

Dear Campus Community,

After a more than year-long, internal investigation, the University has concluded that two professors and a staff research scientist are responsible for significant research misconduct.

In 2018, we received concerns from outside of UK about research being conducted at the University, later identified as involving Xianglin Shi and Zhuo Zhang, professors in our Department of Toxicology and Cancer Biology within the College of Medicine, and Donghern Kim, a staff research scientist who worked with them.

This matter involves a serious breach of ethics, fundamental to who we are as members of an academic community. We want to share with our campus community what happened and the steps we are taking in response.

Per the University's regulations and federal guidelines, we immediately empaneled an inquiry committee of expert scientists to assess whether there were sufficient grounds to proceed to a more thorough investigation. Upon determining that sufficient grounds existed, the investigation committee conducted a detailed examination of a selection of the researchers' grants and scholarly papers authored by one or more of Shi, Zhang and Kim.

In a more than 1,000-page report, the committee determined conclusively that there were numerous occurrences of research misconduct, including falsified or fabricated data as part of several publications and grant proposals. This week we turned that report over to the federal Office of Research Integrity, which will further review our findings.

Per University regulations, UK President Eli Capilouto consulted with the Senate Advisory Committee on Privilege and Tenure (SACPT) prior to informing the faculty members that they were going to be removed from campus. Shi and Zhang were then informed that absent their agreement to resign, we will begin the process to terminate their employment at UK, given the seriousness of these findings. Unless resolved by resignation, a detailed summary of charges will be prepared. Those charges – containing a recommendation to terminate their employment – will be presented to the SACPT.

According to UK's Governing Regulations, at least one other faculty committee, empaneled by the University Senate Council, could also review charges and make a recommendation to President Capilouto regarding termination of employment. Ultimately, the UK Board of Trustees would decide whether to accept a termination recommendation.

Kim, who was a UK staff member, also has had his employment terminated. We also are seeking to retract the papers in question, the faculty members' laboratories have been shut down, and without University Legal Office approval, the three researchers are

not permitted to contact members of the University community or come on campus except for medical care. Their access to University equipment also has been discontinued.

UK will work with graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in the labs in question to minimize disruption of their studies. With the closure of the two labs, the positions of an additional five staff members will be eliminated because they are supported by research grants that must be terminated. UK Human Resources is working with those impacted on a transition from the University and appropriate assistance packages.

Because College of Medicine Dean Robert DiPaola is a co-author on a paper with Shi, Zhang and Kim that was examined by the investigation committee, he recused himself from the process. DiPaola was not a respondent in the investigation, and the committee found that he was not responsible for direct oversight of the research in the paper. However, that paper will be retracted.

As the University of Kentucky supports outstanding research to address Kentucky's most significant and protracted challenges, we are committed to a continual examination of our processes, policies, and procedures to protect against research misconduct. Our research must be conducted in an ethical and responsible manner, consistent with our published policies and standards. In the rare instances when researchers violate our expectations and standards, the University will act forcefully and without hesitation to investigate the misconduct, correct it, and take steps to prevent any recurrence.

We will update the campus as the situation evolves. Thank you for all you do for our University and those we serve.

David Blackwell
Provost

Lisa Cassis
Vice President for Research