

UB president shuts down shale-gas institute

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ALBANY — The University at Buffalo's controversial shale-gas research institute was shut down Monday by the school's president, less than two months after he penned a letter defending it to the board of the State University of New York system.

In an open letter Monday, UB President Satish Tripathi said he decided to close the university's Shale Resources and Society Institute after consulting with top administrators. The institute,

which was officially launched in April, had found itself under a cloud of criticism for an inaugural report that was written by researchers with ties to the natural-gas industry.

"It is imperative that our faculty members adhere to rigorous standards of academic integrity, intellectual honesty, transparency, and the highest ethical conduct in their work," Tripathi wrote. "Because of these collective concerns, I have decided to close the Shale Resources and So-

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ciety Institute."

The Shale Resources and Society Institute was launched as a branch of the university dedicated to researching hydraulic fracturing and other issues related to shale-gas drilling. It released its first report in May. The report claimed Pennsylvania's regulation of high-volume hydrofracking had become more effective in recent years and that New York's proposed regulations would be even more so if the state were to allow the much-debated technique.

But the report led to allegations of bias and questions about how the institute was funded from fracking critics and members of the university's faculty. The institute's founders at one time sought industry funding and its co-director

was being paid by the UB Foundation, the university's quasi-public fundraising arm.

The State University of New York's board of trustees got involved in early September, asking for the university to defend the study and clarify the circumstances surrounding the creation of the institute. Later that month, Tripathi and university officials complied with SUNY's request, standing by the institute and its research.

"As with all research at UB, regardless of the source of funding, it is not the role of the university nor of the funding source to dictate the conclusions drawn by faculty investigators," UB Provost Charles Zukoski said in a statement at the time.

New Yorkers Against Fracking, a coalition of groups opposed to shale-gas drilling, cheered Tripathi's decision on Monday.

"We're excited that the University of Buffalo — through the oversight of the SUNY board of trustees — has decided that the Shale Institute should be shut down," said Rebecca Weber, executive director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, a coalition member. "This is a victory for real science over junk science peddled by the gas industry."

The Shale Resources and Society Institute consisted of two part-time co-directors and a volunteer assistant. Funding was budgeted for a third part-time staffer, but as of September one hadn't been hired, according to UB's report to SUNY.

John Martin, a Saratoga Springs-based consultant who was one of the institute's co-directors, did not immediately return a call for comment Monday.