



# THE DAY-TO-DAY DUTIES OF THE GRIEVANCE COORDINATOR

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**F**or the benefit of those new to the Register of Professional Archaeologists, or for those who have perhaps never stopped to think about it or are outside the Register, it is useful to go over the role of the Grievance Coordinator (GC), an individual elected by all registered archaeologists. He or she is a member of the Board of Directors of the Register (although nonvoting) who operates all the time, “running in the background,” so to speak. To a limited extent, each GC probably defines his or her own role within the specific guidelines for the grievance process set out in the “Manual for Grievance Coordinators,” and perhaps no two past GCs would see their activities in exactly the same light. However, despite differing views, I have always found a remarkable consistency in job performance—and I have served as GC for the earlier Society of Professional Archaeologists as well as currently for the Register. For the interested, however, I would like to briefly go over what “running in the background” means.

The first task the GC must do is weed through complaints of all sorts. As reported in the Manual, past GCs have found that “perhaps 90% of the allegations that are received are the result of bad judgment, ignorance, or both.” Many of these have nothing to do with Registered Professional Archaeologists, and there is nothing the GC can contribute to the discussion. I have always felt that it is not the role of the GC to formally involve the grievance process in issues where it has no standing, that is, for issues that involve no breach of the Code of Conduct or the Standards of Research Performance by a registered archaeologist. Likewise, there are issues, generally in business relations, which are not really the concern of the GC, again except to the extent that they may involve clear violations of the Code or Standards. For example, if a registered archaeologist does not pay his or her bills, it is not up to the GC to try to force the issue, simply because there is little that the GC can accomplish. This said, I do believe that it is the duty of the GC to bring issues of professionalism and related matters that may not directly involve the grievance process to the attention of the Board of Directors of the Register. The GC is in position to monitor many questions that arise in the archaeology profession as a whole as they

are reflected in specific instances. Without this attention, these issues might never be brought to the Board’s attention for a possible response.

For those complaints that do involve Registered Professional Archaeologists and their professional performance, the GC has wide latitude—and an intense professional responsibility—to sift through the data that are presented or can be discovered by investigation and decide what to do next. The GC must form a Grievance Committee (composed of Register members) when the GC is of the opinion that a violation of the Code or the Standards has occurred. This is the first *formal* step in the grievance process. Before that, however, the GC has done considerable groundwork as an investigator and quite often as a negotiator and arbitrator between sides, especially in those cases where alleged violations stem from misunderstandings, oversights, or ignorance on either side (which really do occur and which it is the duty of the GC to identify).

It is all too easy to argue that the GC is constrained by the possible cost of carrying a complaint through a Grievance Committee investigation all the way to presentation before a full Standards Board, a cost that can rapidly enter the six-figure range. It is a charge that I have heard many times, but it is an oversimplification that does not do justice to the professionalism that has been characteristic of past GCs. The GC balances the rights of three parties: the plaintiff, the defendant, and the Register. Without ignoring the substance of a potential violation, it is the duty of the GC to resolve minor issues involving the Code and Standards where possible through negotiation and arbitration. Simply put, the GC cannot ignore that the reputations of all three parties are at stake.

What does it take to be the GC of the Register of Professional Archaeologists? Quite simply it takes experience in archaeology on as many fronts as possible. While my training in archaeology in the 1960s never remotely dealt with the question of pro-

➤ *THE REGISTER, continued on page 31*

fessional ethics, I count myself extremely lucky that service as a professor in an academic department, a number of years in state-level archaeological management, and the past eight years in a mid-level CRM firm have given me a broad perspective on the discipline. Regardless of one's background, however, the job does take discretion and the ability to view sympathetically the roles of teaching/research, management, and praxis. They all tend to get involved in a case as it moves from its initial stages to a formal grievance. In the often intense world of relationships between archaeologists, which can be heavily affected by the "take no prisoners" competition of the academic world mixed with the economic competition outside the academy, the GC must act, above all, as a principled and professional problem solver. It is a challenge, but a rewarding one wherein one learns the meaning of archaeological professionalism.