

# Ethical Guidelines for the Society

In January 1994 the Council received the report of its Special Advisory Committee on Professional Ethics. The committee, which consisted of Murray Gerstenhaber, Frank Gilfeather, Elliott Lieb, and Linda Keen (chair), presented ethical guidelines for adoption by the Council. Those draft guidelines were published twice in the *Notices*, with a request to the membership for responses and suggestions for changes or improvements. These were sent to the committee, which considered all suggestions. The committee then redrafted the guidelines, which were then presented to the January 1995 Council. At that meeting, the Council voted to adopt these guidelines on behalf of the Council (by a vote that was unanimous save for one abstention). Later, in Business by Mail and according to the bylaws, the Council approved the Guidelines in the name of the Society by a vote of twenty-five (25) in favor and three (3) opposed.

## Ethical Guidelines of the American Mathematical Society

To assist in its chartered goal, "...the furtherance of the interests of mathematical scholarship and research...", and to help in the preservation of that atmosphere of mutual trust and ethical behavior required for science to prosper, the American Mathematical Society, through its Council, sets forth the following guidelines. While it speaks only for itself, these guidelines reflect its expectations of behavior both for its members and for all members of the wider mathematical community, including institutions engaged in the education or employment of mathematicians or in the publication of mathematics.

It is not intended that something not mentioned here is necessarily outside the scope of AMS interest. These guidelines are not a complete expression of the principles that underlie them but will, it is expected, be modified and amplified by events and experience. These are guidelines, not a collection of rigid rules.

The American Mathematical Society, through its Committee on Professional Ethics (COPE), may provide an avenue of redress for individual members injured in their capacity as mathematicians by violations of its ethical principles. COPE, in accordance with its procedures, will, in each case, determine the appropriate ways in which it can be helpful (including making recommendations to the Council of the Society). However, the AMS cannot enforce these guidelines, and it cannot substitute for individual responsibility or for the responsibility of the mathematical community at large.

### I. Mathematical Research and its Presentation

The public reputation for honesty and integrity of the mathematical community and of the Society is its collective treasure, and its publication record is its legacy.

The correct attribution of mathematical results is essential, both as it encourages creativity, by benefiting the creator whose career may depend on the recognition of the

work, and as it informs the community of when, where, and sometimes how original ideas have entered into the chain of mathematical thought. To that end, mathematicians have certain responsibilities, which include the following:

To endeavor to be knowledgeable in their field, especially as regards related work;

To give proper credit (even to unpublished sources, because the knowledge that something is true or false is valuable, however it is obtained);

To use no language that suppresses or improperly detracts from the work of others;

To correct in a timely way or withdraw work that is erroneous or previously published.

A claim of independence may not be based on ignorance of well-disseminated results. Errors and oversights can occur, but it is the responsibility of the person making the error to set the record straight.

On appropriate occasions, it may be desirable to offer or accept joint authorship when independent researchers find that they have produced identical results. However, the authors listed for a paper must all have made a significant contribution to its content, and all who have made such a contribution must be offered the opportunity to be listed as an author. To claim a result in advance of its having been achieved with reasonable certainty injures the community by restraining those working toward the same goal. Publication of results that are announced must not be unreasonably delayed. Because the free exchange of ideas necessary to promote research is possible only when every individual's contribution is properly recognized, the Society will not knowingly publish anything that violates this principle, and it will seek to expose egregious violations anywhere in the mathematical community.

### II. Social Responsibility of Mathematicians

The Society promotes mathematical research together with its unrestricted dissemination, and to that end encourages all and will strive to afford equal opportunity to all to engage in this endeavor. Mathematical ability must be respected wherever it is found, without regard to race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religious or political belief, or disability.

The growing importance of mathematics in society at large and of public funding of mathematics may increasingly place members of the mathematical community in conflicts of interest. The appearance of bias in reviewing, refereeing, or in funding decisions must be scrupulously avoided, particularly where decisions may affect one's own research, that of close colleagues, or of one's students; in extreme cases one must withdraw.

A reference or referee's report fully and accurately reflecting the writer's views is often given only on the understanding that it be confidential or that the name of the writer be withheld from certain interested parties; therefore, a request for a reference or report must be assumed, unless there is a statement to the contrary, to carry an implicit promise of confidentiality or anonymity which must be carefully kept unless negated by law. The writer of the reply must respond fairly and keep confidential any

privileged information, personal or mathematical, that the writer receives. If the requesting individual, institution, agency or company becomes aware that confidentiality or anonymity cannot be maintained, that must immediately be communicated, and if known in advance, must be stated in the original request.

Where choices must be made and conflicts are unavoidable, as with editors or those who decide on appointments or promotions, it is essential to keep careful records which, even if held confidential at the time, would, when opened, demonstrate that the process was indeed fair.

Freedom to publish must sometimes yield to security concerns, but mathematicians should resist excessive secrecy demands, whether by government or private institutions.

When mathematical work may affect the public health, safety or general welfare, it is the responsibility of mathematicians to disclose the implications of their work to their employers and to the public, if necessary. Should this bring retaliation, the Society will examine the ways in which it may want to help the “whistle-blower”, particularly when the disclosure has been made to the Society.

### III. Education and Granting of Degrees

Holding a Ph.D. degree is virtually indispensable to an academic career in mathematics and is becoming increasingly important as a certificate of competence in the wider job market. An institution granting a degree in mathematics is certifying that competence and must take full responsibility for it by insuring the high level and originality of the thesis work and sufficient knowledge by the recipient of important branches of mathematics outside the scope of the thesis. The original results in a thesis should be publishable in a recognized journal. When there is evidence of plagiarism, it must be carefully investigated, even if it comes to light after granting the degree, and, if proven, the degree should be revoked.

Mathematicians and organizations involved in advising graduate students should honestly inform them about the employment prospects they may face upon completion of their degrees. No one should be exploited by the offer of a temporary position at a low salary and/or a heavy work load.

### IV. Publications

The Society will not take part in the publishing, printing or promoting of any research journal where there is some acceptance criterion, stated or unstated, that conflicts with the principles of these guidelines. It will promote the quick refereeing and timely publication of articles accepted to its journals.

Editors are responsible for the timely refereeing of articles and must judge articles by the state of knowledge at the time of submission. Editors and referees should accept a paper for publication only if they are reasonably certain the paper is correct.

The contents of an unpublished and uncirculated paper should be regarded by a journal as privileged information. If the contents of a paper become known in advance of publication solely as a result of its submission to or handling by a journal, and if a later paper based on knowledge of

the privileged information is received anywhere (by the same or another journal), then any editor aware of the facts must refuse or delay publication of the later paper until after publication of the first—unless the first author agrees to earlier publication of the later paper.

At the time a manuscript is submitted, editors should notify authors whenever a large backlog of accepted papers may produce inordinate delay in publication. A journal may not delay publication of a paper for reasons of an editor’s self interest or of any interest other than the author’s. The published article should bear the date on which the manuscript was originally submitted to the journal for publication, together with the dates of any revisions. Editors must be given and accept full scientific responsibility for their journals; when a demand is made by an outside agency for prior review or censorship of so-called “sensitive” articles, that demand must be resisted, and, in any event, knowledge of the demand must be made public.

All mathematical publishers, particularly those who draw without charge on the resources of the mathematical community through the use of unpaid editors and referees, must recognize that they have made a compact with the community to disseminate information, and that compact must be weighed in their business decisions.

Both editors and referees must respect the confidentiality of materials submitted to them unless these have previously been made public, and above all may not appropriate to themselves ideas in work submitted to them or do anything that would impair the rights of authors to the fruits of their labors. Editors must preserve the anonymity of referees unless there is a credible allegation of misuse.

These are ethical obligations of all persons or organizations controlling mathematical publications, whatever their designation.

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