

Carl O. Hilgarth's Commentary on "Taking a Position of Influence"

Commentary On
Taking a Position of Influence

I

In my decision to serve or not serve on the review panel for the summer faculty fellowship program I would have to consider the following:

- Since I am nationally known for my research, any new research I do will almost certainly enhance both my status and that of Western Tech as a research institution.
- Because of my reputation, my participation on the review panel that will determine the fellowships projects receive funding will also contribute to the desire of Western Tech to upgrade its status as a first-rate research institution.

Since I have had little opportunity to do research due to my teaching load, my response to David Jackson, Vice-President for Research at Western Tech, is to decline the invitation to serve on the review panel and submit my proposal for review. I explain this to the vice-president.

II

On hearing my decision, Vice-President Jackson explains that while he hasn't worked out all the wrinkles, it doesn't seem fair that the best people at Western Tech--the ones they want on the review panel--should not have a chance at the fellowships. He tells me that I can apply for the fellowship, and also serve on the review panel as long I am not involved in the review of my own proposal inferring that this will preserve the integrity of the research fellowship award process.

I realize that if I were on the panel, my stature and opinions will certainly influence the award process and leave it suspect in the eyes of my peers on the faculty, especially if my proposal receives a fellowship award and another's doesn't. Participation by other faculty could lead to the same result. So to me, this suggestion does not really solve the problem.

I reiterate my interest in the research opportunity and decline to participate on the panel. Any level of my participation on a panel involved in reviewing my proposal and competing proposals could be viewed as a conflict of interest that could cloud the objectivity and integrity of the process to upgrade the research status of the institution. I would suggest to the vice-president that the review panel might be better, more objective, and more credible if none of the reviewers were from Western Tech or faculty. And since he said that he hasn't worked out all of the wrinkles yet, this is still a very attractive and viable option.