

ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS: AN INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVE

Susan B. Butts

Sr. Director of External S&T Programs
(retired), The Dow Chemical Company
Past President, University-Industry
Demonstration Partnership

My Background

- ❑ Advising company researchers about rights and responsibilities in external research collaborations
- ❑ Negotiation of research agreements with universities, government labs, private research institutes
- ❑ Oversight of research relationships
- ❑ Intervention/problem resolution

Putting Things In Context

- The basic principles of ethics in science apply in research collaborations but rights and obligations can vary depending on the context for the research (e.g., public vs. private funding, cultural norms) leading to real or perceived conflicts with these principles.

Research Integrity and Ethics

- Companies often work with universities because:
 - Their research results are believed to be unbiased
 - Their research results are more likely to be trusted by the public
- Therefore, companies should take steps to ensure that no undue influence is exerted or perceived, e.g.,
 - Granting right to publish results
 - Funding not contingent on obtaining desired results

Sensitivity to Cultural Norms

- ❑ Relationship between industry and universities varies from country to country
- ❑ Distinction between “sponsored research” and “work for hire”
- ❑ Faculty expectations for continued funding despite unfavorable results from company perspective
- ❑ Avoid value judgments

Putting Things in Context

- Seek to:
 - Understand why companies and universities or governments work together on research
 - Understand cultural differences in relationships and ethical norms
- Do this by:
 - Asking questions
 - Stating expectations
 - Resolving differences
- Before beginning a collaboration

Examples

- Limiting publication
 - **"BP Accused of Seeking to Limit Gulf Scientists' Publications.** The *Mobile (AL) Press-Register* reports that BP is offering lucrative contracts to marine scientists from the Gulf Coast region to conduct research on the oil spill -- but with strings attached. According to the report, at least one contract "prohibits the scientists from publishing their research, sharing it with other scientists or speaking about the data that they collect for at least the next three years." Academic researchers under contract to BP would also be unable to accept support from federal agencies for work related to the spill." AAAS Policy Alert, 7/21/10
- Contractual obligations for desired outcomes
 - Perceived vs. real ethical conflict