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Code of Ethics for the Society for the Study of Evolution

PART 1: Ethical standards

Mission statement of the Society

The aims of the Society for the Study of Evolution, through its journals and otherwise, reflect the conviction that an evolutionary approach will clarify many unsolved biological problems and will provide common goals and mutual comprehension among all the life sciences¹.

Our values

- Respect
- Scholarship
- Teaching and Learning
- Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability
- Diversity, Inclusivity, and Collegiality

Our goals

- Promote a deeper understanding of the evolution of the world's biodiversity through research, teaching, service, and community engagement
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusivity, and accessibility in our profession
- Maintain the highest professional and ethical standards when conducting, evaluating, and sharing research
- Strengthen and expand the infrastructure for research and education

Membership in the Society for the Study of Evolution (SSE) is a privilege open to all who study or want to contribute to the study of biological evolution. Members are expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with SSE's values and goals. As such, members have the following ethical responsibilities:

1. Responsibilities to the public

- **When engaging with the public,** promote the public's understanding of our discipline
- Do not harm or misinform when teaching or conducting research
- **When offering** professional commentary², **ensure** that is accurate and **well** supported.
- **Report** unethical or illegal research practices to the appropriate authorities when in a position to do so
- Take a humane approach when evaluating the implications of research for human subjects and other organisms³

¹ Smocovitis, V. B. 1994. Organizing Evolution: Founding the Society for the Study of Evolution (1939-1950). *Journal of the History of Biology* 27: 241-309.

² Members are often called upon as experts (e.g., sources for journalists, expert witnesses in trials or before legislatures), including for topics that garner public attention (e.g., evolution, climate change, endangered species, public health, genetically modified organisms).

³ As applicable, researchers should ensure they are in compliance with the applicable human and animal welfare policies in their home countries and where they conduct research abroad. In the U.S., this means ensuring compliance with the National Institutes of Health Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare policies regarding the use of animals in research (i.e., approval from an

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2. Responsibilities to host governments, institutions, and researchers

- Comply with all regulations and agreements regarding permitting, benefit sharing, reporting, and voucher specimens⁴
- Comply with legal requirements and ethical guidelines designed to protect human subjects, ensure the safety of team members, and ensure study organisms, local ecosystems, and indigenous communities are treated humanely and with respect by research activities
- Supply reports, specimens and other specified services (e.g., seminars and training) as agreed upon in research authorizations

3. Responsibilities to research community and profession

- Adhere to SSE ethical standards in the practice of scientific research and dissemination of results⁵
- Adhere to community standards and journal policies regarding authorship, data availability, the disclosure of potential conflicts-of-interest, and service as editor or reviewer
- Foster encouraging, constructive, inclusive, and respectful professional interactions and institutional practices, including working to dismantle historical structures and systems that lead to institutional and systemic inequities⁶.

Procedures for addressing violations to the Code of Ethics, including considerations for the conferral of honors and awards, are outlined in Part 2. **All members of Society for the Study of Evolution, as a condition of membership, agree to abide by the SSE Code of Ethics and to be bound by any decisions made by the SSE Executive Committee upon recommendation by the Committee on Ethics.** In particular, members understand and agree that this Policy outlines a fair process for resolving all matters relating to the SSE Code of Ethics.

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee), and/or the Department of Health and Human Services regulations for research conducted on human subjects (i.e., approval from an institutional review board).

⁴ As applicable, researchers should ensure they have the required research or collecting permits, follow guidelines and restrictions of these permits (including, e.g., the inclusion of local collaborators, deposition of voucher specimens).

⁵ Actions such as falsifying data and results, plagiarism, and the failure to appropriately credit the contributions of others constitute unethical conduct that has consequences that extend far beyond the individual researcher.

⁶ Harassment, discrimination of any sort (demeaning, denigrating, or devaluing individuals on the basis of sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or any other factor unrelated to ability and promise), bullying, and abuse of power are unacceptable and constitute unethical conduct. They perpetuate long-standing structural and systemic barriers to full participation of all talent in the field, which have immediate and long-term adverse impact on individuals and undermine excellence in the field.

Commented [2]: Treatment of students/employees would also fall under this, I imagine.

Commented [3]: add footnote to committee on publication ethics

Commented [4]: I assume this includes mentor/mentee relationships w. a power dynamic, but might be worth it to explicitly mention responsible mentorship. Since training future scientists is def. part of responsibility to the profession.

I think this was also a suggestion back when we were just looking at the mission statement.

Commented [5R4]: Although I realize that this mission statement is already approved...it still just troubles me a bit that this isn't explicit.

Commented [6R4]: We'll be voting on the mission statement today -- not yet approved. Note that I definitely read mentoring into this phrase, and "abuse of power" is in the footnote explicitly. It is sometimes unadvised to mention specific examples that are not comprehensive, as it can be read as excluding things that are not mentioned. Just something that has come up several times in development of the CoC docs.

Commented [7R4]: Totally makes sense - my brain did not register that phrase in the footnote, which I think was added based on our past comments. If most of us read this language as including mentorship then that is great!

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PART 2. Violations of ethical standards

Preamble

The Committee on Ethics (COE) of the Society for the Study of Evolution (SSE) has the primary responsibility for interpreting and applying the SSE's Code of Ethics. In particular, the COE is responsible for considering possible violations of the Code by members of SSE, by persons publishing materials in Society publications, and by persons receiving SSE-conferred honors or awards, and for recommending actions by the Society in response to such violations. Such actions will be taken in accordance with the principles outlined in this Code of Ethics document.

In addition to upholding our mission, values and goals and promoting excellence in our field, the SSE Code of Ethics and procedures described therein are also designed to protect members by guaranteeing the use of reasonable due process procedures against patently false, malicious, or groundless complaints of ethics violations. Recognizing that each case is different, SSE is committed to evaluating and resolving complaints of ethics violations in a fair, transparent, and consistent manner.

Additional considerations for Honors and Awards

When the SSE awards an Honor, the Honor denotes the SSE's judgment that an individual's contributions to, and effect on, the field are exemplary. The SSE takes into account the effect on the field of the totality of the individual's work and ethical and professional conduct and reputation. It expects those who hold Honors to demonstrate that participation in and recognition by the field are privileges; and that the field's leaders, and others it celebrates, embody highly ethical and professional conduct in their work. Recipients of Honors and Awards should also conduct their personal affairs in a way that does not cast serious doubt on their core ethics.

The SSE has decided, in its discretion, that determined unethical conduct of a current or prospective holder of an Honor—as well as credible questions about the ethical conduct of such an individual—can contribute to longstanding structural and systemic barriers in the field. Consequently, for the purpose of prioritizing what is best for excellence in the field over what is best for any individual, the SSE will not confer any Honor on any individual whose conduct has been determined to be unethical based on an outside authority's (e.g., home institution, court, government agency) investigation and determination (with supporting information) made available to the SSE, or based on its own investigation as described under section III-IV. The SSE also will not confer any Honor on any individual whose ethical conduct is the subject of a credible question known to the SSE, so long as the question has not been finally and favorably determined to the SSE's satisfaction, in its sole and absolute discretion, based on such investigation and determination. Determined unethical conduct may also justify suspension or revocation of an Honor; and a credible but undetermined question of ethical conduct may justify suspension. Credible questions arise when there is some substantiated evidence of conduct issues that would justify an investigation (which may include, e.g., a factual account by a target or bystander, recurrent reports of unethical behavior). *When applying this policy in situations of credible or questionable conduct, the Society is withholding judgment and is not making a statement or determination regarding any individual. Rather, the Society is implementing a prophylactic measure to support the field's prioritization of efforts to break down long-*

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standing barriers to excellence, over individual interest. Any statement or action to the contrary is prohibited and not authorized by the Society.

I. Committee on Ethics

The Committee on Ethics (COE) shall consist of the Past President of SSE and four SSE members. The Past President will chair the COE. The four additional members shall be appointed by the SSE President with approval of the Council. These four members will serve for two years each, with two replaced each year. When a member's term expires, they will continue to participate in consideration of complaints that were initiated when they were an active member.

In case of conflict of interest between a member of COE and a current Complainant or Respondent, that member will recuse themselves from involvement in the complaint. Should the COE Chair feel it is in the best interest of all parties, they may ask the SSE President to appoint a temporary replacement member on the committee to assist in adjudicating that complaint.

All decisions by the COE are made by majority vote of all active members, including any temporary replacement member on complaints they are involved in. The COE will strive to reach consensus whenever possible, but if it seems unlikely that consensus can be found, any member of the COE may call for a majority vote.

II. Independent Investigative Agent

The SSE shall hire an Investigative Agent (IA) who does not have any direct personal or professional connection with the SSE or its members and who is credentialed to investigate complaints of ethics violations. The duties of the IA are to receive complaints, perform initial investigations regarding whether the claim has merit, forward a recommendation to the COE as to whether the complaint should be dismissed or investigated further, and perform any additional investigations the COE requests. These duties are described in more detail below. In the absence of an IA, the chair of the COE committee assumes the duties of the IA.

III. Processes involved with receiving complaints

- A. Any person ("Complainant") who believes that an SSE member, or a non-member who has published in the Society's journals or received an Honor or Award ("Respondent"), has violated the SSE Code of Ethics may file a complaint against that Respondent. That complaint shall be on an [official SSE complaint form](#), which will be submitted to the IA.
- B. Upon receipt of a complaint, the IA will conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether the complaint should be dismissed without soliciting a response from the Respondent, which can be for any of the following reasons:

1. The complaint is patently frivolous or trivial or otherwise without merit.

Commented [8]: I think this is wording straight from the Societies Consortium docs, but it might be a bit confusing as worded. What it is supposed to mean is that no one can claim that the society's decision to impose sanctions can be used as evidence that the society has determined responsibility beyond doubt.

Commented [9]: There are a variety of things that the Past President and President are meant to do. I am inserting this comment here as it is the first point at which one of these duties is discussed. I am not comfortable taking on these duties. When I was elected President this document did not exist. Perhaps we could have an alternative person take on COE duties while I am in office.

Commented [10R9]: We also need to figure out what to do if the past president is the person being investigated

Commented [11R9]: and anyone on the committee or on council, as anyone on council would have a COI. There are likely to be additional COIs with the committee for any given complaint.

For the CoC enforcement, there is a 9-member sanctioning committee and 3 of the 9 are consulted on a given case. The Safety Officer doesn't know about COIs, but presents them without names to the extent possible and can identify shared institutional affiliations before requesting the 3 sanctioning officers to a consultation. If, during the consultation, someone feels they might have a COI or not be objective, then they can be replaced.

Commented [12]: I'm thinking about potential consequences of having relatively short term lengths -- a new chair and >50% new committee each year. The clause that keeps a particular committee on a particular complaint will help with confidentiality and continuity for those cases, but I've felt that having several longer term members on the CoCC has helped improve the process with feedback over time.

Commented [13]: Wondering if there is a statute of limitations on complaints. My guess is there will be a bunch as soon as this process is initiated, but from past years--which I personally think, knowing a couple situations, should be permitted.

Commented [14R13]: We thought not to impose one, but rather to leave it at the discretion of the COE.

Commented [15R13]: It will be important to consult either our lawyer or the lawyers at the societies consortium and ask if there are limitations.

Commented [16]: This determination is at the discretion of the IA. Is it possible to provide a few examples here (if just for discussion) of what these could be? What about reporting a colleague who did not properly voucher their specimens or did not obtain collecting permits? What if it was 10+ years ago? These would be difficult to investigate, and triviality maybe be esp. difficult to detn for an IA not familiar with those requirements.

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2. The complaint is directed against an individual who is not an SSE member, with the following exceptions:
 - a. Complaints regarding violations of publication ethics may be directed against non-members who have published in one of the Society's journals.
 - b. Complaints may be directed against non-members who have received SSE honors or awards
 - c. Complaints may be directed against non-members who were members at the time of the alleged incident or whose membership has recently lapsed
3. The complaint does not provide a clear indication of which aspects of the Code of Ethics have allegedly been violated.
4. The complaint form is incomplete or invalidly filled out.

Commented [17]: I am assuming that this applies to ethical violations associated with papers in Evol or Evol Letters, rather than at any journal, but that is not how it reads

Commented [18]: This seems vague. If someone is not a member, the violation took place when the person was not a member, and the violation does not involve a publication violation, then it does not seem to me to be our business as a Society.

Commented [19]: Brian O'Meara suggests having check boxes on the form: "I believe the respondent is in violation of (check all that apply)" [include an "other" option]. If so, this would then fall under #4 if missing.

If the IA believes B.4. is the case, they will request an amended complaint from the Complainant. Otherwise, if the IA believes the complaint should be dismissed for any of reasons B.1 – B.3, they will forward the complaint to the COE Chair with a rationale for dismissal.

- C. If the IA believes there is possible merit in the complaint, they will contact the Respondent for a response to the complaint. Upon receipt of the response, or after 30 days if the Respondent does not reply, the IA will forward their recommendation and any supporting documents regarding resolution of the complaint along with a rationale for that resolution to the Chair of the COE. This will occur via a secure link that provides privileges for viewing but not downloading the materials. The IA may recommend:

1. Dismissal of the complaint
2. Adjudication of the complaint by the COE

IV. Actions by COE and Executive Committee

- A. Upon receiving a recommendation from the IA, the COE may take any of several actions:
1. If the IA's recommendation is dismissal, the COE may accept that recommendation. If it does, the Chair of the COE will inform the Complainant of the decision.
 2. If the IA's recommendation is dismissal, but the COE disagrees with the recommendation, it will inform the IA and may request the IA to gather additional information (e.g. witness statements, outside documentation).
 3. If the IA's recommendation is adjudication, the COE may request additional information from or investigation by the IA. The information requested may include, but is not limited to, statements by witnesses, statements by individuals allegedly harmed by the Respondent, and statements from the home institution of the Respondent. In cases of

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ongoing non-SSE investigations, the COE may temporarily suspend its adjudication, pending those outcomes.

- B. When the COE is satisfied it has the information needed to make a recommendation, it will first vote on whether the Respondent is responsible for the alleged violation. It will then vote on a recommendation of sanctions against the Respondent, if any. The Chair will forward these recommendations, along with supporting documentation, to the SSE Executive Committee.
- C. Upon receiving a recommendation from COE, the Executive Committee will make the final decision on both whether the Respondent is responsible for the alleged violation and on the actual remedial and/or disciplinary actions to be imposed. As appropriate, the Executive Committee may consult with legal counsel before determining actions. When these decisions have been made, the SSE President will inform both Complainant and Respondent of them and will ensure that any sanctions are carried out.
- D. Records relating to the investigation of complaints of violations of the Code of Ethics, whether or not it was determined that a violation occurred, shall be maintained by the IA. Upon the end of a contract that is not being renewed, the IA will transfer all records to the chair of the COE.

Commented [20]: Brian O'Meara thought it was unclear whether the complainant will learn about whether e.g. the respondent will be banned from the annual meeting. This is meant to indicate yes ("decisions" = whether or not found responsible + any remedial or disciplinary actions).

V. Appeals

A Respondent who is determined by the Executive Committee to have violated the Ethical Standards in the Code of Ethics may appeal this decision and any sanctions imposed. A written statement of appeal, including a statement of the reason for the appeal, must be sent to the SSE President within 30 calendar days after receipt of notification of the decision. An extension may be granted by the President if good cause is shown, but the extension may not exceed 90 days. The President will forward the appeal to members of the SSE Council who are not on the Executive Committee, who will serve as an Appeal Board, for consideration. The President will also notify the Complainant that an appeal is under consideration. The President shall preside over consideration of the appeal by the Appeal Board, but will not vote on it.

Commented [21]: Good cause may require an extension by more than 90 days. Perhaps word as the "extension should not exceed 90 days unless there is very strong justification to do so."

The Appeal Board will review all information considered by the COE and Executive Committee and may ask the IA to obtain additional information. The Appeal Board may formally interview members of the COE, but informal conversations are prohibited. The Appeal Board will make a decision, within 90 days, to uphold or reverse the original determination, and inform both Complainant and Respondent. The Appeal Board may affirm the original decision, set aside the original determination that a violation has occurred, or determine that the original sanction(s) imposed is not appropriate and impose a different sanction. The decision of the Appeal Board shall constitute the final decision of the SSE with respect to all matters subject to this section.

If a Respondent fails to file an appeal within thirty (30) calendar days (or 90 days if given an extension), the determination and disciplinary action authorized by the Executive Committee, if

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any, shall go into effect and the Respondent has no further rights to request review or any other appeal; the decision and disciplinary action determinations are final.

VI. Remedial and disciplinary outcomes

When a Respondent is found responsible for a violation of the SSE Code of Ethics (or, in the case of honors and awards, when credible questions exist), the Executive Committee may impose one or more of the following disciplinary or remedial actions:

1. **Mediation.** This may be conducted either by the IA or through a credentialed external mediator.
2. **Private reprimand.** In cases where there has been an ethics violation but the violation did not cause serious personal and/or professional harm, an educative letter concerning the violation, including any stipulated conditions of redress or restrictions, may be sent to the Respondent. Failure to comply with stipulated conditions of redress in a reprimand may result in the imposition of a more severe sanction.
3. **Notification of home institution.** A Respondent's home institution may be informed of the findings of the SSE adjudication process.
4. **Denial of privileges.** A Respondent may be denied one or more of the privileges of SSE membership and/or the opportunity to participate in SSE activities for a specified period of time.
5. **Suspension of publication rights.** If an individual is found to have violated the SSE Code of Ethics with respect to publication ethics, that person may be suspended for publication in any of the Society's journals for a specified period of time.
6. **Denial of editorial activities.** A Respondent may be suspended from their role as editor or ad hoc reviewer, or may be banned from consideration for serving these roles in the future, for a specified period of time or indefinitely.
7. **Suspension of membership.** Membership for a Respondent may be suspended or denied for a specified period of time, including any appropriate conditions or directives.
8. **Revocation of, or denial of consideration for, honors and awards.** Any honors or awards given to the Respondent may be revoked permanently and/or the Respondent may be excluded from consideration for future conferral of honors and awards.
9. **Removal from office.** If the Respondent is an SSE Officer or a member of any SSE committee, the Respondent may be suspended from his or her position for a specified period of time or removed indefinitely. The Respondent may also not be nominated to run for an SSE executive office for a specified period of time or indefinitely.
10. **Termination of Membership.** In cases where there has been an ethics violation and the violation caused serious personal and/or professional harm, the SSE membership of the Respondent may be terminated. The eligibility to reinstate membership at the expiration of a period to be determined by the

Commented [22]: Something to think about for the future: What about restorative justice outcomes? For more info: <http://restorativejustice.org/restorative-justice/about-restorative-justice/tutorial-intro-to-restorative-justice/lesson-1-what-is-restorative-justice/#sthash.QyNlnzvx.dpbs>

Commented [23]: Brian O'Meara: What if the complainant doesn't want to be involved in mediation?

Commented [24]: this is vague enough that it sounds like a loophole...

Commented [25]: I assume this includes not being allowed to attend the Meetings but maybe that is worth stating explicitly.

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Executive Committee may be automatic or may be conditioned on a future determination by the Executive Committee that eligibility is appropriate.

Appropriate conditions, restrictions, or directives may include, but are not limited to: prohibition against serving on a particular SSE committee; no admittance to participating in a particular SSE-sponsored event; undergoing ethics education; and issuing a private apology.

VII. Confidentiality

- A. The filing of a complaint against any Respondent, and all proceedings dealing with that complaint, shall be kept confidential to the fullest extent under applicable laws by COE, the IA, the Executive Committee and the Appeal Panel prior to a final determination of the matter, except that information regarding the complaint may be shared with the SSE legal counsel, the Complainant, the Respondent, and third party sources of information. Determinations of violations of the Code of Ethics shall be kept confidential, except as required under applicable legal requirements or when necessary to enact disciplinary outcomes.
- B. Notwithstanding the foregoing, SSE will publish an annual Transparency Report of its determinations to educate the membership about the requirements of the Code of Ethics, but will not reveal the identity of the involved parties. To aid in preparing the Transparency Report, the IA will send anonymized records of complaints and determinations to the chair of the COE. The resulting Transparency Report serves to inform SSE members about the number and nature of reported COE complaints, statistics on the disposition of complaints, the general type of sanctions imposed, and steps taken by SSE to further educate members on ethics.
- C. Initiation of legal action against the COE, the SSE or its officers or employees shall constitute a waiver of confidentiality by the person initiating such action.
- D. Records relating to the investigation of complaints should always remain confidential, except as required under applicable legal requirements. Permission to use these materials for research and educational purposes may be granted by the chair of the COE within the first 50 years of the closing of the complaint, as long as the materials do not identify the individuals involved. After 50 years, these materials are available for research or educational purposes without special approval as long as the commitment to confidentiality is honored and the materials do not identify the individuals involved.

VIII. Ratification and Amendment

- A. This Code of Ethics shall become effective and binding upon a majority vote of the members of the SSE.
- B. This Code of Ethics may be amended by a majority vote of the members of SSE.

Commented [26]: Brian O'Meara: There's nothing about retaliation. That seems important.

Commented [27R26]: If this occurs, it would constitute another violation of the code of ethics. But we wouldn't want to wait for another complaint to be filed, so we could add something about how it would automatically trigger adjudication?

Commented [28]: What about sharing information/findings with other concerned parties, including other scientific societies (ASN, SSB, ESA, etc) or institutions? We will often be in the situation of evaluating the "supporting information" for decisions made by other institutions. Will we be unable to reciprocate? Not saying we should, just asking.

Commented [29R28]: Last I heard from the Societies Consortium lawyers, sharing of names in particular is not permitted unless the violation of this code was explicitly applied to a joint society activity or event. Then we could share with those collaborating societies but not beyond. There can be an anonymized transparency report released, or information can be released publicly if the policy is set up with that provision, but identities cannot be privately shared.

Commented [30]: Brian O'Meara: suggests adding this phrase to make it clear that lifetime or multiyear members aren't grandfathered in just because they haven't reupped under the new code (yet or ever)

Commented [31R30]: Another question for legal counsel

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Acknowledgements

This policy is based on those of several other societies, including the Geological Society of America, Ecological Society of America, and American Sociological Association. Other language is adapted from a template policy on honors and awards, © American Association for the Advancement of Science for the benefit of and sponsored by the Societies Consortium on Sexual Harassment In STEMM (website); original created by EducationCounsel LLC. Part 1 was drafted by an ad hoc tri-society committee including representatives of the Society for Systematic Biology, American Society of Naturalists, and SSE. Part 2 was drafted by an ad hoc SSE committee.