

Conflicting principles: Are anti-GMO groups abusing public records transparency laws?

A succession of stories in recent weeks involving scientists and open records requests have anguished many who cherish two ideals: academic freedom and transparency.

I imagine that journalists have also been grappling with a tension between those two ideals. (I know I have.) More on that in a minute. First a recap.

Two weeks ago, I [reported](#) in Science magazine that an anti-GMO group had filed a flurry of freedom of information requests, “asking administrators to turn over any correspondence between a dozen academic researchers and a handful of agricultural companies, trade groups, and PR firms.”

Several days after that story appeared, the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) released a [report](#) detailing how open records requests “are increasingly being used to harass and intimidate scientists and other academic researchers, or to disrupt and delay their work.”

So was this a case where the principles of transparency were being (mis)used in a way that threatened academic freedom?

Does it matter if U.S. Right to Know’s requests to four universities that employ agricultural researchers working in biotechnology’s actions spring from an ideological bias (anti-GMO)? Do intentions even matter? After all, Greenpeace is hardly a neutral bystander. Is anyone in the media or climate science questioning its FOIA motivations? Or does it matter only what the environmental group uncovered with its document request?

Read full original article: [How to Balance Transparency with Academic Freedom?](#)