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AAS Ethics Statement

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Adopted by the AAS Council 8 January 2010

The mission of the American Astronomical Society is to enhance and share humanity's scientific understanding of the Universe. We believe the advancement of astronomy requires that we provide ethical guidelines for AAS members and, for that matter, anyone involved in professional astronomical activities.

Every astronomer is a citizen of the community of science. Each of us shares responsibility for the welfare of this community. We endorse the statement of the American Physical Society that "Science is best advanced when there is mutual trust, based upon honest behavior, throughout the community." All scientists should act ethically in the conduct of their research, in teaching and education, and in relations with both members of the public and other members of the scientific community. We have a special responsibility to students and postdoctoral fellows to train them in ethical conduct.

The American Astronomical Society believes that the following are the minimal standards of ethical behavior relating to the profession.

Conduct Towards Others

All people encountered in one's professional life should be treated with respect. At no time is abusive behavior acceptable. Scientists should work to provide an environment that encourages the free expression and exchange of scientific ideas. They should promote equality of opportunity and treatment for all their colleagues, regardless of gender, race, ethnic and national origin, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disabilities, or any other reason not related to scientific merit. This principle is clearly stated in our By-Laws (aas.org/governance/bylaws.php).

More senior members of the profession, especially research supervisors, have a special responsibility to facilitate the research, educational, and professional development of students and subordinates. This includes providing safe, supportive work environments, fair compensation and appropriate acknowledgment of their contribution to any research results. In addition, supervisors should encourage the timely advance of graduate students and young professionals in their career aspirations.

It is also incumbent on senior members of our profession to inform more junior members of these ethical issues and of institutional and government guidelines, policies and procedures related to the oversight and maintenance of ethical standards for research and conduct. It is the responsibility of all members of our Society to familiarize themselves with such guidelines, policies and procedures.

Research

Data and research results should be recorded and maintained in a form that allows review, analysis, and reproduction by others. It is incumbent on researchers involved in large, publicly-supported studies to make results available in a timely manner.

Fabrication of data or selective reporting of data with the intent to mislead or deceive is unethical, unacceptable and fraudulent, as is the appropriation of unpublished data or research results from others without permission and attribution.

It should be recognized that honest error is an integral part of the scientific enterprise. It is not unethical to be wrong, provided that errors are promptly acknowledged and corrected when they are detected.

Publication and Authorship Practices

All persons who have made significant contributions to a work intended for publication should be offered the opportunity to be listed as authors. This includes all those who have contributed significantly to the inception, design, execution, or interpretation of the research to be reported. People who have not contributed significantly should not be included as authors. Other individuals who have contributed to a study should be appropriately acknowledged. The sources of financial support for any project should be acknowledged/disclosed. All collaborators share responsibility for any paper they coauthor, and every coauthor should have the opportunity to review a manuscript before its submission. It is the responsibility of the first author to ensure these.

Proper acknowledgement of the work of others should always be given, and complete referencing is an essential part of any astronomical research publication. Authors have an obligation to their colleagues and the scientific community to include a set of references that communicates the precedents, sources, and context of the reported work. Deliberate omission of a pertinent author or reference is unacceptable. Data provided by others must be cited appropriately, even if obtained from a public database.

All authors are responsible for providing prompt corrections or retractions if errors are found in published works with the first author bearing primary responsibility.

Plagiarism is the presentation of others' words, ideas or scientific results as if they were one's own. Citations to others' work must be clear, complete, and correct. Plagiarism is unethical behavior and is never acceptable.

These statements apply not only to scholarly journals but to all forms of scientific communication including but not limited to press releases, proposals, websites, popular books, and podcasts.

Authors, editors and referees should also be aware of the professional and ethical standards that have been adopted for the AAS journals ([aas.org/ethicsPolicy](https://www.aas.org/ethicsPolicy)).

Peer Review

Peer review is an essential component of many aspects of the scientific process such as evaluating research proposals, publishing research results, and evaluating colleagues for career advancement.

Peer review can serve its intended function only if the members of the scientific community are prepared to provide thorough, fair, and objective evaluations based on requisite expertise. Although peer review can be difficult and time-consuming, scientists have an obligation to participate in the process.

Reviewers should disclose conflicts of interest resulting from direct competitive, collaborative, or other relationships with those they are reviewing and recuse themselves from cases where such conflicts preclude an objective evaluation. It is unethical to seek to gain an advantage by means of reviewing the work of others, either through use of private information or biased reviews of other's work.

Privileged information or ideas that are obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for competitive gain.

Conflicts of Interest

Many activities of scientists and educators have the potential for a conflict of interest. Any professional relationship or action that may either be, or be perceived to be, a conflict of interest should be fully disclosed. Conflict of interest includes, but is not limited to, situations where the outcome of a deliberation will influence the financial status of one of the participants, or situations where decisions will affect the status of a person who is close to one of the participants. Most organizations or activities have mechanisms for managing conflicts, for example, through recusal. If a conflict of interest cannot be properly managed, the activity should be avoided or discontinued.

Resources

There are many sources of ethics information and case studies appropriate to astronomers. We wish to specifically mention:

The American Physical Society Guidelines for Professional Conduct:
(www.aps.org/policy/statements/02_2.cfm)

The DHHS Office of Research Integrity guide An Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research. (ori.dhhs.gov/documents/rcrintro.pdf)

The Federal policy on research misconduct.
(www.ostp.gov/cs/federal_policy_on_research_misconduct)

The National Academies' On Being a Scientist.
(www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12192)

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