Engineering Student Serving As Consultant to University (adapted from NSPE Case No. 91-5)

Year

1999

Description

A graduate student holds consulting jobs for the university in which he is enrolled. Does this situation create a conflict of interest?

Body

Jan, a professional engineer on unpaid leave from Punto Consultants, is a part-time graduate student at a small private university and is enrolled in a research class for credit taught by Dimanro, a mechanical-engineering professor at the University. Part of the research being performed by Jan involves the use of an innovative geothermal technology.

The University is in the process of enlarging its facilities, and Dimanro, a member of the University's building committee, has responsibility for developing a request for proposal (RFP) in order to solicit interested engineering firms. Dimanro plans to incorporate an application of the geothermal technology into the RFP. Dimanro asks Jan to serve as a paid consultant to the University's building committee in developing the RFP and reviewing proposals. Punto Consultants will not be submitting a proposal and is not averse to having Jan work on the RFP and proposal reviews. Jan agrees to serve as a paid consultant.

Is it a conflict of interest for Jan to be enrolled in a class for credit at the University and at the same time serve as a consultant to the University? If so, is disclosure sufficient to meet Jan's obligations? Is it ethical for Jan to participate in the preparation of the RFP? Is it ethical for Jan to review the proposals?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Engineering Student Serving as Consultant to University - Case No. 91-5](#).

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