

Response Council Questions From 10 May Meeting

1. Is the ACM Code of Ethics compatible with the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice (SECEPP)?

COPE has reviewed both codes and found no incompatibility between them. The SECEPP is designed for a sub-specialization of computing. Actions which are in keeping with the SECEPP will also be consistent with the imperatives of the ACM Code. Since the ACM Code is broader than the SECEPP there may be actions taken in accordance with the ACM Code that are outside of the scope of the SECEPP. The two codes are not co-extensive.

People are often bound by codes which are overlapping but not co-extensive. For example, university professors are bound by overlapping codes. Some inappropriate actions while communicating with students in the classroom are defined in sexual harassment guidelines but these same actions in the classroom are not within the scope of a university computer use policy.

2. What is the relationship between the two codes --the ACM Code and the SECEPP?

The SECEPP is not a replacement for either the ACM Code or the IEEE Code. The SECEPP was created under a mandate to professionalize software engineering and the Code is designed as a code for the "profession" of software engineering. For example, the details of the Software Engineering Code emphasize standards of software development, management, maintenance and emphasize the impact of the software development process on society. These emphases reflect the design of this code as a software engineering code. The existence of two codes is not abnormal. Professional engineers are governed by at least two professional code --the more generic code of the National Society of Professional Engineers and a more specific code related to the specific details of their particular branch of engineering--chemical, mechanical, etc.

3. Define the approval process for the SECEPP.

COPE recommends four stages to the approval process. The first three of these stages have been completed. The four stages are:

- A. Develop and revise the Code based on extensive review. *
- B. Have the Code Reviewed by the Joint ACM/IEEE-CS Task Force.
- C. Use an existing and tested formal review process used by the IEEE for approving international technical standards. **
- D. Formal adoption of the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (5.1) by the ACM and the Computer Society of the Software Engineering Code of Ethics and Professional Practice as their approved code for the practice and teaching of software engineering.

* The Code went through extensive reviews and revision until July 1997 when version was sent to the ACM/IEEE-CS Joint Task Force for review. After review by the Joint Task Force, Version 3 was published in the November issues of CACM and Computer

with a turnaround ballot seeking input on each clause of the Code. The responses --most items receiving better than 90% approval-- were used to modify version 3 into version 4 which was submitted to the Joint Task Force in December 1997.

** Version 4 was then submitted to an independent formal review process. After the identification of a representative balloting group by the IEEE Technical review process, version 4 was reviewed and voted on by this group. Even though version 4 was accepted by this group, preliminary votes and comments were taken into account and used to improve version 4 creating version 5. Version 5 was recirculated for final review by the balloting group and again passed. Some editorial minor editorial point were made about version 5. These were made, generating version 5.1. The version being recommended.

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