

## Code of Ethics for the three societies

While harassment of members by attendees at Evolution meetings falls under a Code of Conduct, the societies currently have no policy regarding conduct outside the meeting. Currently the societies have no recourse to prevent someone convicted of a crime or misconduct from attending any meeting or other society event. This is not a theoretical concern: an honoree of one of our societies was recently terminated from his faculty position [1] and a long-term associate editor of one of our journals recently lost his endowed chair and is now serving three years of probation for a sexual crime [2]. Members who have been harmed by these individuals have no guarantee that these individuals will not be serving on a society awards committee, chairing their session, or sitting in the front row of their talk. Establishing a Code of Ethics would allow the societies to make decisions about membership and meeting attendance in a manner that is fair to all involved, while at the same time reducing the risk that *ad hoc* decisions in the wake of a scandal will lead to actions that do not respond appropriately to victims or treat alleged harassers fairly.

## Why this matters

- Scientific societies are communities of scholars, not subscribers to a journal. This means they are united by values. Membership is a privilege and has meaning: there is a reason why CVs include a section on society memberships but not magazine subscriptions. Having a code of ethics helps formalize what the expected values are.
- Our members should not have to fear that recently sanctioned or convicted harassers will further affect them through their activities with their professional society.
- Choosing to ignore victims sends a signal that they are not important members of our scientific societies and robs our community of their contributions.
- Scientific societies are evolving to have codes of ethics to protect their members, prepare for eventual issues, and establish a professional identity. A code of ethics allows for a considered and systematic response that is based on the societies' agreed upon values and expectations for conduct.

## What other societies are doing

An increasing number of scientific societies have codes of ethics that include sanctions for violations of professional ethics (see [3] for more information). The Codes for the Botanical Society of America, American Geophysical Union, and others allow sanctioning, including expulsion of members for misconduct, including harassment. The International Society for Bayesian Analysis recently sanctioned three members, including a founding co-president, after an investigation of misconduct. Possible sanctions include a ban on society activities for a minimum period (e.g., 5 or 10 years depending on the offenses). The Botanical Society of America allows their Board of Directors to suspend or expel a member after a hearing [4] and their comprehensive guidelines of professional ethics include harassment, plagiarism, inhumane treatment of animals, and more [5].

## Should the Evolution Societies have a Code of Ethics? Some Considerations

If our societies decide that a code of ethics is the next step for formalizing expectations of member behaviors, we recommend consideration of the following points:

- A decision on whether each society will have a code of ethics, and if so, how they will coordinate on sanctionable actions as they relate to the attendance at our joint meetings. For example, if one society bans someone from the Evolution meetings out of concern for their members, it is important that this person does not attend the meeting via membership in another society or as a non-member.
- A specific definition of what it means to be a member of the society “in good standing,” and which privileges of membership are revoked when good standing is lost.
- Not all accusations are true, and not all proven offenses rise to the level where the person committing misconduct should be sanctioned. The code of conduct has detailed procedures to deal with these issues, and similar procedures would have to be developed in a code of ethics.
- People change over time. Would there be a procedure to accept banned members back years later if sufficient change is evident?
- How will we enforce this with regard to meeting registration and attendance? Have a list of banned people we give to meeting organizers, committees charged with seeking officer candidates, and the like? Will there be a check on applying for membership online?
- What will the procedure be for receiving reports to then investigate? Presumably members will not self report criminal convictions, and members of executive committees will not be looking for names of any current members flagged in criminal convictions or Title IX actions.
- Other codes of ethics include restrictions of member privileges based on evidence of plagiarism, falsifying data, misleading the public, and more. What should our codes include?
- Guidelines for an expected timeline for the establishment of a Code of Ethics committee, recommendations, approval by councils, and implementation of a coordinated effort.

## URLs

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/science/francisco-ayala-sexual-harassment.html>

[2]

<https://theaggie.org/2018/06/07/former-uc-davis-professor-filmed-individuals-showering-without-their-consent-stored-footage-on-university-owned-hard-drives/>

[3]

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19sj3Q6pHeQB54HceirN06t3aXCfWlqdJmFzrvs2\\_zDY/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19sj3Q6pHeQB54HceirN06t3aXCfWlqdJmFzrvs2_zDY/edit#gid=0)

[4] <https://cms.botany.org/home/governance/bylaws.html>

[5] <https://botany.org/governance/ethics.php>