

Code of Conduct: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This FAQ is not formally part of the Code of Conduct. Content on it is controlled by the Spokesperson with advice from COINS - the Committee on INclusiveness in SDSS.

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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is mandatory reporting and why should I care?

Mandatory reporting can affect how confidential someone that you have reported an incidence to can keep that information. Some institutions have policies that if a "mandatory reporter" is told about another employee's harassment, they must report it to the institution. This does not mean that the institution will pursue the issue further, but it does mean that SDSS cannot keep the information solely within SDSS. Institutions have different standards of when reporting is mandatory and for what kind of harassment. At the bottom of this FAQ are links to the policies of institutions that have mandatory reporting. If you are concerned about this, please be aware of people's affiliations. One of the reasons why there are several people listed as potential points of contact is to be sure that no one is required to talk to someone at their home institution first.

If I witness a violation of the code of conduct, can I report it?

Yes.

If I report a violation, does it immediately go before the committee?

No, unless you or the accused requests it or the violation is of an extreme nature. In general, we will work informally first to correct the situation. Words originally from the Code of Conduct draft: "It is anticipated that many violations of expected conduct will be a consequence of lack of awareness or sensitivity, some of which may reflect the wide range of cultural backgrounds, nationalities, and scientific styles represented in the Collaboration. In these cases, communication with the individuals involved may suffice to resolve the problem informally. The Ombudspersons are a resource for seeking such resolutions with maximal confidentiality."

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If someone is sanctioned by SDSS, can we report it to other astronomical societies?

We have examined the current policies of societies such as the IAU and AAS. Their policies are focused on behavior at meetings, and mainly they rely on home institutions to investigate and sanction. If the violation occurs at a meeting of the AAS or IAU we will support you to report to them. In other cases, it is not clear who we should contact and what they would do with that information. If you would be interested in contacting other astronomy societies to discuss shared reporting, the collaboration would be happy to support that effort.

Are items on the list of possible sanctions the only sanctions that can be considered

No. They are, as stated, a list of possible sanctions.

Can complaints about violations of the Code of Conduct be made anonymously?

We have a mechanism within SDSS for confidential and informal discussion of grievances - via the Ombudspeople (ombuds [at] sdss.org). You are free to send anonymous complaints to them at any time, however please keep in mind that anonymous reports limit our ability to determine whether the violation has occurred, and as a result are unlikely to result in sanctions.

How confidentially will my report be handled?

All reports will be treated confidentially, unless someone is required by law to report a possible violation (see mandatory reporters above). Before any information is shared beyond the people involved in the first report, the complainant's permission will be obtained. Confidentiality can be lifted in parts, for example by discussing the situation informally without names. We point out however that if the complainant wishes to pursue a consideration of formal remedial actions this will necessarily involve some information sharing with relevant members of the project management.

What are my responsibilities for confidentiality?

We ask that no letter or message sent to you about the case be shared in a public forum. All formal written messages sent about the case will contain the following wording:

"This message is confidential. You may not share this message in any public forum without the express, written permission of the ARC Board of Governors. If you are not the intended recipient of this message please contact me immediately and shred/delete all copies of this message."

What is the job of the SDSS-IV Ombudspeople?

Their formal role is defined in the Principles of Operations (the quote is given below). In a nutshell, they are a resource for mediating disagreements within the collaboration and project, and members of the collaboration should feel free to consult them on such matters.

From the Principles of Operations: "The ARC Board will appoint a standing Ombudsperson for the project to help resolve disagreements arising in any aspect of the project in an informal manner. As a neutral third party, the Ombudsperson does not advocate for the project or for either party in a dispute. The objective is to provide a process for achieving a fair and reasonable settlement working within existing policies and procedures. When a request for services is received, the Ombudsperson will work with each party to identify appropriate alternatives that address the conflict and to achieve a mutually satisfactory resolution. Consultation with the Ombudsperson does not preclude later pursuit of a resolution through formal channels if that is still desired."

The current Ombudspeople are listed on the Personal Page. They can always be contacted confidentially at ombuds[at]sdss.org

Is SDSS concerned about false accusations?

False accusations are extremely rare. If in the unlikely case, a false accusation is made, it is also a violation of the Code of Conduct and the same sanctions can apply. More common than false accusations are cases where the parties involved have different experience or assessment of the interaction. The procedures defined in the Code of Conduct are intended to address such cases.

Is it possible to sanction someone for reprisals against someone who reported a violation of the Code of Conduct?

Yes. Reprisals are a violation of the Code of Conduct and the procedure in the Code of Conduct should be used to handle such violations.

List of Institutions with Mandatory Reporting Policies

Please note this list may not be complete. If an institution is missing please let the Spokesperson know at spokesperson@sdss.org (CoCo are currently in the process of adding institutions).

All US based institutions have mandatory reporting via the Title IX.

Institution Policy

- Haverford College, USA Title IX (USA) - mandatory reporting to Title IX officer
<https://www.haverford.edu/sexual-misconduct>
- Portsmouth University, UK Dignity & Respect Policy (2016) requires all staff to report violations they are aware of, and managers have a legal responsibility to stop bullying & harassment
<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/humanresources/occupationalhealthservice/bullyingandharassmentinformation/>
- University of Arizona, USA Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy
<http://policy.arizona.edu/human-resources/nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy>