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DOJ: Former WVU Professor Secretly Worked in China During Paid Parental Leave

A former West Virginia University (WVU) physics professor is facing 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000 when he is sentenced after pleading guilty to one count of fraud in connection with employment he accepted at the Chinese Academy of Sciences. According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), James Patrick Lewis spent most of the fall 2018 semester in China, after having been granted leave by WVU under the guise of being a new parent. “Rather than caring for his newborn child, Lewis planned to work in China during the fall 2018 semester as a part of his agreement with the ‘1000 Talents Plan,’” which was for three years and was signed in July 2017. “Lewis agreed to maintain an active research program that yielded publications in high quality, peer-reviewed journals, and to provide research training and experience for Chinese Academy of Sciences students,” DOJ said.

As payment, “Lewis was promised benefits, including a living subsidy of 1 million Yuan (approximately \$143,000), a research subsidy of 4 million Yuan (approximately \$573,000), and a salary of 600,000 Yuan (approximately \$86,000). To receive the benefits, Lewis would have to work full time in China for three consecutive years, for no less than nine months per year, and would have to begin work no later than Aug. 8, 2018,” DOJ said in announcing the plea agreement. In August 2019, Lewis resigned from WVU, where he had been a tenured professor “specializing in molecular reactions used in coal conversion technologies” since 2006. Lewis will pay WVU \$20,189 in restitution as part of his plea, which reflects his “full salary” during the time he was in China, DOJ said. A sentencing date has not been released.

[Link to DOJ announcement](#)

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