

# Code of Conduct for the American Philosophical Association

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## I. Code of Ethics

The mission statement of the American Philosophical Association (APA) states that the purpose of the society is to “promote the discipline and profession of philosophy.” In 1994, the APA first adopted the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) [Statement on Professional Ethics](#). With the adoption of this Code of Conduct in 2016, the APA reaffirms its commitment to the AAUP statement and to the core value reflected in that statement: academic freedom. Academic freedom in the classroom and in scholarly endeavors is foundational to the forms of inquiry that shape philosophy, as an academic discipline and as a profession. As such, the APA underscores not only the right of all professional philosophers to academic freedom, but also the responsibility to safeguard and sustain it.

At the same time, the APA recognizes that professional philosophers do not simply, in the words of the AAUP statement, “seek and state the truth as they see it.” Philosophers may have responsibilities for research, teaching, and service as defined by their respective institutions. Their responsibilities in teaching are broader than exercising their own academic freedom and protecting that of their students. Professional philosophical activities can include undergraduate advising, the supervising and mentorship of graduate students, and the hiring and review of faculty colleagues. They also encompass interactions with colleagues in a variety of contexts, including academic meetings and conferences. These activities also extend to informal, social settings that offer valuable opportunities for interaction with students and peers.

As philosophy is a professional practice that involves such a wide variety of activities, the APA acknowledges values in addition to academic freedom that support these activities and afford them, as well as the individuals participating in them, the opportunity to thrive. These values are represented in the statements and policies included in this Code of Conduct. In particular, the APA acknowledges that in all their professional interactions and relations, philosophers are responsible for:

- Treating others fairly, equitably, and with dignity;
- Respecting the philosophical opinions and traditions of others, without disparaging those who hold positions at odds with one’s own;
- Maintaining integrity and trust in all professional commitments and interactions; and
- Recognizing that power and seniority do not offer reasons for being inattentive to the values just mentioned.

In addition to aspiring to these core values as individual members of the APA, collectives such as departments are encouraged to be aware of and observe the Good Practices Guide (forthcoming), which seeks to promote diversity and inclusivity.

The APA mission statement states that it "works to foster greater understanding and appreciation of the value of philosophical inquiry" among the general public. Given the varying public perceptions of philosophy, and the contributions of philosophy to the field of ethics as a domain of philosophical inquiry, the APA encourages its members to consider the connections between the public perception of philosophy and professional conduct as it relates to the values identified here.

## II. Legal Requirements

### Non-discrimination

The American Philosophical Association rejects as unethical all forms of discrimination based on race, color, religion, political convictions, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identification, or age, whether in graduate admissions, appointments, retention, promotion and tenure, manuscript evaluation, salary determination, or other professional activities in which APA members characteristically participate. This includes both discrimination on the basis of status and discrimination on the basis of conduct integrally connected to that status, where "integrally connected" means (a) the conduct is a normal and predictable expression of the status (e.g., sexual conduct expressive of a sexual orientation, conduct expressive of a disability status), or (b) the conduct is something that only a person with that status could engage in (e.g., pregnancy), or (c) the proscription of that conduct is historically and routinely connected with invidious discrimination against the status (e.g., interracial or same-sex marriage). At the same time, the APA recognizes the special commitments and roles of institutions with a religious affiliation; and it is not inconsistent with the APA's position against discrimination to adopt religious affiliation as a criterion in graduate admissions or employment policies when this is directly related to the school's religious affiliation or purpose, so long as these policies are made known to members of the philosophical community and so long as the criteria for such religious affiliation do not discriminate against persons according to the other attributes listed in this statement. Advertisers in [PhilJobs: Jobs for Philosophers](#) are expected to comply with this fundamental commitment of the APA, which is not to be taken to preclude explicitly stated affirmative action initiatives.

Institutions that seek to advertise in [PhilJobs: Jobs for Philosophers](#) will be asked whether they comply with the APA Nondiscrimination Statement. Ads from those that do not so indicate will not be run.

The APA board of officers expects that all those who use the [APA placement service](#) will comply with the letter and spirit of all applicable regulations concerning nondiscrimination, equal employment opportunity, and affirmative action.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or sexually directed remarks constitute sexual harassment when submission to such conduct is made a condition of academic or employment decisions, or when such conduct persists despite its rejection.

Sexual harassment is a serious violation of professional ethics, and should be regarded and treated as such by members of the profession. Sexual harassment is a form of prohibited discrimination when an institution or individual employee is aware of a sexually hostile environment and condones, tolerates, or

allows that environment to exist. Colleges and universities should supply clear, fair institutional procedures under which charges of sexual harassment on campus can be brought, assessed, and acted on.

Complaints of sexual harassment at APA-sponsored activities should be brought to the chair of the committee for the defense of professional rights of philosophers or, if they arise in the context of placement activities, to the APA ombudsperson. Complaints of sexual harassment by or against APA staff members should be brought to the chair of the board.

Members of the association who conduct employment interviews in conjunction with divisional meetings should make sure that the conditions in which those interviews take place, and the manner in which they are conducted, are appropriately professional and nonthreatening.

The APA encourages the departments in which its members work and study to follow the best practices recommended in the 2013 report ["We Can Act."](#)

### III. Responsibility of Faculty to Students

Philosophy teachers aim to teach their students how to think, write, and speak clearly; how to read, understand, and critique philosophical texts; and how to develop their own philosophies in conversation with other people. Central to the success of this project is the teacher's respect for student learning and the teacher's interest in doing nothing to interfere with student learning.

Given this, philosophy teachers should do the following:

- Treat students with dignity, never intentionally embarrassing or belittling them, and always communicating with them in clear, respectful, and culturally sensitive ways.
- Nurture intellectual autonomy by maintaining a classroom environment in which students might raise hyperbolic doubts and float views that do not reflect prevailing beliefs and values, while at the same time maintaining a classroom environment in which all students—particularly students from disenfranchised groups—feel welcome and supported.
- Not discriminate against students on the basis of irrelevant differences or tolerate such discrimination against students by other students. Beyond this, teachers should take positive measures both to overcome their own implicit biases and to protect students from the effects of negative stereotypes. Teachers should assess the academic performance of each student on its merits.
- Offer equal educational opportunities to every deserving student.
- Plan well-organized, fair, and level-appropriate courses—courses based upon syllabi that are transparent about the means through which and standards by which students will be evaluated.
- Select relevant materials to teach and present those materials in an informed and balanced way, incorporating competing viewpoints in the spirit of fairness and with intellectual honesty.
- Do not make malicious statements about colleagues or their courses to students, and should not share with students' information about colleagues' personal lives.
- Do not capitalize upon their authority for private financial gain.
- Acknowledge any intellectual debt to students who serve as research collaborators.
- Maintain the confidentiality of student records, information, and communication acquired in the course of professional service in a manner consistent with federal law, state law, and local policy,

except where reporting is required by law, in which case the teacher should be clear with the student about the legal requirements as early as possible in the conversation.

- Call upon the proper institutional resources to assist students who either directly request academic or psychological support, or indicate, through an assignment, that they might need academic or psychological support. Teachers should alert the appropriate campus authorities to students who might pose a danger to themselves or others.
- Provide students who are writing applications with adequate and timely counseling, and should write informed letters of recommendation. Teachers who doubt their ability to evaluate a student fairly should decline to write a letter.
- Not exploit student teaching assistants by overusing them or using them to promote personal ends. Philosophy teachers should provide student teaching assistants with adequate preparation, continuing guidance, and informed evaluation and should not expect students, graduate or otherwise, to perform unremunerated or uncredited tasks.

With regard to personal relationships between instructors and students, please see the above section on **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**.

#### **IV. Electronic Communications**

APA members should remain aware at all times that statements made online or through social media are easily misunderstood due to lack of contextual clues, and can easily become overblown. In addition, members have a special responsibility with regard to potential liability issues for the institutions for which they work and are encouraged to inform themselves about and comply with all relevant institutional policies. While respect for academic freedom and freedom of speech are paramount, members should keep in mind the following guidelines when making use of institutional equipment, servers, websites, and email for engaging with social media:

- In a professional setting, it's best to avoid ad hominem arguments and personal attacks, especially if they amount to slander, libel, and/or sexual harassment.
- Language used in professional electronic communications should use the same kind of inclusive language and reflect the same kind of mutual respect as is expected in the classroom or other face-to-face interactions.
- In compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other professional standards, confidentiality should always be respected.
- While sometimes unavoidable, anonymity in online posts should be used judiciously.
- Instructors who participate in social media should be careful that interactions with students at all levels be professional, courteous, and commensurate with one's obligations as a teacher in a position of authority, despite the typical informality of these media.

#### **V. Bullying and Harassment**

As members of the community of scholars as well as employees whose conduct affects co-workers, students, and members of the public, professional philosophers should avoid engaging in bullying and harassment directed towards students, co-workers, and others in the profession. Such conduct is harmful, disrespectful, and unprofessional, and frequently undermines our ability to perform our jobs or studies at our full capacity, and thereby is contrary to the point of scholarly practice.

Bullying and (non-sexual) harassment includes any degrading, hostile, or offensive conduct or comment by a person towards another that the person knew or reasonably ought to have known would cause the target to be humiliated, intimidated, or otherwise gratuitously harmed. Typical examples of bullying and harassment include verbal aggression and yelling; spreading malicious rumors; calling someone conventionally derogatory names or using derogatory stereotypes to describe them; humiliating initiation practices (“hazing”); “cyber-bullying” through email, text messages, or social media; stalking; subjecting an individual to repeated, unsolicited criticism, except when this is clearly limited to a matter of scholarly dispute; subjecting a person to public ridicule; sabotaging a person's work; scapegoating (e.g., blaming a disabled person for the need to make accommodations); and other hostile conduct that diminishes the capacity of its target to function effectively as a teacher, worker, or scholar. This injunction is not intended to discourage expressing differences of opinion; offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice regarding scholarship or work; or reasonable actions taken in the capacity of instructor or manager for the sake of pedagogy, scholarship, or the management of co-workers or other employees.