Consultation on Tri-Agency Framework: Responsible Conduct of Research (Deadline: September 30, 2011)

The Association of Academic Staff of the University of Alberta is submitting input into the Tri-Agency request for input into the consultation document.

Responsibilities of Institutions

The University of Alberta currently has a Research and Scholarship Integrity Policy which will substantially meet the requirements of this Framework. Our policy is very careful to respect and minimize potential risk to all parties when dealing with allegations of policy breaches. However, the Framework will require the University to alter our policy to require advising an external agency of allegations “that may involve significant financial, health and safety, or other risks.”

We as an Association have concerns about this required communication at the allegation stage. The following questions come to mind:

- What constitutes a “significant financial, health and safety or other risk?”
  - What are the thresholds or definitions of what would be considered significant?
  - What is considered material in terms of financial risk?
  - How is the significance of breaches of Tri-Agency Research Integrity Policy defined?
  - How is the significance of misrepresentation defined?
- Why do allegations need to be reported to the Agency?
  - What are these reports going to be used for?
  - Will these reports be treated as confidential?
- What needs to be included in the allegation advice notice?
  - How much and what kind of information are we sharing and are their any FOIPP implications?

We feel that it should be important to respect and protect the reputation of all parties involved in an allegation until such time as an investigation has been completed. There is a high risk to the Researcher and to the University due to unfounded or malicious allegations. There are many repercussions for false allegations, particularly in terms of partners, extended stakeholders and students.