American Sociological Association

Code of Ethics
CODE OF ETHICS

PREAMBLE

Sociologists recognize that the discovery, creation, transmission, and accumulation of knowledge and the practice of sociology are social processes involving ethical considerations and behavior at every stage. Careful attention to the ethical dimensions of sociological practice, teaching, and scholarship contributes to the broader project of finding ways to maximize the beneficial effects that sociology may bring to humankind and to minimize the harm that might be a consequence of sociological work. The strength of the Code, its binding force, rests ultimately on the continuing active discussion, reflection, and use by members of the profession.

Sociologists subscribe to the general tenets of science and scholarship. Sociologists are especially sensitive to the potential for harm to individuals, groups, organizations, communities and societies that may arise out of the incompetent or unscrupulous use of sociological work and knowledge.

Sociology shares with other disciplines the commitment to the free and open access to knowledge and service, and to the public disclosure of findings. Sociologists are committed to the pursuit of accurate and precise knowledge and to self-regulation through peer review and appraisal, without personal and methodological prejudice and without ideological malice. Because sociology necessarily entails study of individuals, groups, organizations and societies, these principles of access and disclosure may occasionally conflict with more general ethical concerns for the rights of clients and respondents to privacy and for the treatment of clients and respondents with due regard for their integrity, dignity, and autonomy. This potential conflict provides one of the reasons for a Code of Ethics.

The styles of sociological work are diverse and changing. So also are the contexts within which sociologists find employment. These diversities of procedures and context have led to ambiguities concerning appropriate professional behavior. The clarification of ethical behavior in diverse contexts provides a second reason for this Code.

Finally, this Code also attempts to meet the expressed needs of sociologists who have asked for guidance in how best to proceed in a variety of situations involving relations with respondents, students, colleagues, employers, clients and public authorities.

This Code establishes feasible requirements for ethical behavior. These requirements cover many—but not all—of the potential sources of ethical conflict that may arise in research, teaching and practice. Most represent prima facie obligations that may admit of exceptions but which should generally stand as principles for guiding conduct. The Code states the Association's consensus about ethical behavior upon which the Committee on Professional Ethics will base its judgments when it must decide whether individual members of the Association have acted unethically in specific instances. More than this, however, the Code is meant to sensitize all sociologists to the ethical issues that may arise in their work, and to encourage sociologists to educate themselves and their colleagues to behave ethically.

To fulfill these purposes, we, the members of the American Sociological Association, affirm and support the following Code of Ethics. Members accept responsibility for cooperating with the duly constituted committees of the American Sociological Association by responding to inquiries promptly and completely. Persons who bring complaints in good faith under this Code should not be penalized by members of the Association for exercising this right.
I. THE PRACTICE OF SOCIOLOGY

A. Objectivity and Integrity
Sociologists should strive to maintain objectivity and integrity in the conduct of sociological research and practice.

1. Sociologists should adhere to the highest possible technical standards in their research, teaching and practice.
2. Since individual sociologists vary in their research modes, skills, and experience, sociologists should always set forth ex ante the limits of their knowledge and the disciplinary and personal limitations that condition the validity of findings which affect whether or not a research project can be successfully completed.
3. In practice or other situations in which sociologists are requested to render a professional judgment, they should accurately and fairly represent their areas and degrees of expertise.
4. In presenting their work, sociologists are obligated to report their findings fully and should not misrepresent the findings of their research. When work is presented, they are obligated to report their findings fully and without omission of significant data. To the best of their ability, sociologists should also disclose details of their theories, methods and research designs that might bear upon interpretations of research findings.
5. Sociologists must report fully all sources of financial support in their publications and must note any special relations to any sponsor.
6. Sociologists should not make any guarantees to respondents, individuals, groups or organizations—unless there is full intention and ability to honor such commitments. All such guarantees, once made, must be honored.
7. Consistent with the spirit of full disclosure of method and analysis, sociologists, after they have completed their own analyses, should cooperate in efforts to make raw data and pertinent documentation collected and prepared at public expense available to other social scientists, at reasonable costs, except in cases where confidentiality, the client’s rights to proprietary information and privacy, or the claims of a fieldworker to the privacy of personal notes necessarily would be violated. The timeliness of this cooperation is especially critical.
8. Sociologists should provide adequate information and citations concerning scales and other measures used in their research.
9. Sociologists must not accept grants, contracts or research assignments that appear likely to require violation of the principles enunciated in this Code, and should dissociate themselves from research when they discover a violation and are unable to achieve its correction.
10. When financial support for a project has been accepted, sociologists must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed work on schedule, including reports to the funding source.
11. When several sociologists, including students, are involved in joint projects, there should be mutually accepted explicit agreements at the outset with respect to division of work, compensation, access to data, rights of authorship, and other rights and responsibilities. Such agreements may need to be modified as the project evolves and such modifications must be agreed upon jointly.
12. Sociologists should take particular care to state all significant qualifications on the findings and interpretations of their research.
13. Sociologists have the obligation to disseminate research findings, except those likely to cause harm to clients, collaborators and participants, or those which are proprietary under a formal or informal agreement.
14. In their roles as practitioners, researchers, teachers, and administrators, sociologists have an important social responsibility because their recommendations, decision, and actions may alter the lives of others. They should be aware of the situations and pressures that might lead to the misuse of their influence and authority. In these various roles, sociologists should also recognize that professional problems and conflicts may interfere with professional effectiveness. Sociologists should take steps to ensure that these conflicts do not produce deleterious results for clients, research participants, colleagues, students and employees.

B. Disclosure and Respect for the Rights of Research Populations

Disparities in wealth, power, and social status between the sociologist and respondents and clients may reflect and create problems of equity in research collaboration. Conflict of interest for the sociologist may occur in research and practice. Also to follow the precepts of the scientific method—such as those requiring full disclosure—may entail adverse consequences or personal risks for individuals and groups. Finally, irresponsible actions by a single researcher or research team can eliminate or reduce future access to a category of respondents by the entire profession and its allied fields.

1. Sociologists should not misuse their positions as professional social scientists for fraudulent purposes or as a pretext for gathering intelligence for any organization or government. Sociologists should not mislead respondents involved in a research project as to the purpose for which that research is being conducted.
2. Subjects of research are entitled to rights of biographical anonymity.
3. Information about subjects obtained from records that are opened to public scrutiny cannot be protected by guarantees of privacy or confidentiality.
4. The process of conducting sociological research must not expose respondents to substantial risk of personal harm. Informed consent must be obtained when the risks of research are greater than the risks of everyday life. Where modest risk or harm is anticipated, informed consent must be obtained.
5. Sociologists should take culturally appropriate steps to secure informed consent and to avoid invasions of privacy. Special actions may be necessary where the individuals studied are illiterate, have very low social status, or are unfamiliar with social research.
6. To the extent possible in a given study sociologists should anticipate potential threats to confidentiality. Such means as the removal of identifiers, the use of randomized responses and other statistical solutions to problems of privacy should be used where appropriate.
7. Confidential information provided by research participants must be treated as such by sociologists, even when this information enjoys no legal protection or privilege and legal force is applied. The obligation to respect confidentiality also applies to members of research organizations (interviewers, coders, clerical staff, etc.) who have access to the information. It is the responsibility of administrators and chief investigators to instruct staff members on this point and to make every effort to ensure that access to confidential information is restricted.
8. While generally adhering to the norm of acknowledging the contributions of all collaborators, sociologists should be sensitive to harm that may arise from disclosure and respect a collaborator’s wish or need for anonymity. Full disclosure may be made later if circumstances permit.
10. Sociologists should comply with appropriate federal and institutional requirements pertaining to the conduct of research. These requirements might include but are not necessarily limited to failure to obtain proper review and approval for research that involves human subjects and failure to follow recommendations made by responsible committees concerning research subjects, materials, and procedures.
II. PUBLICATIONS AND REVIEW PROCESS

A. Questions of Authorship and Acknowledgment

1. Sociologists must acknowledge all persons who contribute to their research and to their copyrighted publications. Claims and ordering of authorship and acknowledgments must accurately reflect the contributions of all main participants in the research and writing process, including students, except in those cases where such ordering or acknowledgment is determined by an official protocol.

2. Data and material taken verbatim from another person's published or unpublished written work must be explicitly identified and referenced to its author. Citations to ideas developed in the written work of others, even if not quoted verbatim, should not be knowingly omitted.

B. Authors, Editors and Referees have Interdependent Professional Responsibilities in the Publication Process

1. Editors should continually review the fair application of standards without personal or ideological malice.

2. Journal editors must provide prompt decisions to authors of submitted manuscripts. They must monitor the work of associate editors and other referees so that delays are few and reviews are conscientious.

3. An editor's commitment to publish an essay must be binding on the journal. Once accepted for publication, a manuscript should be published expeditiously.

4. Editors receiving reviews of manuscripts from persons who have previously reviewed those manuscripts for another journal should ordinarily seek additional reviews.

5. Submission of a manuscript to a professional journal clearly grants that journal first claim to publish. Except where journal policies explicitly allow multiple submissions, a paper submitted to one English language journal may not be submitted to another journal published in English until after an official decision has been received for the first journal. Of course, the article can be withdrawn from all consideration to publish at any time.

C. Participation in Review Processes

Sociologists are frequently asked to provide evaluations of manuscripts, research proposals, or other work of professional colleagues. In such work, sociologists should hold themselves to high standards of performance in several specific ways:

1. Sociologists should decline requests for reviews of work of others where strong conflicts of interest are involved, such as may occur when a person is asked to review work by teachers, friends, or colleagues for whom he or she feels an overriding sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity, or when such requests cannot be fulfilled on time.

2. Materials sent for review should be read in their entirety and considered carefully and confidentially. Evaluations should be justified with explicit reasons.

3. Sociologists who are asked to review manuscripts and books they have previously reviewed should make this fact known to the editor requesting review.

III. TEACHING AND SUPERVISION

The routine conduct of faculty responsibilities is treated at length in the faculty codes and AAUP rules accepted as governing procedures by the various institutions of higher learning. Sociologists in teaching roles should be familiar with the content of the codes in force at their institutions and should perform their responsibilities within such guidelines. Sociologists who supervise teaching assistants should take steps to insure that they adhere to these principles.

A. Sociologists are obligated to protect the rights of students to fair treatment.

1. Sociology departments should ensure that instructors are qualified to teach the courses to which they are assigned. Instructors so assigned should conscientiously perform their teaching responsibilities.

2. Sociologists should provide students with a fair and honest statement of the scope and perspective of their courses, clear expectations for student performance, and fair, timely, and easily accessible evaluations of their work.

3. Departments of Sociology must provide graduate students with explicit policies and criteria about conditions for admission into the graduate program, financial assistance, employment, funding, evaluation and possible dismissal.

4. Sociology departments should help students in their efforts to locate professional employment in academic and practice settings.

5. Sociology departments should work to insure the equal and fair treatment of all students, by adhering both in spirit and content to established affirmative action guidelines, laws, and policies.

6. Sociologists must refrain from disclosure of personal information concerning students where such information is not directly relevant to issues of professional competence.

7. Sociologists should make all decisions concerning textbooks, course content, course requirements, and grading solely on the basis of professional criteria without regard for financial or other incentives.

B. Sociologists must refrain from exploiting students.

1. Sociologists must not coerce or deceive students into serving as research subjects.

2. Sociologists must not represent the work of students as their own.

3. Sociologists have an explicit responsibility to acknowledge the contributions of students and to act on their behalf in setting forth agreements regarding authorship and other recognition.

C. Sociologists must not coerce personal or sexual favors or economic or professional advantages from any person, including respondents, clients, patients, students, research assistants, clerical staff or colleagues.

D. Sociologists must not permit personal animosities or intellectual differences vis-a-vis colleagues to foreclose student access to these colleagues.

IV. ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEES, AND SPONSORS

No sociologists should discriminate in hiring, firing, promotions, salary, treatment, or any other conditions of employment or career development on the basis of sex, sexual preference, age, race, religion, national origin, handicap, or political orientation. Sociologists should adhere to fair employment practices in hiring, promotion, benefits, and review processes. The guidelines outlined below highlight some, but not all, ethical obligations in employment practices. Clear specification of the requirements governing practices of fair and equal treatment are stated in the guidelines of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the AAUP. Employers, employees, and sponsors should abide by these guidelines and consult them when a more complete description of fair employment practices is needed.

A. Employment Practices and Adherence to Guidelines

1. When acting as employers, sociologists should specify the requirements for hiring, promotion, and tenure and communicate these requirements thoroughly to employees and prospective employees. Voting on tenure and promotion should be based solely on professional criteria.
2. When acting as employers, sociologists should make every effort to ensure equal opportunity and fair treatment to all persons at all levels of employment.
3. When acting as employers, sociologists have the responsibility to be informed of fair employment codes, to help to create an atmosphere upholding fair employment practices, and to attempt to change any existing unfair practices within the organization or university.
4. All employees, including part-time employees, at all levels of employment, should be afforded the protection of due process through clear grievance procedures. It is the obligation of sociologists when acting as employers, to communicate these procedures and to protect the rights of employees who initiate complaints. They should also communicate standards of employment, and provide benefits, and compensation.

B. Responsibility of Employees
1. When seeking employment sociologists should provide prospective employers with accurate information on their relevant professional qualifications and experiences.
2. Sociologists accepting employment in academic and practice settings should become aware of possible constraints on research and publication in those settings and should negotiate clear understandings about such conditions accompanying their research and scholarly activity. In satisfying their obligations to employers, sociologists in such settings must make every effort to adhere to the professional obligations contained in this Code.
3. When planning to resign a post, sociologists should provide their employers with adequate notice of intention to leave.

C. Sponsor's Participation in Employment Processes
1. In helping to secure employment for students and trainees, sociologists should make every attempt to avoid conflicts of interest. When a conflict of interest does arise, full disclosure of potential biases should be made to job seekers.

V. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
The Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE) appointed by the Council of the American Sociological Association, shall have responsibility for: interpreting and publicizing this Code, promoting ethical conduct among sociologists, receiving inquiries about violations of the Code, investigating complaints concerning the ethical conduct of members of the American Sociological Association, mediating disputes to assist the parties in resolving their grievances, holding hearings on formal charges of misconduct, and recommending actions to the Council of the American Sociological Association.

A. The Committee shall:
1. At any time, not necessarily in the context of the investigation of a particular case, advise the Council of the Association of its views of general ethical questions, which the Council may elect to publish in appropriate publications of the Association;
2. Receive complaints of violations of the Code of Ethics, and endeavor to resolve them by mediation, and if mediation is unsuccessful, proceed to a hearing. If, after a hearing, the Committee determines that an ethical violation occurred, it should so notify the parties and prepare a report for Council, which may or may not recommend one of the following actions:
   a. Apply no sanctions
   b. Suspend the membership and attendant privileges of a member (e.g., participation in the Annual Meeting for a period to be recommended by the Committee;
   c. Request the resignation of a member, or;
   d. Terminate the membership of a member.

B. The Council of the Association shall receive case reports and recommendations from the Committee, and from the Review Board hereafter provided, and take appropriate action.

C. The following are the rules and procedures under which the Committee operates:
1. Except as hereinafter provided, all formal actions of the Committee shall be adopted at a meeting at which a quorum is present, by a majority vote of the members present and voting. A quorum shall consist of a majority of members of the Committee. Members of the Committee with conflicts of interest as outlined in "COPE’s Guidelines for Committee Conduct" will be excluded from Committee deliberations and will not be included in determining a quorum.
2. All inquiries about violations of the Code of Ethics should be directed to the Executive Officer of the Association, who shall determine whether the alleged violator is a member of the Association. A person making an inquiry should be sent a copy of the Code and requested to specify in writing the Section(s) of the Code that is (are) believed to have been violated. After receipt of this formal and specific complaint, the Executive Officer shall notify the Chair of the Committee of the inquiry. The Chair, in conjunction with the Executive Officer, shall determine whether or not the complaint is in fact covered by the Code. If so determined, the complainant will be notified of the acceptance by the Committee of the Complaint. The Executive Officer shall then communicate the entire complaint to the person or persons accused, together with a copy of the Code and an explanation of the composition and purpose of the Committee (by registered mail with return receipt requested) and request a response within 90 days.
   a. The Committee shall consider complaints received from both members and non-members of the Association against members of the Association.
   b. In order to be considered by the Committee, complaints must be received within eighteen months of the alleged violation or, if received later, must be certified for Committee consideration by the ASA Council.
   c. The Executive Officer shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint, shall send a copy of the Code, and, where necessary, advise the complainant that a formal complaint must include specification of the time, place, persons, and events constituting the alleged violation and cite the paragraph(s) of the Code alleged to be violated.
3. In cases in which negotiation between the parties is deemed proper, the Chair of COPE will designate members of the Committee to cooperate with the Executive Officer in trying to find an informal and satisfactory solution to the problem.
4. The Executive Officer shall send copies of the complaint, responses and supporting documents to all members of the Committee and to the complainant and the alleged violator. After deliberation, the Committee shall decide by majority vote whether (1) the case should not be pursued further, (2) further information is needed, (3) mediation should be attempted, or (4) the case should not come to a hearing.
   a. If the Committee decides there should be no further pursuit of the case, the Chair shall communicate the decision and the reasons therefore to the Executive Officer, who should notify all parties.
   b. If the Committee decides that further investigation of the case is necessary, it may direct inquiries through the Executive Officer to either the complainant or the alleged violator, with copies of the request and responses thereto in every instance to the other party.
   c. If the Committee decides to attempt mediation, it shall appoint a mediator from among members of the Association, acceptable to both parties. The mediator shall in due course notify the Committee that the matter has been resolved by written agreement of the parties, or if no such resolution has been achieved, the mediator may (1) recommend that the matter be dropped, or (2) recommend that the case proceed to a hearing.
   d. If the Committee decides that a hearing is appropriate, either upon the recommendation of a mediator, or upon its own initiative, it shall advise the complainant and the
alleged violator that a hearing will be conducted, giving at least 90 days notice of
time and place. The alleged violator, as well as the complainant, should be advised of
their rights to introduce witnesses and evidence in their behalf, to cross-examine
witnesses, and to have the assistance of professional or other counsel at the hearing.
All documentary evidence to be introduced by the complainant, and the names of all
witnesses to be offered in support of the charges shall be supplied to the alleged
violator at least 80 days prior to the hearing. If either complaint or alleged violator
refuses to participate in the hearing, the Committee may elect to continue without
their participation.
e. At the hearing, the evidence in support of the complaint shall be presented by the
complainant, by complainant’s lawyer or by a representative of the ASA Council,
and the alleged violator shall have full opportunity to answer the charges. The
Committee may introduce its own witnesses in order to answer factual questions.
f. The Committee shall record the proceedings of the hearing. The alleged violator shall
have the right to be present either in person or, with the consent of all parties,
through a conference telephone hook-up at all evidential sessions of the hearing and
to have a transcript at cost. Every attempt will be made to conduct hearings at one
time and place so as to reduce travel costs of the parties involved in the dispute.
g. Unless the alleged violator requests and the Committee grants a public hearing, the
hearing of the complaint shall be private. All persons except those necessary for the
conduct of the hearing shall be excluded.
h. At the conclusion of the introduction of all evidence, the alleged violator, counsel for
the alleged violator, or both shall be permitted to argue against or in mitigation of the
complaint.
i. Thereafter, the Committee shall conduct its further discussion in private.
j. If the Committee finds that no ethical violation has occurred, the parties, organiz-
ations and individuals contacted during the investigation shall be so notified by the
Executive Officer and the case closed.
k. If the Committee finds that an ethical violation has clearly occurred, it shall prepare a
report of the case summarizing its findings and recommendations. A copy of that
report shall be sent to the alleged violator and complainant who shall have an
opportunity to prepare written comments within 30 days as part of the appeals
process.
l. When the Committee has followed the procedure set forth in paragraph “k”, the
findings shall be automatically appealed to a Review Board composed of three past
Presidents of the Association appointed by the current President. The Review Board
shall consider the written record alone, and by majority vote shall recommend to the
Council that the findings of the Committee be upheld, reversed or modified. Copies
of the recommendations of the Review Board shall be sent to the complainant, the
alleged violator, and the Committee on Professional Ethics, all of whom shall have 30
days to comment in writing before the recommendation is forwarded to Council.
m. The Council, after examination of the Committee’s and the Review Board’s recom-
mendations and comments thereto, shall make a final determination of the case on
behalf of the Association, and either dismiss the case or take appropriate action.

D. The effective date of these procedures is August 14, 1989.