



## **2019 Evolution Meetings Code of Conduct Transparency Report**

*Tri-Societies Code of Conduct Committee: Brian O'Meara & Kelly Zamudio (SSB), Sheng-Pei Wang & Sharon Strauss (ASN), Jodie Wiggins & Andrea Case (SSE)*

Every year, the Code of Conduct Committee will release a transparency report summarizing incidents, consequences, and related changes. The Code of Conduct has a strong emphasis on confidentiality; reports have been aggregated to avoid inadvertently linking reporters or respondents to incidents or any sanctions. The goal of this transparency report is to provide the community with a sense of how the Code of Conduct functions so they can build trust in the process, if such trust is warranted, and recommend improvements.

At Evolution 2019, all executives in the three sponsoring societies were trained by our on-site Safety Officer, Dr. Sherry Marts. Nine elected officers (three from each society) served as a sanctioning committee. Dr. Marts also trained 23 Evo Allies to serve as additional contacts and to help with bystander intervention.

### **Summary of reports**

Dr. Marts received reports of nine incidents (the actual number of reports is higher, as some incidents were reported more than once). Reports came in during the meeting and up to one month after the meeting; reports came by phone, text, email, and social media. Reports of incidents were addressed quickly—within minutes to hours of Dr. Marts learning of them. Anyone reporting incidents via social media was given information on reporting procedures. Of submitted reports, two were not actionable because individuals involved were not identified<sup>1</sup>. In three cases, the targets felt that the situation had been resolved and the Safety Officer made recommendations for no further sanctions. In one case, given concerns about retaliation, the incident was not brought to the sanctioning committee. In two cases, the sanctioning committee was consulted. In one case, sanctions included a letter warning the violator that any further credible complaints would result in their expulsion from the meeting; in two other cases, the sanctioning committee was not consulted, and the violator agreed to stop the behavior.

Reports of attendees receiving unwelcome behavior included two incidents during poster sessions, one during an oral presentation, and three at the Super Social. Reported incidents included at least two distinct cases of attendees belittling other attendees; both of these also included discrimination. Bystander intervention (which can be done by anyone at the meeting, not just Evo Allies) was key in stopping one of the incidents.

At the Super Social, complaints included an individual noticeably lingering near a target after being rejected for a dance (the target reported this made them uncomfortable, and that two other attendees offered help after observing the situation), an individual grabbing an unwilling attendee’s arm to drag them onto the dance floor, and an attendee of color wearing a conference badge being mistaken for a coat-check worker and, later, this same attendee being mistaken as wait staff. Consistent with past years, the Super Social remains a place where multiple incidents occur.

There were no reports that were judged to be false and all reports were deemed credible following investigation. There were also no reports where there was disagreement about the nature of the incident, though in one case there was disagreement between the complainant and the accused about how inappropriate the comments were.

All reports and consultations with the sanctioning committee were confidential; names of involved parties were not disclosed in reports or in consultations with the sanctioning committee. This transparency report is based on anonymized reports received by the Code of Conduct committee from the Safety Officer. Confidential records of all reports that include the names of all parties are kept in sealed envelopes and passed between Safety Officers from one meeting to the next so that past history can be considered in determining sanctions for any future behavioral violation.

**Survey of attendee experiences with Safe Evolution**

We did an unscientific survey of attendees after the meeting about how Safe Evolution was received.

<b>N=89–90 respondents</b>	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Overall, the Safe Evolution initiatives improved *my* experience of the meeting	<b>4</b> 4%	<b>4</b> 4%	<b>19</b> 21%	<b>37</b> 41%	<b>26</b> 29%
Overall, the Safe Evolution initiatives were something I was happy to see	<b>3</b> 3%	<b>3</b> 3%	<b>4</b> 4%	<b>17</b> 19%	<b>63</b> 70%
Evo Allies were visible throughout the meeting, including off site	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b> 9%	<b>25</b> 28%	<b>56</b> 63%
Reporting procedures were clear	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b> 18%	<b>52</b> 58%	<b>22</b> 24%
Resources were made readily available	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b> 1%	<b>14</b> 16%	<b>45</b> 50%	<b>30</b> 33%

Overall, reception was positive, though six of the 90 respondents disagreed with the need for Safe Evolution, finding it an “overreaction,” no need for a “chaperone,” and a waste of money.

Many people lauded the visibility of the Evo Allies and Safe Evolution materials. There was one suggestion to include signs on the urinals, but a different suggestion to remove them from bathrooms. There is interest in establishing additional measures for preventing inappropriate behavior during poster sessions, especially behavior targeted at student presenters.

### **Potential controversies**

*In this section, we highlight areas where there might be discussion or disagreement about what was done or about current procedures. It is not an exhaustive list, but we invite an openness to dialogue for the sake of improvement. Please contact the members of the Code of Conduct committee (see members at <http://www.evolutionmeetings.org/general-meeting-information.html>) or society leadership; you may also contact Dr. Sherry Marts directly.*

In Title IX procedures at universities, investigations can proceed even if the target does not wish them to, but this is rare. Given our limited ability to prevent retaliation, the Code of Conduct procedures honor the target's wishes not to pursue incidents that happen at conferences.

The current Code of Conduct has very strict confidentiality terms: complainants do not always know what sanctions are applied (but are notified that their complaint was evaluated by the Safety Officer<sup>2</sup>), and the names of people being sanctioned are not released to anyone unless deemed necessary by the Safety Officer to complete an investigation or legally required. We believe this is a good policy for our community, where there is express concern about the fairness of procedures.

For Evolution 2019, a patch for the Code of Conduct was put in place by society leadership allowing information about prior incidents that occurred outside the conference (such as someone being fired for misconduct) to be taken into consideration of sanctions for incidents occurring at the Evolution meeting. A permanent policy for considering past behavior is under development for the meeting Code of Conduct. A Code of Ethics is also being developed for each society to deal with expectations for behavior in general. For example: if someone is fired for assaulting a student, many societies prohibit them from attending their meetings.

### **Recommended changes from the Code of Conduct Committee**

Our societies need to prioritize making a decision on a permanent policy on banning known harassers (see above). As far as we know, there was no one who attended this year who would be affected by such a policy, but there are a few known individuals in our societies who would be subject to such a policy if one existed.

The Super Social still requires work to make it an enjoyable and safe event for everyone.

Based on one report, there was concern raised about housing arrangements during the conference. There are clear power dynamics at play in such arrangements: a member of a lab might not feel they can object to sharing accommodation with other members of the lab. Employers, especially universities, may have policies about housing arrangements, even during travel, especially if housing arrangements involve advisors and their students.

For the first year, Evo Allies were chosen based on recommendations from societies (which ran their own processes: sometimes querying members, sometimes just the leadership, several nominated by other nominees). Nominations were evaluated by the Code of Conduct Committee to ensure that the group would represent multiple axes diversity to the extent possible. Names of nominees were then sent to Dr. Marts for formal vetting. We need to create a mechanism to recruit attendees who are interested and prepared to serve as Evo Allies for future meetings. While consistency is useful, there also needs to be a mechanism to rotate membership in the Evo Allies program. We need to continue to improve our training and evaluation of allies.

Publicized reports of incidents at other society meetings provide insights on aspects of our code to keep or change. Recent examples of such incidents highlight the importance of rapid response to reports, the importance of speaking to all involved parties before determining outcomes, and the need for a mechanism to allow information about prior incidents that occurred outside the conference to be taken into consideration.

Notes:

1. An important distinction is between **anonymity** (identity of someone is unknown) versus **confidentiality** (identity is known only to the investigator and never publicly revealed). For a complaint to be actionable, the person investigating must know the identity of the person making the complaint and the person being accused of inappropriate behavior: that is, they must not be anonymous, but all identities will be kept confidential to the extent permissible by law.
2. There is never a non-disclosure requirement placed on any complainant, so they are free to report to others if they are satisfied with the process or not, and they can seek their own avenues for resolution.