American Philosophical Association

Good Practices Guide
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.................................................................................................................................................. 3  
Preface.................................................................................................................................................................. 4  
List of Topics ......................................................................................................................................................... 6  
Section 1: Communication and implementation of guidelines for good practices........................................... 11  
Section 2: Contemporary forms of bias and discrimination .............................................................................. 13  
- Forms of bias and discrimination ................................................................................................................... 13  
- Explicit bias ...................................................................................................................................................... 14  
- Implicit bias ................................................................................................................................................... 15  
- Contextual bias .................................................. 17  
- Structural bias and discrimination .................................................................................................................. 18  
- Contending with bias and discrimination ....................................................................................................... 19  
- References .................................................................................................................................................. 20  
Section 3: Teaching, supervising, supporting, and mentoring students .......................................................... 24  
- Classroom teaching ........................................... 24  
- Supervising dissertations, undergraduate theses, and independent or directed studies .............................. 29  
- Mentoring and supporting graduate students .............................................................................................. 31  
Section 3, Appendix A: Some suggested practices in teaching philosophy ................................................. 35  
Section 4: Professional development of students and faculty ........................................................................... 38  
- Professional development in graduate programs ......................................................................................... 38  
- Professional development in undergraduate programs ............................................................................... 42  
- Formal and informal programs for professional development and mentoring of tenure-track faculty ...... 45  
- Some special considerations .......................................................................................................................... 46  
- Supporting non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty ................................................................................................. 47  
- Other resources ......................................................................................................................................... 49  
Section 5: Interviewing and hiring ....................................................................................................................... 50  
- Preliminaries .......................................................... 50  
- The first-round screening interview ............................................................................................................. 51  
- The campus visit ................................................................................................................................. 53  
- After the campus visit .................................................. 55  
- Offers of employment ....................................... 55  
Section 5, Appendix A: Some recommended practices for phone and internet interviews ............................ 57  
- Interviewing institutions and individual interviewers ............................................................................... 57  
- Placement advice for candidates ................................................................................................................. 59  
- Placement officers and graduate programs ................................................................................................. 60  
Section 5, Appendix B: Research on interviewing ............................................................................................. 61  
- Other resources .......................................................... 63  
- Sources .................................................................................................................................................. 63  
Section 5, Appendix C: Guidelines for interview questions .............................................................................. 65  
Section 5, Appendix D: Sample candidate evaluation sheet ........................................................................... 68  
Section 6: Social events and activities .............................................................................................................. 69  
- Social activities and inclusivity ...................................................................................................................... 69
Social events and alcohol........................................................................................................................................................................ 69
Accessibility of social events, conferences, and other meetings............................................................................................. 70
Additional resources ........................................................................................................................................................................... 76
Section 7: Communication .......................................................................................................................................................... 77
Communication across levels ........................................................................................................................................................ 77
Communication in discussions ..................................................................................................................................................... 79
Electronic communication ............................................................................................................................................................... 81
Section 7, Appendix A: Some general norms for discussions ................................................................................................. 87
Norms of respect................................................................................................................................................................................ 87
Norms of constructiveness ............................................................................................................................................................. 87
Norms of inclusiveness .................................................................................................................................................................... 87
Section 8: Mental and emotional health and safety ........................................................................................................................... 89
Student mental and emotional health and safety ..................................................................................................... 89
Faculty and staff mental and emotional health and safety ............................................................................................ 91
Responding to traumatic events on campus ......................................................................................................................... 93
Resources .......................................................................................................................................................................................... 94
Section 9: Sustainability ................................................................................................................................................................... 95
Events ................................................................................................................................................................................................. 95
Teaching and writing ..................................................................................................................................................................... 98
Governance and public advocacy ......................................................................................................................................... 101
Resources ........................................................................................................................................................................................ 101
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Preface

Times change, and the American Philosophical Association, like most professional organizations, colleges, and universities, has perceived the need for continuing development of codes of professional conduct across a wide range of areas of academic life. The following are among the areas usually included in such codes of conduct:

- Academic freedom
- Discrimination and diversity
- Sexual harassment and assault
- Faculty-student relations
- Professional meetings
- Accessibility for families and caregivers
- Social events and alcohol
- Fair practices in recruitment, promotion, and funding
- Professional discourse and the use of social media
- Grievances and redress

Such codes of conduct are intended to spell out acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior, as well as associated procedures and sanctions in cases where violations may have occurred. Often these codes of conduct connect with law, and contain procedural guarantees and reporting requirements mandated by law (e.g., under Title IX and the Clery Act). Codes of conduct also typically go beyond strictly legal mandates by setting out standards of professional conduct distinctively appropriate for an academic community. In 2016, the APA board of officers adopted the APA Code of Conduct.

This Good Practices Guide, as we understand it, is written against the background of such a code, and is not intended to play the same role in relation to the conduct of academic life. There will inevitably be areas of overlap—some of the guidelines or recommendations within this document will have the same content, if not the same force, as a rule of professional conduct. But a Good Practices Guide—we decided this was a more accurate representation of what we might hope to achieve than “Best Practices”—does not attempt to draw lines regarding what is strictly permissible or impermissible. Rather, it is a set of recommendations based upon the accumulated experience of faculty, administrators, and students, intended in part to address some of the underlying conditions that can give rise to the problems with which a code of conduct deals, and to suggest structures and practices that can, if in place, help promote constructive and equitable responses to these problems. More positively, these recommendations are meant to suggest policies and practices that may help us to realize the sort of academic community we aspire to—a community of mutual respect and fairness, of commitment to scholarship and learning, of open-mindedness and inclusivity, and of concern for nurturing the next generation of philosophers and members of the society at large.

Naturally, members of the APA will differ over the interpretation of these values, their priority, and how to understand the responsibility of individuals, academic units, teaching programs, students, journals, and
professional associations in attempting to realize these values. We view this Good Practices Guide not as an attempt at a definitive statement, but as a starting point, and as a basis for continuing discussion and development of good practices.\textsuperscript{1} Similarly, this guide does not purport to be comprehensive. Rather, it focuses upon a number of areas where special challenges arise in the promotion of mutual respect, fairness, and inclusivity, and where experience and research indicate effective ways of meeting some of these challenges.

Philosophers are also members of the broader community beyond the academy, and most of those we teach will find their lives outside academia. Our recommendations have sought in various ways to take cognizance of these facts, but many issues remain. In particular, we have not attempted to discuss the role or responsibilities of philosophers as potential agents in the public or political sphere, and how these relate to their professional and pedagogical roles and responsibilities. This, in our opinion, is an important discussion to have within the APA, and we hope the continuing evolution of this Good Practices Guide will provide one forum for it.

\textsuperscript{1} Members are encouraged to send comments and suggestions on this guide, or on related matters, to the APA at info@apaonline.org, where an archive of such suggestions will be kept.
List of Topics

We divide our suggestions into the following categories, though, of course, the suggestions often bear on more than one category, resulting inevitably in some duplication. As noted above, this list is not meant to be exhaustive, and we encourage members to make recommendations as to how this list might be supplemented.

Section 1: Communication and implementation of guidelines for good practices
What role might this guide play in stimulating discussion of significant concerns within departments, committees, or other academic units? How might such discussions enable all perspectives to be expressed? What is it for an academic unit to adopt, ratify, or adapt a set of good practices? On a continuing basis, how are faculty, staff, and students to be made aware of the recommendations of this Good Practices Guide, and of their meaning and implications?

Section 2: Contemporary forms of bias and discrimination
Central to many of the concerns and recommendations of this guide is the challenge of promoting a diverse and inclusive philosophical community characterized by mutual respect and a commitment to fairness. Bias, discrimination, and unfairness can enter into virtually any area of academic life and can take a variety of forms: explicit, implicit, contextual, and structural. Bias and discrimination are complex phenomena, and awareness of their diverse forms is important in contending with them. Recent research in psychology, sociology, and philosophy has led to the development of theoretical frameworks for thinking about bias and discrimination, frameworks that may enhance our understanding and contribute to the development of more effective practices. Each of the individual sections of this document draws to some extent upon elements of this research, but just as it is important to make use of our best-developed theories to date, it is also important to keep in mind the limitations of these theories and the controversies about their well-foundedness. In particular, recent years have seen a very active debate over experimental methodologies and reproducibility in science generally, and social psychology has been a special focus of concern. How might we as philosophers take into account both the content and the controversies of empirical research?

- Forms of bias and discrimination
- Explicit bias
- Implicit bias
- Contextual bias
- Structural bias and discrimination
- Contending with bias and discrimination

Section 3: Teaching, supervising, supporting, and mentoring students
What sorts of practices have been found to promote effective and inclusive teaching? What are some of the goals or concerns in the supervision or mentoring of students? How is one to increase accessibility for students with disabilities without marginalizing or imposing additional burdens upon them? What are the special responsibilities of supervisors and mentors, and how are these related to the structure of graduate and undergraduate programs?
• Classroom teaching
  o Curricular design; Course content; Course structure; Grading and assessment
  o Plagiarism and cheating; Classroom atmosphere and management; Classroom community building; Institutional partners and students in difficulty; Accessibility; Events for students; Special opportunities for talented students

• Supervising dissertations, undergraduate theses, and independent or directed studies
  o Meetings; Feedback; Professional opportunities; Sharing resources; Progress and review; Letters of recommendation; Teaching letters

• Mentoring and supporting graduate students
This section also includes an appendix with further information.

• Section 3, Appendix A: Some suggested practices in teaching philosophy
  o Active learning; Lectures; Discussions; Professional development; Contributions to the scholarship of philosophy teaching and learning; Pedagogical activism

Section 4: Professional development of students and faculty
Concern for philosophy is also concern for the long-term health of the discipline—a concern that extends to undergraduates and junior faculty as well as graduate students. Recent years have seen tightening budgets and a difficult job market for academic positions in philosophy, and these developments have had significant effects at all levels. How can faculty provide encouragement and support for students, while promoting expectations that avoid excesses of optimism and pessimism? At the undergraduate level, how can faculty provide guidance and assistance to students with a diverse array of backgrounds as they think about, and apply to, graduate school? At the graduate level, how should faculty contribute to the professional development of students—including the possibility of “alternative academic” and non-academic careers—and how should departments conduct placement services? How might placement procedures be made more transparent and responsive to current student needs? What are some ways in which programs have learned to inform students about issues of professional development, or to provide encouragement and support for such activities?

• Professional development in graduate programs
• Professional development in undergraduate programs
• Formal and informal programs for professional development and mentoring of tenure-track faculty
• Some special considerations
• Supporting non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty

Section 5: Interviewing and hiring
What are some good practices with respect to the holding and conducting of recruitment interviews—in-person or electronic, whether at conventions or in other settings? How are questions of dual careers or disabilities to be addressed? What are some techniques that have been found to help counter bias and elicit fairer assessment of candidates? When making offers of employment, what are some practices that avoid
placing unreasonable pressure on candidates, or that promote greater understanding of the terms of employment?

- Preliminaries
- The first-round screening interview
- The campus visit
- After the campus visit

This section also includes several appendices with further information.

- Section 5, Appendix A: Some recommended practices for phone and internet interviews
  - Interviewing institutions and individual interviewers
  - Candidates
  - Placement officers and graduate programs
- Section 5, Appendix B: Research on interviewing
- Section 5, Appendix C: Guide to acceptable interview questions
- Section 5, Appendix D: Sample candidate evaluation sheet

Section 6: Social events and activities
Social events and informal department-centered activities play a large role in academic life and are often a vital part of the exchange of ideas that colleges and universities exist to promote. They can also play an outsized role in shaping perceptions of belongingness or exclusion. It therefore is appropriate that questions of good practices and inclusiveness be raised in connection with such events and activities as well as those that are more official. Several particularly important areas of concern are socially gendered activities, alcohol use, accessibility, and potential for bullying or sexual harassment. What issues should be kept in mind, and what are some effective ways for individuals, groups, or academic units to reduce the risks associated with alcohol, or to avoid various forms of social or economic marginalization or exclusion, or to help ensure that events and activities are accessible to individuals with disabilities and free of bullying or harassment?

- Social activities and inclusivity
- Social events and alcohol
- Accessibility of social events, conferences, and other meetings
- Accessibility and accommodation checklist
  - Some general planning considerations
  - Planning for possible emergencies
  - More specific recommendations

Section 7: Communication
Effective communication plays an important role in discovering and addressing virtually all problems faced by individuals and units. Are there examples of effective practices within departments, programs, or other
units to encourage open lines of communication across levels? What are reasonable expectations or norms for open discussions at meetings, colloquia, and other events, if we are to promote the goals in inquiry, fairness, openness, and inclusion?

- Communication in discussions
- Electronic communication
- Email
- Social media
- Communication on department websites

This section also includes an appendix with more information.

- Section 7, Appendix A: Some general norms for discussions
  - Norms of respect; Norms of constructiveness; Norms of inclusiveness

Section 8: Mental and emotional health and safety

How can teachers, supervisors, mentors, and administrators help when students or colleagues appear to be in psychological difficulty or distress? When is it appropriate to raise concerns about mental or emotional health with a student or colleague? What should instructors do when they sense that a student might pose a risk of violence to self or others? What sorts of conversations about or involving mental health or safety concerns should be treated as confidential, or, alternatively, should be communicated to those whose responsibility is to help students in distress or to manage campus security? How can an environment be created in which questions of mental health are less stigmatized and isolating, and individuals are more likely to receive the treatment they need?

- Student mental and emotional health and safety
- Faculty and staff mental and emotional health and safety
- Responding to traumatic events and experiences

Section 9: Sustainability

Note: This section of the Good Practices Guide was developed by Philosophers for Sustainability.

What sustainable practices can departments and institutions adopt to mitigate climate change? How can philosophers make an impact through teaching, research, administration, advocacy, and community engagement? What individual choices can be made in tandem with encouraging others to treat sustainability as a priority?

- Events
- Teaching and writing
- Governance and public advocacy

This list of topics is obviously not comprehensive. We have attempted to focus on questions that are recurrent in academic life, and that can give rise to some of the most difficult problems. We have also discussed most extensively those areas with some overlap with our own areas of research or experience. It
is important in sustaining a living Good Practices Guide over time that others enrich, revise, or extend these
guidelines. That, too, is a good practice.

Note: Throughout this document, frequent use is made of the expression “the department” or “departments” when
describing good practices. Philosophy programs and teaching may also be situated in other kinds of academic units,
and suggestions to departments may in some cases need to be adapted to these varied institutional settings. Those
philosophers who are located in non-departmental settings are especially encouraged to contribute their experience to
the evolution of this guide. Similarly, the phrase “colleges and universities” is typically meant to include community
colleges as well as four-year colleges.
Section 1: Communication and implementation of guidelines for good practices

We encourage departments and other academic units to make this guide accessible to faculty and students and to hold open discussions of the issues discussed herein. Some departments have already found it useful to discuss sections of previous drafts of this guide during departmental meetings, using this as an occasion to share ideas and information about issues discussed in the guide. Such discussions can be more than informational, however. The governing idea of guides of this kind is that it is not enough simply to affirm certain values or goals—there must be a continuing commitment to developing and implementing policies and procedures that can enhance their realization. Since faculty, student population, and staff change over time, and since new challenges arise and improved research emerges, periodic revisiting of the issues discussed in this guide is recommended, as is the monitoring of policies and practices for effectiveness.

Departmental and committee chairs can contribute to the effectiveness of such meetings by making it clear that participation in such meetings is as much a responsibility as participation in meetings for hiring, promotion, and graduate review—indeed, good practices for the conduct of hiring, promotion, and graduate review are among the central concerns of these guidelines. Thought should also be given to the representation of various groups—faculty, staff, students, etc.—who might not normally be present at department or committee meetings, but who would be affected by such practices and whose perspectives and participation are important for the development, implementation, and success of the practices.

Discussion of the guide and subsequent decision-making can model the central values of inclusion, transparency, and mutual respect, as well as manifesting recognition of the importance of process.

The issues with which the guide is concerned are often difficult to broach and awkward to discuss, and for this reason they may fail to be discussed in the usual array of departmental or committee meetings. Thus, posing the question of explicitly reviewing existing practices in light of the recommendations of guides such as this can afford an opportunity for discussions and decision-making that otherwise would not have occurred. Moreover, planned discussions of this kind make it possible to raise difficult issues in a setting independent of any specific incident, grievance, or crisis, and without attributing any fault. Once such an incident has occurred or a crisis is underway, it will be more difficult to achieve open reflection and frank discussion of how existing practices might better address persisting concerns or serve underlying values. Moreover, it should not fall upon those who are most concerned with these issues, or most likely to be adversely affected by them, to raise such questions—the departmental or committee chair can do so as part of the regular course of events.

As this guide will discuss below, structure is important for effective and inclusive processes and discussions. If there is to be a departmental or committee meeting, or several such meetings, at which a review of practices is to occur, it is recommended that copies of this guide or other such guides be circulated in advance, along with links to existing departmental, college, or university policies or standard practices. One recommended practice is to have the various sections of this guide reviewed and discussed first in the relevant departmental committees or in ad hoc representative groups, which then can bring recommendations to the department as a whole. This may permit a more thorough examination of issues as
well as better adaptation of recommendations to specific unit circumstances and resources. Department and committee chairs can encourage attendance at meetings, and make available agendas in advance that help ensure that there will be space both for structured and open discussion, that there will be a chance for those with minority views to make themselves heard, and that action items can be introduced. It is also considered a good practice that, where possible, significant policy changes are not be adopted at the first meeting at which they are discussed, so that there can be time for reflection and wider discussion. Another recommended practice is to designate a chair or facilitator for such meetings other than the existing departmental or committee chair (see SECTION 7: COMMUNICATION for further suggestions about how to structure discussions to promote full and open participation). Departments and committees may also benefit from inviting a college or university ombudsperson, legal counsel, or others with relevant expertise or experience to make presentations to the group, prior to or during deliberation.

If a vote is taken on affirming, revising, or adopting guidelines, this should be recorded in the meeting’s minutes, and a copy of the guidelines voted upon should be kept along with the minutes and archived by the department, whether the vote is favorable or not. Being able to refer back to such discussions and guidelines can play an important role in subsequent deliberations and in contending with incidents as they occur.

If adopted, guidelines should be made readily available to all members of the department, and newly arriving members should be given copies. Orientation of new students and faculty is an important occasion for making sure that all members are aware of unit guidelines—again, before a crisis or controversy arises of the kind such a guide is intended to help prevent. For example, a departmental Good Practices Guide can help newcomers to gain a reasonable idea of what they should expect from others—colleagues, staff, and students—and what others will expect from them. Becoming aware of the guide can also enable newcomers to contribute more effectively to the ongoing process of developing departmental practices.

Should an incident or accusation occur, all parties should be reminded of the existence of unit guidelines and given access to them. In such cases, guidelines may be of significant value in providing structure and focus for the discussions that follow.

This Good Practices Guide is itself a work in progress, and experience is an important source of information about how to improve it. The APA has therefore sought ways of drawing upon this experience in the ongoing development of the guide through a series of public consultations via the APA Blog and discussion sessions at APA meetings. The task force hopes that the APA will continue to create opportunities and forums for members to convey relevant comments and suggestions to the APA (along with a durable record of comments and suggestions received).  

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2 Members are encouraged to send comments and suggestions on this guide, or on related matters, to the APA at info@apaonline.org, where an archive of such suggestions will be kept for future review.