

Community Standards Q&A Session at AP-LS 2024

AP-LS's Community Standards Policy is expected to take effect in 2025. Information about the background and development of this policy was presented during the AP-LS 2024 Conference, in an Overview and Q&A session on Friday, March 22.

This Policy was developed following the PDW Committee's 2020 Conference Climate Survey. According to the results (available [here](#)), 351 respondents completed the survey, with 9.6% reporting discrimination or harassment at formal conference events and 7.0% reporting discrimination or harassment at unofficial events. Respondents also reported hearing offensive remarks (16.8%), hearing sexist remarks (14.8%), being stared or leered at in a way that caused them discomfort (11.3%), and being touched in a way that made them uncomfortable (2.5%). Also reported were unwelcoming behaviors that included insults/condescension (24.7%), deliberate exclusion (12.4%), and intimidation or bullying (5.3%). Despite considering it important that the AP-LS conference is inclusive ($M = 8.13$ on a 1 to 9 scale), only 20.7% reported knowing whom to contact to report discrimination or harassment. Approximately 4 in 5 respondents identified as a top priority for AP-LS the implementation of a clear process for reporting (81.4%) and for investigating (80.4%) acts of discrimination or harassment at a conference (Gottfried, 2020; Hunt, 2024).

In light of these findings, an ad-hoc Task Force convened to clarify and communicate expectations of behaviors. This Task Force identified and reviewed Codes of Conduct adopted by other academic and professional organizations. This review indicated widespread adoption of Codes of Conduct by other organizations and provided a foundation for drafting the AP-LS Community Standards Policy. Following initial review and approval of the draft policy by the AP-LS Executive Committee (EC), the draft was made available for review and comment by AP-LS membership for a one-month period. The Task Force then revised the Policy in response to member comments. Following the revision, APA General Counsel reviewed the policy, and the EC approved the final policy on 8/4/23.

Additional information is provided in the Overview of the Community Standards Policy, available [here](#). In short, the Policy documents AP-LS's expectation of respectful and inclusive behaviors at conferences and gatherings, details prohibited harmful behaviors, and outlines a response process if such behavior does occur. Overall, many behaviors outlined in the policy may be addressed through informal and educational responses. However, individuals also have the option to request a formal reporting process and investigation by a Community Standards Committee, with the possibility of the imposition of consequences. The AP-LS Governance Committee is currently introducing the policy and expectations to AP-LS membership, and developing the mechanisms for full implementation. These include hiring an ombudsperson, creating a Community Standards Committee, and arranging for trainings of designated responders and the CS Committee.

Also identified were potential concerns regarding the adoption of a Community Standards Policy, which were addressed further:

Rather than creating fear or anger among AP-LS members, this Policy is not intended to police or suppress membership. Rather, this policy explicitly affirms welcome, inclusion, professionalism, and respectful behavior. Such affirmation supports the addition and involvement of students and new members to the organization.

Concerns that potential consequences will not deter problematic behavior stem from comparisons to criminal behavior and criminal sentences. However, the Community Standards (and other Codes of Conduct) process is most similar to organizational prevention and response to internal harassment and discrimination. Such harassment tends to be reduced by clear expectations for respectful and inappropriate behavior, accountability for violating expectations, and empowering bystanders to intervene (e.g., Cortina & Areguin, 2021).

In mind of potential negative repercussions to AP-LS, AP-LS consulted with APA General Counsel, which reviewed and approved the Community Standards Policy prior to EC approval. Review of similar organizations revealed no lawsuits against them related to the adoption and implementation of a code of conduct. Rather, having a clear policy in place, along with identified mechanisms by which to respond to inappropriate behavior, serves to protect AP-LS and its members.

During the AP-LS Conference session, attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and provide additional comments. Attendees suggested that this policy should be provided to the Student Committee for further dissemination to student members, addressed during presidential plenary sessions to bring added attention to the policy, disseminated through the conference app, and introduced via video on AP-LS website. It was also noted that flow charts depicting available options, as well as additional information about potential outcomes would provide further clarification. Also recommended was an annual survey to assess for any ongoing problems and the impact of the Community Standards policy on attendee behaviors. Questions included whether this policy will also apply to the AP-LS journal, given that other journals have adopted such policies; at present, the Community Standards will maintain its focus on the Conference. Members also sought clarification regarding the presence and availability of the ombudsperson during the AP-LS conference, as well as whether the conference organizers will function as Designated Responders.

The full text of the Community Standards Policy is now available on the [AP-LS website](#).

References

Cortina, L. M., & Areguin, M. A. (2021). Putting people down and pushing them out: Sexual harassment in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 8, 285-309.

Gottfried, E. (2020, July). *American Psychology-Law Society (AP-LS) Professional Development of Women (PDW) Committee Climate Survey*. Retrieved from <https://ap-ls.org/resources/reports/>

Hunt, J. (2024, March). *AP-LS Community Standards Policy: Overview and Q&A Session*. Session presented at the Annual Conference of the American Psychology-Law Society, Los Angeles, CA.