

## **Society of Christian Ethics Standards of Professional Conduct**

### **Section 1. Aspirations and values of the SCE.**

The purpose of the Society of Christian Ethics is to promote scholarly work in the field of Christian ethics and in the relation of Christian ethics to other traditions of ethics and to social, economic, political, and cultural problems; to encourage and improve the teaching of these fields in colleges, universities and theological schools; and to provide a community of discourse and debate for those engaged professionally within these general fields. (By-laws, Art. II) In pursuit of this purpose members of the Society have particular professional commitments and responsibilities.

**As scholars in the field of ethics** we hold ourselves to a standard of free, rigorous, and intellectually honest inquiry aiming to advance moral understanding, especially in regard to theologically informed perspectives. Our examination of moral issues shall respect the dignity of persons whose practices and positions we study. Likewise, our engagement with other disciplines and ethical and religious traditions shall be conducted with the aim of mutual learning and understanding. We seek to promote critical and constructive understandings of justice, the well being of society and the good of the wider creation.

**As participants in institutions** we will foster just relationships with their members and constituencies -- especially students, graduate assistants, colleagues, staff, clients, and patients -- as well as with the communities these institutions affect.

**As educators** we will strive to improve the methods and intellectual depth of our teaching. We will exercise our authority justly with concern for the development of our students, respecting their dignity and the boundaries appropriate to professional interaction.

**As members of the Society** we will conduct inquiry, debate and other interactions with colleagues openly, fairly, and respectfully. We will execute our duties competently and justly without prejudice toward those with different values and viewpoints. We will welcome and take action to ensure the full participation of new and junior members and those who bring new voices to our conversations.

Certain conduct so clearly affronts the dignity of persons that it contravenes the minimal conditions for participation in our profession. Accordingly, in activities that occur under the auspices of the Society we will neither practice nor tolerate any form of harassment or unjust discrimination, in deed or word, based on race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, religious community, sexual orientation, age, or physical condition. Neither will we practice nor tolerate plagiarism, copyright infringement, and unacknowledged use of the research of others. (Cf. By-laws, Art. III, Sec. 3.) Persons who engage in such conduct within the Society's activities shall be subject to the grievance procedures the Society adopts, as explained below.<sup>1</sup>

### **Section 2. Statement of Professional Conduct.**

The primary purpose of this document is to promote the commitments outlined in the paragraphs above by adopting standards for the professional conduct of our members, and setting forth a grievance procedure for their reinforcement. These standards, organized under three headings, aim to protect the goods of our society, to protect members from being treated in such a way that they cannot enjoy the full benefits of membership and activity in the Society, and to educate all members about that standards of behavior that membership in our scholarly community requires.

It is our responsibility, as a community of professionals, to develop and sustain our own standards of conduct. We therefore publicize these commitments and standards, and commit to renewing them by regular examination and, if

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<sup>1</sup> To this point, this Section 1 is taken from the "Declaration of Professional Commitments", which was appended to SCE Bylaws at the 2006 annual meeting.

appropriate, revision. Questions and concerns, and especially reports and complaints of violations of professional conduct, will be listened to, taken seriously, and responded to fairly and constructively.

These standards apply to all members of the SCE when they are involved in meetings and activities directly connected with the Society's work. These standards also will be shared with invited speakers and other non-members who register for SCE meetings.

**A. Respect for difference.** We commit ourselves to sustaining a secure and open environment for discussion in the public spaces of our annual meetings. We expect, from ourselves individually and each other, thoughtful and constructive analysis and reflection—discourse which serves to invite, rather than diminish or exclude the participation of those to whom and about whom we are speaking. We respect each other through the civil language that we employ in panels, presentations and conversation. We recognize that vigorous expression of disagreement about ethical matters does not itself count as disrespect for difference; we commit ourselves to expressing even vigorous disagreement in a civil way.

*Disrespect for difference* occurs when members use abrasive and hurtful words, or engage in insensitive and demeaning conduct, unjust discrimination based on race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, religious community, sexual orientation, age, or physical condition—in short, and any behavior which impedes particular individuals or groups from fully participating in and enjoying the life of the Society. Any words or actions of this sort violate this standard when they contribute to an atmosphere of intimidation or contempt.

**B. Respect for personal integrity.** We commit ourselves to honoring the physical, moral, and sexual integrity of all SCE members. In all of our professional interactions connected with the SCE, we will treat fellow members with the equal regard due to them as fellow human beings and fellow professionals, according to the norms of justice, honesty, fairness, and care. We recognize that each of us has a right to claim our own physical safety and security, as well as to make our own decisions and keep our own commitments in matters concerning romantic and sexual relationships. Participation in the roles, activities, and events of the SCE should depend solely upon professional interest and competence. No one's claim to participation should be conditioned upon a threat, implicit or explicit, to their personal integrity.

*Disrespect for personal integrity* can take several different forms in the context of SCE meetings, particularly in the context of the annual meeting at a hotel. The use of hotel bedrooms for professional purposes can create the appearance of a threat to personal integrity. Consequently, such private rooms should not be used for functions appropriate to public spaces, such as interviews, meetings or official SCE social gatherings. In public spaces, disrespect is expressed through remarks, jokes or behavior which belittle, bully, harass, or exploit other members; the display or use of degrading or pornographic images for purposes unconnected to a professional presentation; the expression of lewd remarks or conduct; and the surreptitious administration of alcohol or drugs to reduce sexual inhibitions. As teachers and scholars of ethics, we are particularly sensitive to the way in which differentials of power and position, such as those between students and teachers, or junior colleagues and senior colleagues, can create or exacerbate threats to personal integrity. Unwelcome sexual advances, including unwanted touching, violate the integrity of both parties. Persistent and unwelcome social invitations threaten to violate personal integrity, particularly when the intent is to extract sexual favors in exchange for professional advantage.

**C. Respect for intellectual integrity.** No scholarly progress can be made without freedom of thought, speech, and publication. The Society encourages its members to formulate and present their ideas, arguments, and research with freely exercised imagination and responsibility, in accordance with internalized standards of professional judgment. Good scholarly work requires a high degree of discretion exercised by members in determining the appropriate context and presentation of academic material. Respect for intellectual integrity also requires us to accurately present the work of other scholars with whom we are in conversation, particularly if we disagree with them. Finally, we must appropriately acknowledge our debt to the scholarly endeavors of others, by citing them fully and fairly in accordance with prevailing scholarly standards. Respect for intellectual integrity consists in protecting the conditions for and honoring the fruits of the vocation to scholarship, in order to facilitate a creative, honest, and rigorous scholarly conversation.

*Disrespect for intellectual integrity* can be expressed in several ways. Three of the more egregious kinds of violations include incidents where: 1) a member or members intimidate, ridicule or otherwise wrongfully inhibit others from a full and genuine expression of their ideas; 2) a member presents the ideas or positions of another scholar or source in a willfully or negligently incomplete or biased way; and 3) a member misrepresents the ideas from a source as his or her own, by willfully or negligently failing to acknowledge the source in accordance with prevailing scholarly standards.

The list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, and the possible violations are framed in a general way so as to allow appropriate latitude for a determination to be made as to whether a given incident constitutes a violation.

### **Section 3. The Grievance Procedure**

**1. The Purpose of the Grievance Procedure** is to provide structure and guidance for responding to evident violations. The procedure may be applied only to grievances between members of the SCE, that is, to *members* of the SCE aggrieved by the conduct of *fellow members* in the context of meetings and activities directly connected with the Society's work.<sup>2</sup>

The procedure is intentionally flexible, allowing considerable scope for discretionary exercise of its provisions in response to morally relevant differences in particular cases, such as the gravity of the alleged misconduct and whether or not it was intentional. The overarching goal is to reestablish a respectful and just environment for inquiry and discourse at SCE meetings. Where possible, the procedure should aim at achieving reconciliation on fair terms. In some cases, the duty to maintain the values and commitments of the SCE may require the application of sanctions (e.g., suspension or expulsion). Any intervention should aim at supporting and strengthening the SCE's efforts to safeguard respect for difference, personal integrity and intellectual integrity.

**2. The Professional Conduct Committee** is the sole body authorized to interpret and apply the grievance procedure; evaluate complaints brought under it; and make recommendations to the Board of Directors in response to such complaints.

Members of the PCC are appointed by the President for staggered three-year terms, to ensure continuity of experience on the Committee. Since respect for intellectual integrity requires vigilance, sensitivity and courage to identify and remedy infractions, the members of the PCC should be chosen for their practical wisdom. They should be seasoned members of the SCE, who possess sound and sober judgment, as well as tact, discretion, and skill with people. In aggregate, they should represent the SCE community in all its diversity. If possible, the SCE should look into sending them to a relevant training program.

The PCC will review cases arising out of the formally constituted activities of the SCE if it deems the procedure of peer investigation and judgment to be an appropriate forum to address the alleged misconduct, and if it deems the SCE's resources to be adequate to yield a fair judgment. The PCC will not accept complaints it deems capricious or principally vindictive, nor will it attempt to obviate or preempt civil or legal proceedings, nor will it, except in unusual circumstances, pursue a case while the dispute is pending in another forum. Review of a complaint by the PCC should not be regarded as substitute for legal action.

**3. The Grievance Procedure** is designed for use during or soon after a formally constituted event of the SCE, normally the annual meeting. The swift passage of such events imposes limitations on the PCC's ability to obtain information, provide due process, protect confidentiality, and resolve the case with effective mediation or retributive justice, as the case warrants.

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<sup>2</sup> SCE employees are expected to know and abide by these standards as well, but it should be noted that they are protected by state and federal employment laws, including laws against harassment and discrimination. Guests, including guest speakers, will be encouraged to hold themselves accountable to these standards by means of a brief summary of this document, supplied to them in their registration packets.

A member should bring a grievance directly to the chair of the PCC, who ensures that all inquiries and complaints are properly undertaken and concluded. If any member of the PCC is named in the complaint, he or she will be replaced for that case by Presidential appointment. No person who has been accused in a complaint will participate in the investigation or resolution of the complaint.

When a grievance is brought to the chair of the PCC, the chair shall promptly assign a member of the PCC to handle the case as its representative.

In some situations, the PCC representative may find that an informal conversation with the complainant and the respondent members suffices to determine what happened and then to resolve a hurtful misunderstanding or repair an unintentional offense through mediation. If the mediation is successful, no written record shall be generated. The PCC member shall orally inform the chair of the PCC of the successful resolution of the incident.

For example, under *Respect for Difference*, if a member of the SCE uses a derogatory racial term in a conversation at the hotel bar, but doesn't realize the term is offensive, the PCC member may explain its offensiveness and a sincere apology may be all that is required. Under *Respect for Personal Integrity*, a request for some form of sexual intimacy that was honestly but mistakenly believed to be welcome might be settled with a sincere apology. Under *Respect for Intellectual Integrity*, using material from the writings of another member without proper citation, but unintentionally and in a minor way, might be resolved with a sincere apology and a correction in the next issue of the *JSCE*.

A more formal procedure will be required if mediation fails or if the PCC representative judges that the offense was deliberate and/or serious enough to require more attention. The PCC representative shall ask the complainant whether he or she wishes to proceed further, and shall respect the complainant's wishes in this regard.

For example, if a derogatory term was applied maliciously (a serious violation of *respect for difference*), or if sexual favors were requested in exchange for preferment or professional help (a serious violation of *personal integrity*), or if a citation was deliberately omitted (a serious violation of *intellectual integrity*)

If the complainant chooses to proceed, the PCC representative should inform the PCC chair, who should promptly convene the committee, by telephone if need be, to evaluate the complaint. By majority vote, the PCC may decide either to accept the complaint for full review or to decline to consider it. This decision should be based upon:

- a judgment of its resources and competence to handle the matter;
- the seriousness of the complaint;
- the degree to which the complaint alleges specific violations of the SCE Code of Conduct;
- the likelihood that the SCE will be able to make a positive contribution to resolving the problem; the availability of a more suitable forum, such as a university grievance procedure or the AAUP.

If the PCC decides to decline consideration of the complaint, the PCC representative will explain the decision to the complainant, and the respondent if aware of the complaint. No written record will be kept of the complaint or the PCC's decision not to consider the case.

If the PCC decides to pursue the complaint, it will ask the PCC representative promptly and impartially to solicit 1) a written statement from the complainant. The statement will be furnished to the respondent, with a request for 2) a written response. The PCC representative also will solicit additional relevant evidence. The solicitation of comments from witnesses needs to be done delicately and with circumspection. The PCC representative will write 3) an investigatory report detailing additional evidence in the case.

(Note: The PCC will protect the privacy of both the complainant and the respondent in every way possible during the process of the complaint and thereafter. However, all parties should realize that the confidentiality of the SCE proceeding is not protected against legally mandated disclosure if it falls within the scope of a subsequent lawsuit.)

The PCC will then meet in person or by conference call to consider the case, including the statements by the complainant and the respondent, and the investigatory report by the PCC representative.

- A. The PCC might conclude that there is insufficient evidence of violation to warrant any action, and therefore officially close the investigation. The chair of the PCC shall so notify the complainant and the respondent. No written record will be maintained of the incident.
- B. The PCC might conclude that a violation has occurred and impose a sanction, if it deems a sanction to be warranted. Sanctions are imposed by a majority vote of the PCC (excluding the investigating PCC member).
- C. Possible sanctions include:
  - 1) Sending a letter of reprimand to the respondent.
  - 2) Requiring the offender to undergo some sort of education regarding the Society's professional commitments and appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, and to provide documentation to the PCC that this training has been completed. Failure to comply may result in the rescinding of membership.
  - 3) Recommending to the Board to suspend, restrict, or terminate the membership of the respondent, in accordance with Article III, Section 7 of the By-laws.
- D. If a sanction is imposed, the chair of the PCC shall prepare a written report justifying the action taken. This report should include, as appendices, the statements of the complainant and respondent, as well as the PCC representative's investigatory report.
- E. If the recommendation to the Board is made to suspend, restrict, or terminate membership (3c), the following additional procedures must be followed.
  - 1) The PCC shall provide the Board with copies of the PCC chair's report, including all appendices.
  - 2) The complainant and respondent will be provided a copy of the chair's report, including all appendices. They will be offered an opportunity to make a written response to the PCC's decision.
  - 3) The sanction of suspension or restriction requires a majority vote of the Board of Directors. The sanction of expulsion requires a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the Board. The vote of the Board is final.
  - 4) The President shall notify the complainant and the respondent of the Board's decision in writing.
- F. Records
  - 1) For each case in which a violation has been found to have occurred, the Executive Director shall maintain in the office file one copy of the complete case file, which includes the PCC chair's report, including all appendices. If applicable, it shall also include additional materials submitted to the Board, and the written decision of the Board.
  - 2) These documents shall be made available only to those who serve in the office of President, the Executive Director, and the Chair of the PCC, and shall be destroyed in five year's time.
  - 3) All other copies shall be destroyed immediately after the PCC or Board meetings dealing with the case have concluded.

#### **4. After the Grievance procedure.**

The decisions rendered by the PCC are final, and may not be appealed by the complainant, respondent or a third party to the Board or to the entire membership. The only exception is a PCC recommendation for suspending, restricting or terminating membership as set forth in 3)c above, which may be appealed to the Board. However, further action by the PCC may be needed if the PCC learns, after investigating a complaint, that the grievance procedure has been misused:

- a. If a complainant knowingly made a false complaint or knowingly provided false information regarding a complaint. The SCE prohibits the use of false testimony, and the PCC or the Board may take disciplinary action.
- b. If retaliation is taken against any member, or against an employee of SCE filing a complaint against a member, or against the person accused. The SCE prohibits such retaliation, and the PCC or the Board may take additional disciplinary action.
- c. If the confidences of the complainant, the respondent, or other parties directly involved are abused by the members of the PCC or the Board. The SCE prohibits disclosure of confidential material unless required

by law or to protect the safety of a party or a third person. Violations of confidence may warrant additional sanctions by the PCC or the Board. Whether or not these misuses of the grievance procedure exacerbate the original complaint, they are themselves violations of respect for personal and intellectual integrity, and so are subject to the same disciplinary standards.

## **5. Report to the Board**

The PCC chair is the official liaison to the Board, President, and Executive Director and must report every inquiry and formal complaint. The PCC Chair shall prepare a written annual report to the Board, describing the cases it has dealt during the previous year in the following way:

- The PCC chair shall identify the number and general type of cases resolved by a PCC member on an informal basis.
- The PCC chair shall describe in general terms, which omit all direct and indirect identification of the parties, each case which the PCC declined to consider.
- The PCC chair shall prepare an abbreviated version of the case report of each case to which the PCC has decided to give full consideration, omitting all direct and indirect identification of the parties.

## **6. Report to the Membership**

The PCC Chair shall prepare a short oral report, to be given at the annual meeting, summarizing the annual report to the Board, but identifying cases, resolved or declined, only according to the kind of violation involved (regarding disrespect for difference, personal integrity, or intellectual integrity).

Approved by the SCE Board, January 2009.