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Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

ETHICS COMMISSION INVESTIGATION LEADS TO CONVICTION OF FORMER WRIGHT STATE PROFESSOR

After a joint investigation by the Ohio Ethics Commission, State Highway Patrol, Auditor of State, and Greene County Prosecutor's office, Phillip E. Messner, former professor in the College of Education and Human Service at Wright State University, was found guilty today of a criminal conflict of interest in violation of Revised Code Section 102.03 (E). Messner was convicted by Fairborn Municipal Court Judge Catherine Barber after pleading no contest to the ethics charge, a first degree misdemeanor, and was sentenced to pay the maximum fine of \$1000 and court costs.

Messner was convicted of a violation of R.C. 102.03 (E), a conflict of interest restriction prohibiting a public official or employee from accepting compensation or other things of value that may substantially and improperly influence the public official or employee with respect to his duties. In February and March of 1995, Messner accepted consulting fees totaling \$1600.00 from a private corporation, Leadership Services International, Inc. Leadership Services paid the fees to Messner for services that related to an educational journal, Record in Educational Leadership. The journal was subsidized by Wright State University. Messner had also been compensated by Wright State University for performing the same consulting services. The President of Leadership Services, Frederick J. Gies, deposited money from Leadership Services into an account controlled by Messner. Gies, in his role as Dean of the College of Education at Wright State, also authorized stipends from Wright State to Messner for Messner's work on the educational journal.

According to Paul M. Nick, Investigative Counsel for the Ethics Commission and a Special Assistant Prosecutor for Greene County, "The conviction arises out of Messner's role as a professor at Wright State University. Messner was paid twice, once by the University, once

by Geis' corporation, for performing the same work."

According to David E. Freel, Executive Director of the Ohio Ethics Commission, "This case shows the problems that can arise when a public servant allows his private interests to interfere with his public duties." Freel further stated that the joint investigation and prosecuting resulting from problems at Wright State University is ongoing in conjunction with the Greene County Prosecutor William Schenck.

The Ohio Ethics Commission is an independent agency of state government charged with interpreting and administering the Ohio Ethics Law for many state and local public officials and employees. The Commission has been serving the public, and state and local governments, since its formation as part of the Ohio Ethics Law in 1973.