

# **A Code of Professional Ethics for the Communication Scholar/Teacher**

*Adopted, 1999. revised by Review Committee and accepted by Legislative Assembly, 2017.*

This code and its guidelines are intended to remind those in the discipline of accepted standards of ethical conduct and they serve at least three broad functions:

1. to highlight ethical responsibilities and issues relevant to members of the communication discipline;
2. to stimulate personal reflection as well as public discussion of the ethical implications of our disciplinary goals and practices; and
3. to set forth the ethical practices that are appropriate for communication professionals.

## **Teaching**

We accept our professional and social responsibilities as communication educators by endeavoring to improve public understanding of communication theory, research, and practice. Our primary responsibilities as communication instructors rest in being knowledgeable, communicating what we know in a fair and accurate manner, acting as ethical role models for students by providing information and instruction to students about how to think and behave as ethical communicators, and establishing communication relationships with students that enhance their learning and encourage them to communicate ethically.

As communication instructors, we strive to treat all students fairly and we are always concerned with fairness. We model fairness in the classroom and require that students value fairness by insisting on respectful and civil expression when discussing differing viewpoints. We encourage listening to others and presenting ideas accurately, while acknowledging differences in points of view and personal biases. We provide, and encourage students to provide, constructive feedback to others in the class while acknowledging the value of opposing arguments and evidence. We try to foster freedom of expression and a safe classroom environment in which students communicate candidly and thrive intellectually.

We respect and honor culturally-based differences in communication and presentational styles in and outside the classroom. That respect calls for encouraging students to communicate in multiple ways, depending on what is most appropriate and effective for given contexts and communication goals. We strive to treat all students equally by not allowing predispositions or biases to influence how we teach and interact with students.

We display personal integrity in the classroom by our own use of ethical behaviors and by refusing to encourage or tolerate unethical behavior. As instructors, we maintain high standards of academic integrity by:

- Being prepared for the courses we teach by accessing the subject matter area and exposing ourselves to the knowledge of current pedagogical thinking and research related to teaching the course material.
- Helping all students to develop their fullest academic potential; encouraging them to become engaged in learning, to think critically about readings and lectures, to reflect on what they learn and, when appropriate,

to disagree with what is presented; and to participate with faculty and other students in research projects and activities.

- Acknowledging scholarly debates where they exist and helping students understand the nature of scholarly controversy, rather than presenting controversial material as “truth.”
- Engaging in classroom practices that help students achieve a better understanding of the course material without putting them at psychological or emotional risk.
- Using with care exercises or assignments that may conflict with the closely-held values of students and being open to allowing alternative assignments when students object for personal reasons.
- Demonstrating respect for students by following federal, state, and institutional laws that guarantee confidentiality and student privacy.
- Presenting course objectives and requirements fully and communicating clear criteria for grading and evaluating student achievement.
- Assessing student learning using methods and instruments that are free of bias and that provide an equal opportunity for all students to perform to the best of their ability. Students’ work is assessed based on the quality of content, not the viewpoints presented.

## **Research**

Ethical principles apply to all communication researchers, regardless of the form or method of inquiry. Ethical communication researchers should employ recognized standards of research practice, conduct research that they are properly trained to perform, and avoid procedures for which they have not been adequately prepared or trained. The primary goal of ethical communication research is to avoid harm to others—whether direct emotional or physical harm or harm to the reputations of research participants. Ethical communication research requires respect for human dignity, integrity, privacy, and right to confidentiality. Researchers have the obligation to protect vulnerable populations and to strive for accurate representations of all cultures and communities.

If in doubt about any ethical matter, ethical researchers seek advice before proceeding. The value of confidentiality demands that the identity of those being researched be kept confidential except in cases where the research is carried out on public figures or publicly available material. Criticism of another’s language, ideas, or logic is a legitimate part of scholarly research, but ethical researchers avoid *ad hominem* attacks. Avoiding personal attack does not mean that critics or reviewers refrain from commenting directly and honestly on the work of others, however.

Professional responsibility requires that ethical communication researchers know and comply with the legal and institutional guidelines covering their work. They do not use the work of others as their own, plagiarizing others’ ideas or language or appropriating the work of others for which one serves as a reviewer.

Responsibility to others entails honesty and openness. Thus, the ethical communication researcher:

- Obtains Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the appropriate institution(s) before conducting the research.
- Obtains informed consent to conduct the research, where appropriate to do so.
- Avoids deception as part of the research process, unless the use of deception has been approved in advance by an appropriate review body.

- Provides adequate citations in research reports to support theoretical claims and to justify research procedures.
- Discloses results of the research, regardless of whether those results support the researcher's expectations or hypotheses.
- Does not falsify data or publish misleading results.
- Reports all financial support for the research and any financial relationship that the researcher has with the persons or entities being researched, so that readers may judge the potential influence of financial support on the research results.

Likewise, the value of personal responsibility mandates that:

- Communication researchers will not accept research funding for projects that are likely to create a conflict of interest or where the funder controls any of the research design or procedures. If funding is accepted, communication researchers honor their commitments to finish the work on schedule.
- Communication researchers who work with human subjects honor their commitments to their subjects. Those who work with communities honor their commitments to the communities they research.
- Communication researchers share credit appropriately and recognize the contributions of others to the finished work. They decide before research is conducted how authorship will be determined and the order of authorship. They also decide through mutual consultation whether authors should be added or deleted from the finished product.

## **Publication**

Ethical responsibilities in the scholarly publication process exist for authors, editors, and reviewers. Author's primary responsibility rests in an extension of the ethical parameters for conducting research. Editor's and the reviewer's responsibilities rest primarily in insuring that author's work receives a fair review and an opportunity for publication based on a fair, ethical evaluation of the merit of the work.

Ethical considerations for each of these three groups of participants in the publication process will be addressed in turn.

For Authors:

- Authors have an obligation to submit their work to professional conventions or to scholarly journals in proper format and according to the guidelines set forth by the publication or convention call for papers.
- Authors have an obligation to acknowledge properly those who contributed to the research.
- Authors have an obligation to submit their work to only one scholarly journal or to one programming unit of a convention or conference. Editors or convention planners must not be put in the position of allowing an author to choose between two venues after each has evaluated the work as acceptable for presentation.
- If portions of the submitted work have been presented or published previously, authors have an obligation to note that fact, and editors or planners have an obligation to take this disclosure into account in deciding whether to accept the present version of the work.
- Authors have an obligation to communicate in a manner that is sensitive to readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability.

**For Editors and Convention Program Planners:**

- Editors and planners have an obligation to select associate editors and manuscript reviewers based on scholarly acumen, accomplishments and openness to various methodologies, topics, and theoretical perspectives. To maintain fairness in the review

- process, reviewers should represent a variety of geographic regions and a diversity of backgrounds, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality and ability.
- Editors and planners should maximize the likelihood that the peer review process is blind with the identity of the author(s) concealed from the reviewers.
  - Editors and planners have an obligation to forward submissions to the reviewers in a timely fashion and to monitor the review process to insure that reviews are returned in a timely fashion. If a manuscript's review exceeds the amount of time normally allotted to review, an editor should notify authors of the review's progress and should take steps to insure that a speedy conclusion to the review process is reached.
  - Editors and planners, to the extent possible, should select manuscript reviewers who are qualified to review the submission, able to render a fair judgment, and have no relationship with the author that might bias judgment.
  - In communicating a decision to the author, editors and planners should provide copies of reviewers' comments where appropriate, explain the basis or reasons for the decision, and maintain a professional demeanor toward the author and the work.
  - Editors should maintain accurate records of their expenditures and use subsidies from sponsoring organizations solely for publication and editorial expenses.

**For Manuscript Reviewers:**

- Reviewers should acknowledge any factors that might unfairly influence their assessment of a manuscript and promptly return that manuscript so that it might be sent to a different referee.
- Reviewers should render judicious, professional assessments and evaluations, devoid of personal attacks.
- Reviewers should thoroughly elucidate the reasons for their recommendations and provide constructive criticism and advice for the benefit of the author.
- Reviewers should submit their reviews in a timely manner or notify the editor or planner why a delay is necessary. Necessary delays should be minimal in length.
- Reviewers are obligated to advise the editor or planner of any elements in the manuscript that may be unethical, unprofessional, or of questionable validity.