LSA Code of Conduct for Events

Note: In early 2024 this page was transferred “as is” from LSA’s old website to preserve the historical record of these advocacy efforts. Please be aware that the original hyperlinks and other information on the page may no longer be current.

Introduction
The LSA annual meetings, Linguistic Institutes, and other LSA-sponsored events are convened for the purposes of professional, scholarly and educational interchange and development in the spirit of free inquiry and free expression. Consequently, all forms of uncollegiality and harassment are considered by the LSA to be serious forms of professional misconduct.

This Code of Conduct is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all its participants. It describes expected behavior and outlines ways in which event organizers will address problems that arise. It reminds LSA participants (including conference reviewers) that a high level of professional ethics and norms is expected as standards of behavior and interaction at these events, standards which include but are not limited to those outlined below.

The LSA, like many professional scholarly organizations, requires participants to agree to a Code of Conduct to ensure we are able to offer inclusive and welcoming environments. Members of the LSA have reported issues such as those covered by this Code of Conduct for several decades. Therefore, this policy is intended to be responsive to those complaints and address similar issues that may arise at future LSA events.

Unprofessional behavior

All participants in LSA events must maintain professional integrity in their relationships and interactions with one another. Harassment and discrimination are specifically prohibited. “Participant” in this policy refers to anyone attending the event (in in-person, hybrid, or online iterations) or present at the event, including staff, contractors, and vendors.

Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Prejudicial actions or communication (actions or language) related to a person’s identity or group membership that coerce others, foment broad hostility, or otherwise undermine professional equity or the principles of free academic exchange. Relevant identities include (but are not limited to) those defined by age, career or employment status, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or following.
- Harassing photography or recording.
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events.
- Inappropriate physical contact.
• Unwelcome sexual attention.
• Advocating for, encouraging, or condoning any of the above behavior.

The expression or the critique of a contested academic or professional viewpoint does not in itself constitute harassment, as long as it is done in a professional and respectful way. By contrast, aggressive discussion styles (including *ad hominem* comments) that are aimed to intimidate, marginalize, belittle, or disparage others (or their research area) are unacceptable.

**Inclusive Behavior**

LSA events aim to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all participants. Every participant is welcome and respected. By the same token, all participants are expected to treat each other with respect and tolerance. To accomplish this, participants are asked to speak up and take action when these values are not adhered to, and recognize that power differences and hierarchies inherent to academia and broader society may inhibit some participants (including students and junior scholars) from deciding to object to or report problematic behavior (details on reporting below). In addition, linguists working in non-academic (industry, government, professional or community) settings may feel that they are treated as second-class citizens. Inclusion means treating all participants with respect, as equally valuable contributors to the field.

The LSA encourages its event participants to proactively engage in inclusive behavior, e.g.:

• Acknowledge the opinions, skills, and contributions of others.
• Discuss any sensitive material in a respectful way where the material is adequately contextualized in line with academic inquiry and professional practice.
• Give feedback to others in a professional and respectful manner.
• Refrain from disruptive or monopolizing behavior, especially during talks and question periods.
• Advocate for others when they are unable to advocate for themselves, or in instances of prejudice or discrimination, without taking over or deciding what is best for others.
• Provide encouragement, help, support, or mentorship to colleagues when it is welcomed.

**Reporting**

Harassment and other violations of this code reduce the value of our events for everyone. If someone makes you or anyone else feel unsafe or unwelcome, or if you witness unacceptable behavior, please report it to the event organizers as soon as possible.

You can report a violation:

• in person to an organizer;
• in an email to the LSA Executive Director (mvitullo@lsadc.org);
• or in an anonymous form.

LSA event organizers will do their best to address your report with as much confidentiality as the enforcement process allows. Depending on the nature of the violation, in some jurisdictions organizers may also be required by law and/or university policy to inform authorities. For example,
some U.S. universities require faculty to report all instances of sexual harassment to university officials regardless of whether the target consents to the reporting.

**Enforcement**

LSA event organizers are committed to taking appropriate actions to prevent and/or stop any behavior designed to, or with the clear impact of, disrupting the event or making the environment hostile for any participants.

Participants who are reasonably and politely asked to comply with this code should do so immediately. Failure to do so could result in the filing of a violation report (see above).

If a participant has a report filed against them, the event organizers will review the report and may contact the participant so they can consider their version of the incident. The organizers may also consult with the person who filed the report or other people involved in or with knowledge of the incident.

The organizers will decide, as quickly as possible, the extent to which the behavior reported constitutes a violation of the Code of Conduct or a violation of the law. If the target consents, the organizers may choose to respond to the behavior reported. Possible responses include:

- no response (if the behavior is found to not constitute a violation);
- a warning to the participant that their behavior constitutes a minor violation, but that continued behavior would constitute a major violation; and
- expulsion from the event and a report of the incident to the following year’s organizers (if the behavior is found to constitute a major violation)
- behavior that may constitute a violation of the law will be reported to law enforcement

**Severability**

If any part of this Code of Conduct is in conflict with the applicable law in the jurisdiction of the conference, this shall not affect the validity of any other part.

**Ombuds**

The LSA provides an ombuds service for its members for confidential consultation, either before or after filing a complaint regarding conduct at an LSA event, to address any concerns and to assist with problem-solving. For more information, please contact the LSA Executive Director at mvitullo@lsadc.org.

*Adopted by the LSA Executive Committee, September 10, 2023. This policy is based upon the prior work of the Committee on Gender Equity in Linguistics (COGEL) and the committee's Resources on Equity and Inclusivity in Linguistics (REIL).*
The LSA welcomes member comments on its Civility Policy.

I am surprised by this Civility Policy. I don't remember having witnessed any uncivil behavior worth mentioning at LSA meetings, except maybe a shouting match between two great linguists (in 1969?)!

I entered grad school as the Generative Semantics wars were dying down. That rather extreme period in the field did not prompt LSA to implement a Civility Policy and I have observed nothing in ensuing years approaching that level of fractiousness. So why are we implementing this now? And why does "Persistent and unwelcome physical contact or solicitation of emotional, sexual or other physical intimacy, including stalking" fall under the category of "incivility"? It seems to me this is simply unprofessional conduct.

I also think it would be helpful to know what the context is for this proposal. I can see potential problems in reconciling the "norms of civil behavior" of two parties, given how broad the catchment for the LSA membership is.

Assuming there is a demonstrable need for a civility policy within the world of linguistics, I have a couple of questions. Are the behaviors listed under the third bullet point in (3) not in fact illegal in most states (and in many cases the second bullet point too)? Isn't it a little odd for a professional society to be weighing in on matters that are already law? I can see that the first bullet point relates to professional conduct – if the speech or action is circumscribed to that taking place in professional spaces (LSA surely can't tell people how to talk or act in their non-linguistics lives, though as this is drafted, in principle it could apply to any speech or action). What do the Society's lawyers advise about this?
Finally, the use of "latter" in the first bullet point of item (3) doesn't make sense to me. It could refer to "demeaning speech", "demeaning actions or speech". I suspect what's intended is something like "Coercive ... speech, where this is distinct from vigorous ... [etc.]".

- **LSA is already civil**

  Permalink Submitted by klichtman on Sun, 05/13/2018 - 9:53pm

  The only incivility I've seen (unnecessarily harsh comments) was at BUCLD. I agree with a previous commenter that sexual harassment is not a kind of incivility, and is already covered by other laws/policies.

- **Apparently, there is much below the surface**

  Permalink Submitted by david.bowie@uaa... on Fri, 05/18/2018 - 2:03pm

  Many of the comments to this point are of the "I haven't seen a need for this, so there is no need for this" variety. I'd suggest that we need to beware of falling into an observation bias trap—really, just because any one individual LSA member hasn't seen a problem can't be taken as evidence that there isn't a problem.

  For my part, I can say that I've only directly seen any sort of overt racial/ethnic/sexual harassment (that I recognized as such) at an LSA-sponsored event once. However, I have seen a number of small-scale things that may well have been such harassment, but where I didn't have enough information to know for certain. Also, I'm a white male, and thus much less likely to have such harassment directed at me—but I have heard from a number of other linguists about the harassment (sometimes subtle, sometimes overt) that they've been subjected to. It's out there, and it may not be at the point that it's obvious to absolutely everybody, but that just means that (a) it's at a level that we can correct it now if we act, but (b) it's an insidious problem, and so needs to be rooted out and stopped.

- **Who knows what evil...?**

  Permalink Submitted by Richard.Larson@... on Fri, 05/18/2018 - 6:19pm

  At least as far as my own post was concerned, it wasn't of the "I haven't seen this, so there is no need for this" variety. It was of the "I haven't seen this; what is the motivation for the policy?" variety, with no presupposition one way or the other. Plausibly the LSA had conducted a survey, or had received reports through one or more committees indicating presence of a widespread problem within the profession that merited a formal policy. So far, I haven’t seen that kind of discussion, or anything beyond anecdotes. Perhaps the LSA is preparing to circulate such data. In the meantime I myself don’t know how insidious or widespread a problem it is, or how much is going on beneath the surface.
Ambivalent...
Permalink Submitted by mike_cahill@sil.org on Fri, 06/01/2018 - 12:14pm

Who could be against civility? (Well, I can name a few, but mostly non-linguists...) My concerns are two. First, I just prefer fewer regulations and policies, but if they are needed, then they should be clear - and observed, not just there for window dressing. So I'm finding myself at least somewhat in agreement with those who have questioned the need for this. I only got in on the last couple minutes of the organized discussion at LSA in January; if there is a summary or report of this, can you let us know where to find it? That may answer the question of the need for this.

Second, even though the language under point 3 is clear that "derogatory or demeaning actions or speech...is distinct from vigorous, reasoned disagreement compatible with norms of civil behavior," I wonder if this may yet have a dampening effect on expressing unpopular views (as seems to be increasing on a fair number of university campuses these days).

Finally, I mourn the loss of an accepted cultural norm of civility. When people's internal moral compasses are lost, then external coercion is the only alternative.

Civility ≠ Civility Policy
Permalink Submitted by Richard.Larson@... on Fri, 06/01/2018 - 12:49pm

“Who could be against civility?”
Who could be against politeness? Does it follow one should have policies defining it and requiring its practice?
I agree with your first point that regulations and policies should only be implemented when they are needed, and when that need has been demonstrated.
Regarding your second point, I would ask, who is going to judge breaches of a formal LSA Civility policy and what are to be the punishments? Loss of membership? Formal censure? Once one has a stated policy, one must develop responses to breach of policy. Do we, as an organization want to go there?
Regarding your third point, John Adams remarks somewhere that our Constitution was made only for an (already) moral people - that it was and is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. In other words it presupposes a just and moral people; it does not (and could not hope to) create one. I take this to be a key point of your final line, although I do not agree that coercion is an alternative.

A civility policy is necessary
Permalink Submitted by claire.bowern@y... on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 9:17am

I'm glad that there are LSA members for whom harassment and incivility is not part of their everyday experience. Unfortunately, that is not the case for many of our members, particularly junior
members, women, and people of color, who should be able to participate in LSA activities without being the targets of bullying, intimidation, and harassment. It's very visible, once we stop pretending it isn't there. It would be great if we all both agreed that uncivil, derogatory, harassing or bullying behavior was out of place in professional societies and meetings. Yet it goes on, and the people who are the targets of such behavior often cannot call it out without retaliation.

The recent NASEM report on harassment in the sciences, engineering, and medicine, mentions the strong role that professional societies can (and should) play in addressing uncivil behavior, since they are both important for future careers and all too often a place where harassing and bullying behavior goes unchecked.

In short, we need this policy, and we also need a lot more.

Report link: https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24994/sexual-harassment-of-women-climate-cul...

I agree with Claire
Permalink Submitted by avf@u.arizona.edu on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 10:43am

I see a couple of comments that suggest that if we need this policy at all, it is evidence of some sad departure from a previous era when civility and ethical conduct were the norm, and no policy was necessary. But that's not how I understand the situation. Instead, the problem has been that certain kinds of bullying (etc) behavior just weren't seen as problematic in the past, and those who suffered as a result of them had no recourse to a remedy. I support this policy as one step in the right direction - but agree that it should not be the only step.

What Behavior, exactly?
Permalink Submitted by Richard.Larson@... on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 11:04am

In fact, my own experience from the 70s and 80s was that LSA meetings (and meetings generally) used to be much "more" fractious and contentious - less civil, if you will - than they are now. You write: "the problem has been that certain kinds of bullying (etc) behavior just weren't seen as problematic in the past, and those who suffered as a result of them had no recourse to a remedy." Could you be more specific about what you are referring to? By your lights, precisely what kinds of behavior weren't formerly seen as problematic but should have been, and should be now? No one so far in this thread has cited anything beyond vague generalities.
On a related point, the NASEM report that Claire notes cautions specifically against "symbolic" actions - broad statements like those employed by universities that reduce legal exposure and make administrations feel they are doing something, but which achieve little if anything in fact. Policies that everyone can agree on are typically of this symbolic character. They are agreed upon because they don't threaten anyone. They don't really achieve anything either, hence (I assume) your final point about a CP not being enough.
I also agree with Claire

Submitted by punske@email.ar... on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 11:41am

I agree with Claire that this is an important first step.

I'm seeing a lot of questions as to "why now", I think this can be answered in two parts: (1) if the the Society failed to act during a period of greater incivility, that does not mean to me that the Society should not rectify that now. We should beholden to decisions of the past. (2) there have been recent and well documented cases of problematic behavior from well regarded folks in closely aligned fields (the Rochester case, John Searle, etc.), where there were also questions about the home institution responses.

This policy allows the LSA to be proactive, not reactive and that seems quite welcome.

Civility

Submitted by garrett@berkeley.edu on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 11:10am

I agree with Claire and Amy that the civility policy is a very good step. Despite the general good will of most linguists and despite a lot of awareness in some sub-communities, there are people at LSA (and other linguistic) events who are made to feel marginalized, disrespected, and sometimes even threatened by conduct that we can all try to avoid and call out, and should all want to see less of. Within academic departments, I've seen progress along these lines happen as a result of a stronger sense of community and mutual respect; in the much bigger and less well-connected context of a conference or summer school, it may take more work to build the same sense, but it would benefit us all.

Ambivalence resolved - mostly

Submitted by mike_cahill@sil.org on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 12:14pm

Hearing from those who have experienced incivility or witnessed it, I can see that a statement such as this is a useful position to take. While it would of course be ideal to have a statistical study of incivility within LSA, anecdotal evidence is still evidence. The underlying philosophy behind this, though not explicitly stated, is that all humans have inherent worth and dignity, and should be treated as having such.

The only "wondering" I have is what concrete effect this will have. I would hope that it has some actual impact, rather than being purely symbolic. The statement says LSAers should be "proactive in helping to mitigate or avoid [any] harm." Perhaps this will encourage all of us to call out incivility when it happens (hopefully, in a civil way ourselves...), and incidents like Claire and others have reported will become vanishingly rare.
Examples
Permalink Submitted by Richard.Larson@... on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 12:37pm

I also just received various examples of behavior by email that I agree are highly unacceptable and need to be dealt with. Mostly they were examples of sexual harassment, or disparagement, of women. Frankly, I think that it would be helpful for such examples to be included explicitly in the Civility Policy. "Examples of unacceptable behavior include: ..." It would be a way of indicating that such behaviors are being explicitly observed and noted, i.e., 'you are not getting away with this.'" Thanks very much for the clarifications. In the 70's we had what I would regard as genuine incivility (as opposed to harassment). I mean faculty shouting at each other, swearing at each other, calling each other "a**holes", etc. What's being discussed here under "incivility" is something quite different.

Yes, we need this
Permalink Submitted by nwarner@u.arizo... on Tue, 07/03/2018 - 4:19pm

I also feel we do need a policy like this, for the reasons listed above. Yes, sexual harassment happens in our field, and racism and negative behavior against LGBTQ people do too. Beyond that, incivility between people who disagree about theory may have decreased greatly since the 1970's, but it can certainly still happen. It is better that the LSA put a policy in place to forbid and discourage such behavior ahead of time than that the organization have to develop one after an incident.

I understand the policy.
Permalink Submitted by megameg@live.unc.edu on Thu, 10/11/2018 - 10:16am

I understand the policy.

I understand the policy
Permalink Submitted by grenoble@uchica... on Mon, 12/28/2020 - 5:45pm

I understand the policy

Gail CLements
Permalink Submitted by gaillynndavis@... on Tue, 12/29/2020 - 11:28am

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Gail Clements
Permalink Submitted by gaillynndavis@... on Tue, 12/29/2020 - 11:29am
Gail Clements

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Yes.
Permalink Submitted by Eunsun Lee on Sun, 01/03/2021 - 7:05pm
Yes.

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I understand the policy.
Permalink Submitted by sigwan@umd.edu on Tue, 01/05/2021 - 4:31pm
I understand the policy.

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Yes
Permalink Submitted by eveokura@gmail.com on Wed, 01/05/2022 - 10:27pm
Yes

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I agree to the LSA Meeting
Permalink Submitted by eveokura@gmail.com on Wed, 01/05/2022 - 10:28pm
I agree to the LSA Meeting Conduct Policy

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I agree to the LSA Meeting
Permalink Submitted by eveokura@gmail.com on Wed, 01/05/2022 - 10:28pm
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