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MEMORANDUM

TO: Steven W. Leslie, Executive Vice President and Provost
Patricia C. Ohlendorf, Vice President for Legal Affairs
Juan M. Sanchez, Vice President for Research

FROM: Robert A. Peterson, Research Integrity Officer 

SUBJECT: Regnerus Inquiry Report

DATE: August 24, 2012

I have now completed an inquiry into the allegations of research misconduct lodged against Professor Mark Regnerus, an associate professor in the Sociology Department and a faculty research associate in the Population Research Center. The purpose of this memorandum is to memorialize this inquiry.

The inquiry was initiated in response to a series of allegations set forth in a letter from Mr. Scott Rose (actual name: Scott Rosensweig) to President Powers. In the letter Mr. Rose alleged general scientific misconduct by Professor Regnerus when designing and conducting research that resulted in his article, "How different are the adult children of parents who have same-sex relationships? Findings from the New Family Structures Study," which was published in *Social Science Research* (Volume 41, pages 752-770). The inquiry was conducted in accordance with The University of Texas at Austin *Revised Handbook of Operating Procedures*, Part II, Research Section B, Research Ethics and Compliance Policy Number 11.B.1 (Misconduct in Science and other Scholarly Activity).

In the *Handbook*, scientific misconduct or misconduct in other scholarly research is defined to mean

fabrication or falsification of data, plagiarism, and other practices that seriously deviate from ethical standards for proposing, conducting, or reporting research are unacceptable and in some cases may constitute scientific misconduct. Note that ordinary errors, good faith differences in interpretations or judgments of data, scholarly or political disagreements, good faith personal or professional opinions, or private moral or ethical behavior or views are not misconduct.

Because initially there were no specific allegations regarding fabrication of data, falsification of data, or plagiarism, the focus of the inquiry was whether Professor Regnerus employed or exhibited “other practices that seriously deviate from ethical standards for proposing, conducting, or reporting research” and consequently constitute scientific misconduct.

A structured and systematic approach was followed when conducting the inquiry. Professor Regnerus was informed of the inquiry in writing and orally at the beginning of the inquiry. Subsequently,

- All data on Professor Regnerus’ computers were sequestered. These data included emails and documents.
- Materials including grant applications, correspondence, and IRB protocols were obtained.
- A panel comprised of senior University faculty members was created and advised me during the inquiry process. Panel members actively participated in the inquiry process.
- An independent consultant experienced in matters of scientific misconduct was retained to monitor and evaluate the inquiry process. He concluded that the inquiry process was carried out according to the *Handbook*.
- Interviews were conducted with Mr. Rose and Professor Regnerus. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by a court reporter.

All data, materials, and documents pertinent to the inquiry have been filed and are available for your inspection and review.

The *Handbook* requires that allegations of scientific misconduct be sufficiently specific to allow their evaluation. To satisfy this criterion, Mr. Rose was asked to provide his allegations in a written form prior to being interviewed. On or about July 26th Mr. Rose provided a multi-page document consisting of a series of allegations. I summarized these allegations, and they served as the basis of his interview. These allegations can be respectively synopsized as:

- “Regnerus’s Seeming Falsification of Data”¹
- “Regnerus’s Use of a Seemingly Inadequate, Inappropriate Research Design”
- “Regnerus’s Possible Bad-Faith, Invalid Comparison Between His Test and Control Groups”
- “Apparently Damaging Peer Review Issues, Perhaps Linked to Regnerus Himself”

¹ Mr. Rose spoke about “qualitative falsification” in the context of inappropriate definitions and labeling of analysis groups, not falsification in which underlying data are falsified.

- “Regnerus’s Scientific Disreputable Funders”
- “Justifiable Doubts About Regnerus’s Survey Company, Knowledge Networks”
- “Regnerus’s Seemingly Feeds into NOM’s Defamatory Conflation of Homosexuals with Pedophiles”
- “Regnerus Might Be Incompetent to Study Gay Parenting”

During his interview, Mr. Rose was explicitly asked to state the factual basis of, or the direct evidence supporting, each of these allegations, even those allegations that did not fall directly within the scope of the University’s misconduct policy.

A copy of Mr. Rose’s written allegations was transmitted to Professor Regnerus and served as the basis of his interview. Subsequent to his interview, Professor Regnerus produced written responses to certain questions posed during the interview.

I have carefully reviewed all available data, materials, and information associated with this matter in the context of the University’s distinctions as to what does and does not constitute scientific misconduct. I have also discussed the inquiry process as well as all information obtained during the inquiry process with inquiry panel members. After doing so, I have concluded that Professor Regnerus did not commit scientific misconduct when designing, executing, and reporting the research published in the *Social Science Research* article. None of the allegations of scientific misconduct put forth by Mr. Rose were substantiated either by physical data, written materials, or by information provided during the interviews. Several of the allegations were expressly beyond the purview of the inquiry. In brief, Mr. Rose believed that the Regnerus research was seriously flawed and inferred that there must be scientific misconduct. However, there is no evidence to support that inference.

Whether the research designed and conducted by Professor Regnerus and reported in *Social Science Research* possessed significant limitations or was even perhaps seriously flawed is a determination that should be left to debates that are currently underway in the academy and future research that validates or invalidates his findings. Professor Regnerus has stated that the data on which the research at issue was based will soon be made publicly available. At that time scholars can examine the data themselves and arrive at their own conclusions.

Since no evidence was provided to indicate that the behavior at issue rose to a level of scientific misconduct, no formal investigation is warranted. The issues raised by Mr. Rose fall within that portion of the University’s definition of scientific misconduct that states, “ordinary errors, good faith differences in interpretations or judgments of data, scholarly or political disagreements, good faith personal or professional opinions, or private moral or ethical behavior or views are not misconduct.”