

# Interim Report of the Task Force on a Code of Conduct

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**TO: Cheshire Calhoun, Chair**  
American Philosophical Association Board of Officers

**FROM: Code of Conduct Task Force**  
Scott A. Anderson, University of British Columbia  
Leslie Francis, University of Utah  
Nancy J. Holland, Hamline University, Chair  
Ned Markosian, Western Washington University  
Diane Michelfelder, Macalester College  
Julinna Oxley, Coastal Carolina University  
Sally Scholz, Villanova University  
Yolonda Wilson, Howard University

This Task Force was formed in response to a petition to the Board of Officers signed by at least fifty members of the Association requesting that the APA establish a code of conduct for professional philosophers. The Board of Officers forwarded the petition to the Committee on the Status and Future of the Profession, which recommended that “the APA should set up a task force to investigate the issue of whether such a code of conduct is warranted, and, if it is warranted, to produce one for board approval.” The Task Force was charged, in the first place, with the task of making a recommendation as to whether the APA needs to develop a code of conduct or ought to continue to refer members to statements on specific areas of concern, where relevant.

After consideration of the original petition, and examination of existing APA policies related to conduct, the codes of ethics/conduct for other scholarly societies, and the various dimensions of faculty responsibilities, the Task Force discussed the arguments for and against the adoption of a code of conduct. Some of the main reasons noted for having such a code included:

1. A code would allow for the ethical and professional expectations for faculty members to be articulated more concretely than they are presently.
2. While the APA has articulated statements on sexual harassment and discrimination, currently, they are limited to the context of APA meetings and activities, and do not extend to the more general context of professional employment.
3. If the APA wants to enjoy influence among professional philosophers, it must articulate ideals and standards on a broader range of subjects, as do other professional organizations.
4. A disciplinary-specific code could play a role in the education of philosophy graduate students. Even if a code might not necessarily serve to motivate more ethical and professional behavior, it could give graduate students and others general professional guidelines that would enable them to articulate their own concerns and problems regarding unprofessional conduct.

5. While professional codes of conduct do address behavior that is both *illegal* and unprofessional (e.g. discrimination and sexual harassment), they play a more important role in identifying behavior that is *legal*, but which falls below standards for acceptable professional conduct.

The main arguments raised against having such a code were

1. A code of conduct looks great on paper, but it won't do anything to prevent unprofessional behavior, and is thus pointless.
2. Many academic philosophers are not members of the APA. If a code is developed, they may not feel that it applies to them.

After substantial discussion, the Task Force decided by consensus that the reasons favoring a code of conduct are persuasive. Such a code is not meant to police members' behavior, but rather to clarify and provide general guidelines regarding the wide range of professional responsibilities of philosophers, especially those in which ethical challenges might arise. The Task Force has further determined that certain existing policies of the Association taken together comprise a substantial portion of what such a code should contain. These policies include the APA Statements on

- Academic Freedom and Questionable Employment Practices
- Best Practices in Journal Publishing
- Clarification of Qualifications
- Graduate Student Aid Offers
- Hotel Room Interviews
- Nondiscrimination
- Offers of Employment
- Placement Practices
- Sexual Harassment, including the Statement of Best Practices with Respect to Sexual Harassment
- The Teaching of Philosophy

The code might also draw from the statements on

- Anonymous Review of Manuscripts
- Non-Tenure Track Faculty
- Outcomes Assessment
- Research
- Service
- The Global Character of Philosophy
- Unaffiliated Philosophers

(This is a fairly inclusive list, but further study might show that other statements or parts of statements should be considered as part of a code of conduct.)

Based on these findings, the Task Force makes the following recommendations:

1. The above APA statements pertaining to member conduct should be gathered on a separate web page, organized into a coherent system, and preceded by a code of ethics that would offer grounding principles for the code of conduct (e.g., an endorsement of the AAUP code, which the APA

already accepts, or the AAUP code plus a principle of respect for others that is not directly connected to academic freedom);

2. The Statement on Meeting Participation adopted by the Pacific Division should be adopted by the entire organization and added to the code;
3. The Committee on Teaching Philosophy should develop an additional statement on “The Responsibility of Faculty to Students” that would outline the expectations of the professor/student relationship, including mentoring, and its professional nature. This additional statement could refer to other existing statements (such as the Statement on Teaching, the Statement on Harassment, and the Statement on Discrimination) and should be quite frank in its condemnation of abuses of power.

In addition to these recommendations regarding the content of the code of conduct, the Task Force also recommends that the process of determining the content of the code be open for public comment from APA members.