutions to ensuring that money from salary offsets is allocated to hiring the proper number of adjunct faculty?
3. What can be done to rectify the imbalance in the teaching load of the ME faculty?
4. Since the three principal responsibilities of a faculty member are service, teaching and scholarship, should faculty members also receive a reduction in their expected service contributions upon receiving a salary offset from a grant?

## **Notes**

Brian Schrag, ed., *Research Ethics: Cases and Commentaries*, Volume 6, Bloomington, Indiana: Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, 2002.

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