



Matthias Köppe <matthiaskoepp@gmail.com>

Sage Code of Conduct Committee response and assessment regarding several reports

5 messages

Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com>

Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:16 AM

To: Matthias Koepp <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>, sage-conduct@googlegroups.com

Dear Matthias,

As you have observed, we have certainly seen Code of Conduct violations directed toward you, and we have taken actions in many cases, and we will continue to do so. We are slowly working on the backlog, and we hope to respond quickly to new reports.

Regarding Dima: by this point many of your interactions with him are not productive. Note that we are not assigning equal blame in stating this, but those interactions, especially the most public ones — the ones on sage-devel — are hurting the Sage development community. The committee also finds that Dima's bad behavior, although persistent, is not systematic. He gets frustrated with the discussion and lashes out using abusive language. The result may very well be CoC violations, but this is not the same as intentional, systematic abuse. The Committee continues to assess the situation and considers every option at its disposal.

The rest of this email is mainly about interactions with developers other than Dima. First, regarding your recent reports: while we have observed inappropriate language in some cases and in several instances interactions that, in our opinion, cross the line of respectful dialogue, they do not constitute systematic bullying and abuse. We have seen significant signs of good faith in the form of retractions and reformulations.

We do not want to trivialize any possible responses these interactions may have triggered in you, and we do think that there is ground to approach these issues on a basis of resolving misunderstanding and making members aware of how their responses may end up coming across more hurtful and unconstructive than they anticipate.

We have also, unfortunately, received a number of complaints about your behavior, including from multiple developers who have otherwise been silent on these disputes. We all strive to build an inclusive and welcoming community; however, some of your behavior has the opposite effect. Indeed, we are aware of several instances where people have left the SageMath project in large part because of your conduct. Since we believe that you truly care about Sage development and building a welcoming community, we hope you can reconsider your approach here. Your behavior is currently harming this objective, which we are confident is not your intention.

Here are some examples of your actions that make Sage less welcoming.

- As noted in an [earlier message](#), ascribing malicious intentions to the other side in your [recent post](#) on sage-devel calling for votes is not acceptable. There are 2600 people on this mailing list — this is very public behavior — and it will discourage people from joining the community (the committee has heard at least one report to this effect).

- Your use of the eyes emoji. Gonzalo [stated](#) that he felt the use offensive, and we find that credible. When someone asks you to stop engaging in a particular behavior because they find it offensive, especially if they provide a reasonable explanation for their reaction, it is a bad choice to continue using that behavior with that person.
- Your comment at [#38387](#), “The notification is what people who are doing the work want to get.” This implies that you consider anybody who does not like the alerts as issued by the system as not “doing the work.” There are clearly people who are actively involved in SageMath who do not like the alerts, so this comment can be (and was) understood as an insult.
- Your comments at [#37446](#) and [#37447](#) trivialize the effort other community members volunteer in checking and reviewing work. We assessed that members did take genuine effort to evaluate the changes proposed.
- Your comments [#37430](#) and [#37292](#), where you dismiss a community member’s comment as “nonsense” is disrespectful. The person clearly put work into formulating their argument. You may disagree and you can point out technical reasons to corroborate your assessment, but dismissing comments as “nonsense” without further argument is disrespectful to and frustrating for the other party, as well as unwelcoming to other participants.
- In [#37452](#), the term “grandstanding” attributes malicious intentions to the other side.
- In [#37446](#), calling another contribution “deliberate noise” is not acceptable.
- In [#37446](#), “That’s a meaningless comment. It seems that you are still confused about our version files even after the documentation improvements” is disrespectful and patronizing.
- In [#37446](#) “attempting to mislead the audience by reframing” and “manipulative reframing” are not acceptable.
- The word “sabotages” in [#37436](#) is not acceptable.
- The vocabulary in [#36753](#) is attributing malicious intentions with “compiled for the specific purpose of obstructing my modularization work” and we already mentioned before that the term “artificial friction” is not acceptable.
- In [#37399](#) we read no “tactics” of “blame and intimidation,” and accusing others of such behavior is not acceptable. Instead you should let them know which choice of words makes you uncomfortable and ask them to rephrase. Also, you are claiming a position of authority here with “it is necessary that you revise your communication style”. You are in no such position, nor are any other of the community members.

A few examples which are not CoC violations, but which we want to bring to your attention:

- We ask that you stop asserting in public that you have reported content as abuse. Others do the same, and we are also asking them to refrain from this behavior. Note that comments that center your own experience, such as “I found your use of the word X offensive and ask you to avoid it in the future” are still perfectly acceptable. Of course, we continue to encourage you to report code of conduct violations privately to us.
- Similarly in [#37387](#) “Julian, kind reminder that this word has no place in a discussion.” (We are not addressing this because you criticized a member of the committee: we were notified about this by someone else.) This kind of comment pushes people away. If you find that the word “insistence” is inappropriate (a view which we do not share) then you should point that out, but lecturing others in this way is inappropriate.
- Another related case is “Please, Michael, it’s a bit undignified to use such polemic characterizations in every single discussion” in [#37138](#). You are entitled to disagree with Michael’s statement here and your response is certainly not a breach of the CoC. But the way you are elevating yourself morally here may discourage further discussion.

- Regarding two comments at #37287: the [first of these](#), “Still no reaction,” could be read as being aggressive. The [second](#), “Julian, I think this just means that you need process a little bit more context. In particular, as I have told you specifically before, such careful processing is needed before you go and post public reprimands” is not an appropriate response: if a writer’s words can easily be misinterpreted, it is the writer’s responsibility, not their audience. Furthermore, there was no reprimand, just an explanation of a way the message could be misread.

In summary, the committee finds that you sometimes use personal attacks, as well as disrespectful and tactless language, all of which can make the development environment unwelcoming. In a discussion, even in one in which you feel that you have been the target of abuse, it is not appropriate to engage in this behavior.

Finally, J-P and John are available to meet to discuss these and other issues. They will follow up with a separate email: there is no need to involve the full committee in a scheduling discussion.

The SageMath Code of Conduct Committee

Matthias Koepppe <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>
To: Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com>
Cc: sage-conduct@googlegroups.com

Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:35 AM

Dear Nils,

On Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:16AM Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com> wrote:
> As you have observed, we have certainly

"certainly", what do you mean?

> seen Code of Conduct violations directed toward you, and we have taken actions in many cases, and we will continue to do so. We are slowly working on the backlog, and we hope to respond quickly to new reports.

>

> Regarding Dima: by this point many of your interactions with him are not productive. Note that we are not assigning equal blame in stating this, but those interactions, especially the most public ones — the ones on sage-devel — are hurting the Sage development community. The committee also finds that Dima’s bad behavior, although persistent, is not systematic.

"Persistent, but not systematic." What does that even mean?

> He gets frustrated with the discussion and lashes out using abusive language. The result may very well
> be CoC violations,

"may very well"?

> but this is not the same as intentional, systematic abuse.

No, that's a wildly unacceptable assessment. Abuse has nothing to do with intent.

I don't think I have to read on after this.

Committee: As they say, there are two possible directions of stepping here: Up or down.

Matthias

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Dr. Matthias Koepppe <http://www.math.ucdavis.edu/~mkoeppe>
Professor of Mathematics

Matthias Koepppe <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>

Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 12:08 PM

To: Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com>
Cc: sage-conduct@googlegroups.com

I did read on, after all.

On Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:16AM Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com> wrote:

> We have also, unfortunately, received a number of complaints about your behavior, [...]

It is the first time that I hear about it. Surely if there had been any substance to such complaints, the committee would have contacted me about it.

> We all strive to build an inclusive and welcoming community;

I'm sorry that I have to say this but I don't think that you do, Nils. You are part of the problem.

- In <https://groups.google.com/g/sage-devel/c/Wjw2wcvgf8k/m/D9HzfAbEAQAJ>, you publicly thanked Dima for his highly offensive message in which he repeated his typical denunciations of my work.

- And just the other day, you suggested that I take a break and leave the community to the rule of the bullies, to protect my health. That's the opposite of building an inclusive community.

I do hope that you can make the effort to learn about the methods of inclusion, so that we can work together in a meaningful way.

> however, some of your behavior has the opposite effect.

No, it does not. I'm doing the necessary steps of transformative leadership.

Obviously, the bullies and abusers are not happy about it.

I do understand that community members who happen to be their friends may also be offended. You know, I was friends, in real life, with Dima, too, until he ratcheted in to his permanent toxic behavior some time last year. (I think the war did this to him.)

> Indeed, we are aware of several instances where people have left the SageMath project in large part because of your conduct.

I don't believe you. I have a very good overview about who's contributing. We're not missing anyone.

> Since we believe that you truly care about Sage development and building a welcoming community, we hope you can reconsider your approach here.

No, what's necessary is what I have asked before -- for the committee to learn about the principles of inclusion and act accordingly.

> Here are some examples of your actions that make Sage less welcoming.

>

> As noted in an earlier message, ascribing malicious intentions to the other side

> in your recent post on sage-devel calling for votes is not acceptable. There are 2600 people on this mailing list — this is very public behavior — and it will discourage people from joining the community (the committee has heard at least one report to this effect).

You are viewing it in the wrong frame of a "dispute". I'm calling out harmful conduct, which is fully documented and which has been whitewashed by repeatedly mischaracterizing it as mere differences in opinion.

> Your comments at #37446 and #37447 trivialize the effort other community members volunteer in checking and reviewing work. We assessed that members did take genuine effort to evaluate the changes proposed.

Sorry, the committee probably shouldn't make such authoritative

statements about technical points that are outside their area of expertise. You're dead wrong about these.

> Your comments #37430 and #37292, where you dismiss a community member's comment as "nonsense" is disrespectful. The person clearly put work into formulating their argument. [...]

No, they did not. I use utmost, professional restraint in my language. I use the word "nonsense" only very rarely, namely as a stopping response to comments that are deliberately disrespectful and/or manipulative, e.g. by trying to mislead the audience with false claims. I'm prepared to explain each and everyone of these instances in detail if there's interest.

> In #37452, the term "grandstanding" attributes malicious intentions to the other side.

Yes, that's right. That's me calling out a deliberate violation of our Code of Review, which calls for a collaborative approach to reviewing.

> In #37446, "That's a meaningless comment. It seems that you are still confused about our version files even after the documentation improvements" is disrespectful and patronizing.

To the contrary. This comment is putting a stop to Dima's persistent disrespectful conduct. Dima is frequently trying to mislead the audience about his level of competence.

> In #37446 "attempting to mislead the audience by reframing" and "manipulative reframing" are not acceptable.

To the contrary. I'm calling out what the committee has failed to call in: That Dima is repeatedly playing the victim, in public, really requires a public reprimand whenever it occurs.

> you are claiming a position of authority here with "it is necessary that you revise your communication style". You are in no such position, nor are any other of the community members.

There's a fundamental misunderstanding on your side here. I'm exactly in this position, namely that of responsible leadership. I have stepped up where the community has failed in the past.

> A few examples which are not CoC violations, but which we want to bring to your attention:

>

> We ask that you stop asserting in public that you have reported content as abuse. Others do the same, and we are also asking them to refrain from this behavior.

It's a necessary correction for the continued public denial of abuse, both-siding, and use of euphemisms by the committees. Step up, and it won't be necessary any more for me to do so.

> Another related case is "Please, Michael, it's a bit undignified to use such polemic characterizations in every single discussion" in #37138. You are entitled to disagree with Michael's statement here and your response is certainly not a breach of the CoC. But the way you are elevating yourself morally here may discourage further discussion.

I'm not "elevating myself". I'm taking the necessary leadership to fight disrespect in our community.

[Quoted text hidden]

Matthias Koeppe <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>

To: Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com>

Cc: sage-conduct@googlegroups.com

Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 2:49 PM

On Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:16AM Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com> wrote:

> Finally, J-P and John are available to meet to discuss these and other issues. They will follow up with a separate email: there is no need to involve the full committee in a scheduling discussion.

I would strongly suggest that the full committee make itself available to discuss with me.

[Quoted text hidden]

Matthias Koepppe <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>
To: sage-conduct <sage-conduct@googlegroups.com>

Tue, Jun 4, 2024 at 1:46 PM

Hi committee,
Thanks again to all who took the time to meet. Prompted by today's discussion on Zoom, I've looked again at the examples in the message below.
I can confirm that all of the committee's comments on these examples were wildly misguided; I'd recommend the committee to revisit them as part of the learning experience.
Best
Matthias

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Nils Bruin <bruin.nils@gmail.com>
Date: Sat, Apr 13, 2024 at 10:16AM
Subject: Sage Code of Conduct Committee response and assessment regarding several reports
To: Matthias Koepppe <mkoeppe@math.ucdavis.edu>, <sage-conduct@googlegroups.com>

[...]

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