

Harassment as an Ethics Issue

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Harassment, sexual and otherwise, including bullying and discrimination, remains an ongoing problem in the science workforce. In response to monthly revelations of harassment in academic science in the U.S. in 2016, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) convened a workshop to discuss strategies for professional societies to address this pernicious practice. Participants included researchers on this topic and members from professional science societies, academia, and U.S. federal government agencies. We agreed on the following principles:

- Harassment, discrimination and bullying most often occur between a superior (e.g., an advisor, professor, supervisor) and a student or early career professional, representing a power difference that disadvantages the less-powerful scientist.
- Harassment drives excellent potential as well as current scientists from the field who would otherwise contribute to the advancement of science, engineering and technology.
- Harassment, therefore, represents a form of scientific misconduct, and should be treated as plagiarism, falsification, and other forms of scientific misconduct are treated, with meaningful consequences.

To address harassment and to change the culture of science, professional societies can and should: ensure that their Code of Ethics and/or Code of Conduct addresses harassment with clear definitions of what constitutes this behavior, including in academic, professional, conference and field settings; provide a clear and well-disseminated mechanism for reporting violations to the society; have a response person or team in the society that can assist those who feel affected by harassment; and provide a mechanism to revisit and update Codes on a regular basis. The Code should be disseminated widely to members and apply to all members and staff. A revised Code of Ethics is now being constructed by AGU, and will be ready for adoption in 2017. See <http://harassment.agu.org/> for information updates.