

Rural Sociological Society

Code of Ethics

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Code of Ethics
Rural Sociological Society
(Approved by the RSS Membership 07/28/2017)

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INTRODUCTION

The Rural Sociological Society's (RSS's) Code of Ethics sets forth the principles and ethical standards that underlie RSS members' professional responsibilities and conduct. These principles and standards should be used as guidelines when examining everyday professional activities. They constitute normative statements for RSS members and provide guidance on issues that RSS members may encounter in their professional work.

The Preamble and General Principles of the Code are aspirational goals to guide RSS members toward the highest ideals of our Society. Although the Preamble and General Principles are not enforceable rules, they should be considered by RSS members in arriving at an ethical course of action and may be considered by ethics bodies in interpreting the Ethical Standards.

The Ethical Standards set forth enforceable rules for conduct by RSS members. Most of the Ethical Standards are written broadly to apply to RSS members in varied roles, and the application of an Ethical Standard may vary depending on the context. The Ethical Standards are not exhaustive. Any conduct that is not specifically addressed by this Code of Ethics is not necessarily ethical or unethical.

Membership in the RSS commits members to adhere to the RSS Code of Ethics and to the Policies and Procedures of the RSS Ethics Committee. Members are advised of this obligation upon joining the Society and that violations of the Code may lead to the imposition of sanctions, including termination of membership. RSS members subject to the Code of Ethics may be reviewed under these Ethical Standards only if the activity is part of or affects their work-related functions, or if the activity is sociological in nature. Personal activities having no connection to or effect on RSS members' performance of their professional roles are not subject to the Code of Ethics.

PREAMBLE

This Code of Ethics articulates a common set of values upon which RSS members build their professional and scientific work. The Code is intended to provide both the general principles and the rules to cover professional situations encountered by RSS members. It has as its primary goal the welfare and protection of the individuals and groups with whom RSS members work. It is the individual responsibility of each RSS member to aspire to the highest possible standards of conduct in research, teaching, practice, and service.

The development of a dynamic set of ethical standards for a RSS member's work-related conduct requires a personal commitment to a lifelong effort to act ethically; to encourage ethical behavior by students, supervisors, supervisees, employers, employees, and colleagues; and to consult with others as needed concerning ethical problems. Each RSS member supplements, but does not violate, the values and rules specified in the Code of Ethics based on guidance drawn from personal values, culture, and experience.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The following General Principles are aspirational and serve as a guide for RSS members in determining ethical courses of action in various contexts, including workplaces, research sites, and professional meetings. They exemplify the highest ideals of professional conduct.

Principle A: Integrity

RSS members are honest, fair, and respectful of others in their professional activities—in research, teaching, practice, and service. RSS members do not knowingly act in ways that jeopardize either their own or others' professional welfare. RSS members conduct their affairs in ways that inspire trust and confidence; they do not knowingly make statements that are false, misleading, or deceptive.

Principle B: Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity

RSS members respect the rights, dignity, and worth of all people. They strive to eliminate bias in their professional activities, and they do not tolerate any forms of discrimination based on age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation or identity, disability, health conditions, or marital, domestic, or parental status. They are sensitive to cultural, individual, and role differences in serving, teaching, and studying groups of people with distinctive characteristics. In all of their work-related activities, RSS members acknowledge the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own. We believe deeply in the free expression of ideas, in civil discourse founded upon a mutual respect among participants, and in the value of scientific research unencumbered by political considerations. We oppose actions and words that demean, exclude, and otherwise marginalize individuals and groups of different genders, races, identities, sexual orientations, and national origins.

Principle C: Professional Competence

RSS members strive to maintain the highest levels of competence in their work; they recognize the limitations of their expertise; and they undertake only those tasks for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience. They recognize the need for ongoing education to remain professionally competent, and they utilize the appropriate scientific, professional, technical, and administrative resources needed to ensure competence in their professional activities. They consult with other professionals when necessary for the benefit of their students, research participants, and other stakeholders.

Principle D: Professional and Scientific Responsibility

RSS members adhere to the highest scientific and professional standards and accept responsibility for their work. RSS members understand that they form a community and show respect for other RSS members even when they disagree on theoretical, methodological, or personal approaches to professional activities. RSS members value the public trust in our work and are concerned about their ethical behavior and that of other RSS members that might compromise that trust. While endeavoring always to be collegial, RSS members must never let the desire to be collegial outweigh their shared responsibility for ethical behavior. When appropriate, they consult with colleagues to prevent or avoid unethical conduct.

Principle E: Social Responsibility

RSS members are aware of their professional and scientific responsibility to the communities and societies in which they live and work. They apply and make public their knowledge to contribute to the public good. When undertaking research, they strive to enhance the quality of rural life, communities and the environment, both in North America and elsewhere in the world. We applaud the efforts of RSS members and others who seek to assist vulnerable and marginalized peoples wherever they may be.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

1. Nondiscrimination

RSS members do not engage in discrimination in their work based on age; gender; race; ethnicity; national origin; religion; sexual orientation or identity; disability; health conditions; marital, domestic, or parental status; or any other applicable basis proscribed by law. RSS members are encouraged to report instances of discrimination they observe in their workplace to the proper authorities.

2. Non-exploitation

- (a) Whether for personal, economic, or professional advantage, RSS members do not exploit persons over whom they have direct or indirect supervisory, evaluative, or other authority such as students, supervisees, employees, or research participants.
- (b) RSS members do not directly supervise or exercise evaluative authority over any person with whom they have a sexual relationship, including students, supervisees, employees, or research participants.
- (c) RSS members are encouraged to report instances of exploitation they observe in their workplace to the proper authorities.

3. Harassment

RSS members do not engage in harassment of any person, including students, supervisees, employees, research participants, or other RSS members. Harassment consists of a single intense and severe act or of multiple persistent or pervasive acts which are demeaning, abusive, offensive, or create a hostile professional or workplace environment. Sexual harassment may include sexual solicitation, physical advance, or verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature. Racial harassment may include unnecessary, exaggerated, or unwarranted attention or attack, whether verbal or non-verbal, because of a person's race or ethnicity. RSS members are encouraged to report instances of harassment they observe in their workplace to the proper authorities.

4. Professional and Scientific Standards

RSS members adhere to the highest possible technical standards that are reasonable and responsible in their research, teaching, practice, and service activities. They rely on scientifically and professionally derived knowledge; act with honesty and integrity; and avoid untrue, deceptive, or undocumented statements in undertaking work-related functions or activities.

5. Competence

- (a) RSS members conduct research, teach, practice, and provide service only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, or appropriate professional experience.
- (b) RSS members conduct research, teach, practice, and provide service in new areas or involving new techniques only after they have taken reasonable steps to ensure the competence of their work in these areas.
- (c) RSS members who engage in research, teaching, practice, or service maintain awareness of current scientific and professional information in their fields of activity and undertake continuing efforts to maintain competence in the skills they use.
- (d) RSS members refrain from undertaking an activity when their personal circumstances may interfere with their professional work or lead to harm for a student, supervisee, human subject, client, colleague, or other person to whom they have a scientific, teaching, consulting, or other professional obligation.

6. Representation of Expertise

- (a) In research, teaching, practice, service, or other situations where RSS members render professional judgments or present their expertise, they accurately and fairly represent their areas and degrees of expertise.

- (b) RSS members do not accept grants, contracts, consultation, or work assignments from individual or organizational clients or sponsors that appear likely to require violation of the standards in this Code of Ethics. RSS members dissociate themselves from such activities when they discover a violation and are unable to achieve its correction.
- (c) Because RSS members' scientific and professional judgments and actions may affect the lives of others, they are alert to and guard against personal, financial, social, organizational, or political factors that might lead to misrepresentation of their knowledge, expertise, or influence.
- (d) If RSS members learn of misrepresentation of their work, they take reasonable steps to correct or minimize the misrepresentation.

7. Delegation and Supervision

- (a) RSS members provide proper training and supervision to their students, supervisees, or employees and take reasonable steps to see that such persons perform services responsibly, competently, and ethically.
- (b) RSS members delegate to their students, supervisees, or employees only those responsibilities that such persons, based on their education, training, or experience, can reasonably be expected to perform either independently or with the level of supervision provided.
- (c) RSS members who work under the supervision of others (e.g. students, junior faculty, and government employees) should be provided avenues to raise concerns about possible mistreatment or inadequate preparation without risk of retaliation.

8. Employment Decisions

RSS members have an obligation to adhere to the highest ethical standards when participating in employment related decisions, when seeking employment, and when planning to resign from a position.

8.1 Fair Employment Practices

- (a) When participating in employment-related decisions, RSS members make every effort to ensure equal opportunity and fair treatment to all full- and part-time employees. They do not discriminate in hiring, promotion, salary, treatment, or any other conditions of employment or career development on the basis of age; gender; race; ethnicity; national origin; religion; sexual orientation or identity; disability; health conditions; marital, domestic, or parental status; or any other applicable basis proscribed by law.
- (b) When participating in employment-related decisions, RSS members specify the requirements for hiring, promotion, tenure, and termination and communicate these requirements thoroughly to full- and part-time employees and prospective employees.
- (c) When participating in employment-related decisions, RSS members have the responsibility to be informed of fair employment codes, to communicate this information to employees, and to help create an atmosphere upholding fair employment practices for full- and part-time employees.
- (d) When participating in employment-related decisions, RSS members inform prospective full- and part-time employees of any constraints on research and publication and negotiate clear understandings about any conditions that may limit research and scholarly activity.

8.2 Responsibilities of Employees

- (a) When seeking employment, RSS members provide prospective employers with accurate and complete information on their professional qualifications and experiences.
- (b) When leaving a position, permanently or temporarily, RSS members provide their employers with adequate notice and take reasonable steps to reduce negative effects of leaving.

9. Conflicts of Interest

RSS members maintain the highest degree of integrity in their professional work and avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflict. Conflicts of interest arise when RSS members' personal or financial interests prevent them from performing their professional work in an unbiased manner. In research, teaching, practice, and service, RSS members are alert to situations that might cause a conflict of interest and take appropriate action to prevent conflict or disclose it to appropriate parties.

9.1 *Adherence to Professional Standards*

Irrespective of their personal or financial interests or those of their employers or clients, RSS members adhere to professional and scientific standards in (1) the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data; (2) the reporting of research; (3) the teaching, professional presentation, or public dissemination of sociological knowledge; and (4) the identification or implementation of appropriate contractual, consulting, or service activities.

9.2 *Disclosure*

RSS members disclose relevant sources of financial support and relevant personal or professional relationships that may have the appearance of or potential for a conflict of interest to an employer or client, to the sponsors of their professional work, or in public speeches and writing.

9.3 *Avoidance of Personal Gain*

- (a) Under all circumstances, RSS members do not use or otherwise seek to gain financially or professionally from information or material received in a confidential context (e.g., knowledge obtained from reviewing a manuscript or serving on a proposal review panel), unless they have authorization to do so or until that information is otherwise made publicly available.
- (b) Under all circumstances, RSS members do not seek to gain from information or material in an employment or client relationship without permission of the employer or client.

9.4 *Decision-making in the Workplace*

In their workplace, RSS members take appropriate steps to avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts and carefully scrutinize *potentially biasing* affiliations or relationships. In research, teaching, practice, or service, such potentially biasing affiliations or relationships include, but are not limited to, situations involving family, business, or close personal friendships or those with whom RSS members have had strong conflict or disagreement.

9.5 *Decision-making Outside of the Workplace*

In professional activities outside of their workplace, RSS members in *all* circumstances abstain from engaging in deliberations and decisions that allocate or withhold benefits or rewards from individuals or institutions if they have *biasing* affiliations or relationships. These biasing affiliations or relationships are: 1) current employment or being considered for employment at an organization or institution that could be construed as benefiting from the decision; 2) current officer or board member of an organization or institution that could be construed as benefiting from the decision; 3) current employment or being considered for employment at the same organization or institution where an individual could benefit from the decision; 4) a spouse, domestic partner, or known relative who as an individual could benefit from the decision; or 5) a current business or professional partner, research collaborator, employee, supervisee, or student who as an individual could benefit from the decision.

10. Professional Communications

RSS members adhere to the highest standards in professional communications about their professional services, credentials and expertise, work products, or publications, whether these communications are from themselves or from others.

10.1 *RSS Member Communications*

- (a) RSS members take steps to ensure the accuracy of all of their professional communications. Such communications include, but are not limited to, websites and social media, directory listings, personal resumes or curriculum vitae, advertising, brochures or printed matter, interviews or comments to the media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, or other published materials.
- (b) RSS members do not make professional statements that are false, deceptive, misleading, or fraudulent, either because of what they state, convey, or suggest or because of what they omit, concerning their research, practice, or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated. Such activities include, but are not limited to, false or deceptive statements concerning RSS members' (1) training, experience, or competence; (2) academic degrees; (3) credentials; (4) institutional or association affiliations; (5) services; (6) fees; or (7) publications or research findings. RSS members do not make false or deceptive statements concerning the scientific basis for, results of, or degree of success from their professional services.
- (c) When RSS members provide professional advice or comment by means of public lectures, demonstrations, radio or television programs, prerecorded tapes, printed articles, mailed material, or other media, they take reasonable precautions to ensure that (1) the statements are based on appropriate research, literature, and practice; and (2) the statements are otherwise consistent with this Code of Ethics.

10.2 *Statements by Others*

- (a) RSS members who engage or employ others to create or place public statements that promote their work products, professional services, or other activities retain responsibility for such statements.
- (b) RSS members make reasonable efforts to prevent others whom they do not directly engage, employ, or supervise (such as employers, publishers, sponsors, organizational clients, members of the media) from making deceptive statements concerning their professional research, teaching, or practice activities.
- (c) In working with the press, radio, television, or other communications media or in advertising in the media, RSS members are cognizant of potential conflicts of interest or appearances of such conflicts (e.g., they do not provide compensation to employees of the media), and they adhere to the highest standards of professional honesty (e.g., they acknowledge paid advertising).

11. Research Ethics

Protecting the human subjects involved in our research projects is a basic ethical tenet expected from all RSS members. Consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report (1979)¹, RSS members agree to treat individual research subjects as autonomous agents and take extra steps to protect individuals with diminished autonomy. They also work to promote beneficence by avoiding research that places human subjects at any undue mental or physical risk, and utilizing research designs and data collection and management practices that maximize the benefits and minimize risks to research subjects and society at large. Finally, they take steps to ensure that their research fairly distributes the risk and benefits of their research to all members of society, particularly avoiding practices that might exploit socially marginal or vulnerable groups and individuals.

Protecting research subjects is typically guided by policies and procedures formulated by the

¹ National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. 1979. The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. Available on-line at: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report>.

Institutional Review Boards (IRB) or equivalent bodies at academic institutions and/or government agencies. These policies provide guidelines for ensuring that research subjects are able to make informed decisions to participate in research projects (informed consent) and that researchers protect the confidentiality of information obtained from their research subjects (confidentiality). While specific requirements of different institutional IRBs may vary, all RSS members are expected to follow the principles and expectations outlined in the sections on Informed Consent and Confidentiality described below.

Even when they work at institutions without active IRBs, all RSS members are expected to follow the guidelines and principles outlined in this document. They should seek and obtain approval from a recognized IRB or another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research before engaging in research that involves human subjects.

12. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a basic ethical tenet of scientific research on human populations. RSS members do not involve a human being as a subject in research without the informed consent of the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative. RSS members recognize the possibility of undue influence or subtle pressures on subjects that may derive from researchers' expertise or authority, and they take this into account in designing informed consent procedures.

12.1 Scope of Informed Consent

- (a) RSS members conducting research that will be used in publications obtain consent from research participants or their legally authorized representatives (1) when data are collected from research participants through any form of communication, interaction, or intervention; or (2) when behavior of research participants occurs in a private context where an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or reporting is taking place.
- (b) Despite the paramount importance of consent, RSS members may seek waivers of this standard when (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk for research participants, and (2) the research could not practicably be carried out were informed consent to be required. RSS members recognize that waivers of consent require approval from institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research. Under such circumstances, the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information must be maintained unless otherwise set forth in 13.2(b).
- (c) RSS members may conduct research in public places or use publicly-available information about individuals (e.g., naturalistic observations in public places, analysis of public records, or archival research) without obtaining consent. If, under such circumstances, RSS members have any doubt whatsoever about the need for informed consent, they consult with institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, with another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research before proceeding with such research.
- (d) In undertaking research with vulnerable populations (e.g., youth, recent immigrant populations, the mentally ill), RSS members take special care to ensure that the voluntary nature of the research is understood and that consent is not coerced. In all other respects, RSS members adhere to the principles set forth in 12.1(a)-(c).
- (e) RSS members are familiar with and conform to applicable state and federal regulations and, where applicable, institutional review board requirements for obtaining informed consent for research.

12.2 Informed Consent Process

- (a) When informed consent is required, RSS members enter into an agreement with research participants or their legal representatives that clarifies the nature of the research and the responsibilities of the investigator prior to conducting the research.
- (b) When informed consent is required, RSS members use language that is understandable to and respectful of research participants or their legal representatives.
- (c) When informed consent is required, RSS members provide research participants or their legal representatives with the opportunity to ask questions about any aspect of the research, at any

time during or after their participation in the research.

- (d) When informed consent is required, RSS members inform research participants or their legal representatives of the nature of the research; they indicate to participants that their participation or continued participation is voluntary; they inform participants of significant factors that may be expected to influence their willingness to participate (e.g., possible risks and benefits of their participation); and they explain other aspects of the research and respond to questions from prospective participants. Also, if relevant, RSS members explain that refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation in the research involves no penalty, and they explain any foreseeable consequences of declining or withdrawing. RSS members explicitly discuss confidentiality and, if applicable, the extent to which confidentiality may be limited as set forth in 13.2(b).
- (e) When informed consent is required, RSS members keep records regarding said consent. They recognize that consent is a process that involves oral and/or written consent.
- (f) RSS members honor all commitments they have made to research participants as part of the informed consent process except where unanticipated circumstances demand otherwise as set forth in 13.2(b).

12.3 Informed Consent of Students and Subordinates

When undertaking research at their own institutions or organizations with research participants who are students or subordinates, RSS members take special care to protect the prospective subjects from adverse consequences of declining or withdrawing from participation.

12.4 Informed Consent with Children

- (a) In undertaking research with children, RSS members obtain the consent of children to participate, to the extent that they are capable of providing such consent, except under circumstances where consent may not be required as set forth in 12.01(b).
- (b) In undertaking research with children, RSS members obtain the consent of a parent or a legally authorized guardian. RSS members may seek waivers of parental or guardian consent when (1) the research involves no more than minimal risk for the research participants, and (2) the research could not practicably be carried out were consent to be required, or (3) the consent of a parent or guardian is not a reasonable requirement to protect the child (e.g., neglected or abused children).
- (c) RSS members recognize that waivers of consent from a child and a parent or guardian require approval from institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research. Under such circumstances, the confidentiality of any personally identifiable information must be maintained unless otherwise set forth in 13.2(b).

12.5 Use of Deception in Research

- (a) RSS members do not use deceptive techniques (1) unless they have determined that their use will not be harmful to research participants; is justified by the study's prospective scientific, educational, or applied value; and that equally effective alternative procedures that do not use deception are not feasible; and (2) unless they have obtained the approval of institutional review boards or, in the absence of such boards, with another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.
- (b) RSS members never deceive research participants about significant aspects of the research that would affect their willingness to participate, such as physical risks, discomfort, or unpleasant emotional experiences.
- (c) When deception is an integral feature of the design and conduct of research, RSS members attempt to correct any misconception that research participants may have no later than at the conclusion of the research.
- (d) On rare occasions, RSS members may need to conceal their identities to undertake research that could not practicably be carried out were they to be known as researchers. Under such circumstances, RSS members undertake the research if it involves no more than minimal risk for

the research participants and if they have obtained approval to proceed in this manner from an institutional review board or, in the absence of such boards, from another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research. Under such circumstances, confidentiality must be maintained unless otherwise set forth in 13.2(b).

12.6 Use of Recording Technology

RSS members obtain informed consent from research participants, students, employees, clients, or others prior to videotaping, filming, or recording them in any form, unless these activities involve simply naturalistic observations in public places and it is not anticipated that the recording will be used in a manner that could cause personal identification or harm.

13. Confidentiality

RSS members have an obligation to ensure that confidential information is protected. They do so to ensure the integrity of research and the open communication with research participants and to protect sensitive information obtained in their professional research, teaching, practice, and service activities. When gathering confidential information, RSS members should take into account the long-term uses of the information, including its potential placement in public archives or the examination of the information by other researchers or practitioners.

13.1 Maintaining Confidentiality

- (a) RSS members take reasonable precautions to protect the confidentiality rights of research participants, students, employees, clients, or others.
- (b) Confidential information provided by research participants, students, employees, clients, or others is treated as such by RSS members even if there is no legal protection or privilege to do so. RSS members have an obligation to protect confidential information and not allow information gained in confidence from being used in ways that would unfairly compromise research participants, students, employees, clients, or others.
- (c) Information provided under an understanding of confidentiality is treated as such even after the death of those providing that information.
- (d) RSS members maintain the integrity of confidential deliberations, activities, or roles, including, where applicable, that of professional committees, review panels, or advisory groups (e.g., the RSS Ethics Committee).
- (e) RSS members, to the extent possible, protect the confidentiality of student records, performance data, and personal information, whether verbal or written, given in the context of academic consultation, supervision, or advising.
- (f) The obligation to maintain confidentiality extends to members of research or training teams and collaborating organizations who have access to the information. To ensure that access to confidential information is restricted, it is the responsibility of researchers, administrators, and principal investigators to instruct staff to take the steps necessary to protect confidentiality.
- (g) When using private information about individuals collected by other persons or institutions, RSS members protect the confidentiality of individually identifiable information. Information is private when an individual can reasonably expect that the information will not be made public with personal identifiers (e.g., medical or employment records).

13.2 Limits of Confidentiality

- (a) RSS members inform themselves fully about all laws and rules which may limit or alter guarantees of confidentiality. They determine their ability to guarantee absolute confidentiality and, as appropriate, inform research participants, students, employees, clients, or others of any limitations to this guarantee at the outset, consistent with ethical standards set forth in 13.2(c).
- (b) RSS members who seek greater protection to ensure promises of confidentiality can be honored may wish to use processes or documents such as Certificates of Confidentiality available from the US National Institutes of Health.
- (c) RSS members may confront unanticipated circumstances where they become aware of

information that is clearly health- or life-threatening to research participants, students, employees, clients, or others. In these cases, RSS members balance the importance of guarantees of confidentiality with other principles in this Code of Ethics, standards of conduct, and applicable law.

- (d) Confidentiality is not required with respect to observations in public places, activities conducted in public, or other settings where no rules of privacy are provided by law or custom. Similarly, confidentiality is not required in the case of information available from public records.

13.3 Discussing Confidentiality and Its Limits

- (a) When RSS members establish a scientific or professional relationship with persons, they discuss (1) the relevant limitations on confidentiality, and (2) the foreseeable uses of the information generated through their professional work.
- (b) Unless it is not feasible or is counter-productive, the discussion of confidentiality occurs at the outset of the relationship and thereafter as new circumstances may warrant.

13.4 Anticipation of Possible Uses of Information

- (a) When research requires maintaining personal identifiers in databases or systems of records, RSS members delete such identifiers before the information is made publicly available.
- (b) When confidential information concerning research participants, clients, or other recipients of service is entered into databases or systems of records available to persons without the prior consent of the relevant parties, RSS members protect anonymity by not including personal identifiers or by employing other techniques that mask or control disclosure of individual identities.
- (c) When deletion of personal identifiers is not feasible, RSS members take reasonable steps to determine that appropriate consent of personally-identifiable individuals has been obtained before they transfer such data to others or review such data collected by others.

13.5 Electronic Transmission of Confidential Information

RSS members use extreme care in delivering or transferring any confidential data, information, or communication over public computer networks. RSS members are attentive to the problems of maintaining confidentiality and control over sensitive material and data when use of technological innovations, such as public computer networks, may open their professional and scientific communication to unauthorized persons.

13.6 Anonymity of Sources

- (a) RSS members do not disclose in their writings, lectures, or other public media confidential, personally identifiable information concerning their research participants, students, individual or organizational clients, or other recipients of their service which is obtained during the course of their work, unless consent from individuals or their legal representatives has been obtained.
- (b) When confidential information is used in scientific and professional presentations, RSS members disguise the identity of research participants, students, individual or organizational clients, or other recipients of their service.

13.7 Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy

- (a) To minimize intrusions on privacy, RSS members include in written and oral reports, consultations, and public communications only information germane to the purpose for which the communication is made.
- (b) RSS members discuss confidential information or evaluative data concerning research participants, students, supervisees, employees, and individual or organizational clients only for appropriate scientific or professional purposes and only with persons clearly concerned with such matters.

13.8 Preservation of Confidential Information

- (a) RSS members take reasonable steps to ensure that records, data, or information are preserved in a confidential manner consistent with the requirements of this Code of Ethics, recognizing that ownership of records, data, or information may also be governed by law or institutional principles.
- (b) RSS members plan so that confidentiality of records, data, or information is protected in the event of the RSS member's death, incapacity, or withdrawal from the position or practice.
- (c) When RSS members transfer confidential records, data, or information to other persons or organizations, they obtain assurances that the recipients of the records, data, or information will employ measures to protect confidentiality at least equal to those originally pledged.

14. Research Planning, Implementation, and Dissemination

RSS members have an obligation to promote the integrity of research and to ensure that they comply with the ethical tenets of science in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of research. They do so to advance knowledge, to minimize the possibility that results will be misleading, and to protect the rights of research participants.

14.1 Planning and Implementation

- (a) In planning and implementing research, RSS members minimize the possibility that results will be misleading.
- (b) RSS members take steps to implement protections for the rights and welfare of research participants and other persons affected by the research.
- (c) In their research, RSS members do not encourage activities or themselves behave in ways that are health- or life-threatening to research participants or others.
- (d) In planning and implementing research, RSS members consult those with expertise concerning any special population under investigation or likely to be affected.
- (e) In planning and implementing research, RSS members consider its ethical acceptability as set forth in the Code of Ethics. If the best ethical practice is unclear, RSS members consult with institutional review boards or, in the absence of such review processes, with another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.
- (f) RSS members are responsible for the ethical conduct of research conducted by them or by others under their supervision or authority.

14.2 Unanticipated Research Opportunities

If during the course of teaching, practice, service, or non-professional activities, RSS members determine that they wish to undertake research that was not previously anticipated, they make known their intentions and take steps to ensure that the research can be undertaken consonant with ethical principles, especially those relating to confidentiality and informed consent. Under such circumstances, RSS members seek the approval of institutional review boards or, in the absence of such review processes, another authoritative body with expertise on the ethics of research.

14.3 Offering Inducements for Research Participants

RSS members do not offer excessive or inappropriate financial or other inducements to obtain the participation of research participants, particularly when it might coerce participation. RSS members may provide incentives to the extent that resources are available and appropriate.

14.4 Reporting on Research

- (a) RSS members disseminate their research findings except where unanticipated circumstances (e.g., the health of the researcher) or proprietary agreements with employers, contractors, or clients preclude such dissemination.
- (b) RSS members do not fabricate data or falsify results in their publications or presentations.
- (c) In presenting their work, RSS members report their findings fully and do not omit relevant data.

They report results whether they support or contradict the expected outcomes.

- (d) RSS members take particular care to state all relevant qualifications on the findings and interpretation of their research. RSS members also disclose underlying assumptions, theories, methods, measures, and research designs that might bear upon findings and interpretations of their work.
- (e) Consistent with the spirit of full disclosure of methods and analyses, once findings are publicly disseminated, RSS members permit their open assessment and verification by other responsible researchers with appropriate safeguards, where applicable, to protect the anonymity of research participants.
- (f) If RSS members discover significant errors in their publication or presentation of data, they take reasonable steps to correct such errors in a correction, a retraction, published errata, or other public fora as appropriate.
- (g) RSS members report sources of financial support in their written papers and note any special relations to any sponsor. In special circumstances, RSS members may withhold the names of specific sponsors if they provide an adequate and full description of the nature and interest of the sponsor.
- (h) RSS members take special care to report accurately the results of others' scholarship by using correct information and citations when presenting the work of others in publications, teaching, practice, and service settings.

14.5 Data Sharing

- (a) RSS members share data and pertinent documentation as a regular practice. RSS members make their data available after completion of the project or its major publications, except where proprietary agreements with employers, contractors, or clients preclude such accessibility or when it is impossible to share data and protect the confidentiality of the data or the anonymity of research participants (e.g., raw field notes or detailed information from ethnographic interviews).
- (b) RSS members anticipate data sharing as an integral part of a research plan whenever data sharing is feasible.
- (c) RSS members share data in a form that is consonant with research participants' interests and protect the confidentiality of the information they have been given. They maintain the confidentiality of data, whether legally required or not; remove personal identifiers before data are shared; and, if necessary, use other disclosure avoidance techniques.
- (d) RSS members who do not otherwise place data in public archives keep data available and retain documentation relating to the research for a reasonable period of time after publication or dissemination of results.
- (e) RSS members may ask persons who request their data for further analysis to bear the associated incremental costs, if necessary.
- (f) RSS members who use data from others for further analyses explicitly acknowledge the contribution of the initial researchers.

15. Plagiarism

- (a) In publications, presentations, teaching, practice, and service, RSS members explicitly identify, credit, and reference the author when they take data or material verbatim from another person's written work, whether it is published, unpublished, or electronically available.
- (b) In their publications, presentations, teaching, practice, and service, RSS members provide acknowledgment of and reference to the use of others' work, including conceptual models, measures, instruments and other research tools, even if the work is not quoted verbatim or paraphrased, and they do not present others' work as their own whether it is published, unpublished, or electronically available.

16. Authorship Credit

- (a) RSS members take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have contributed. These norms apply to grant proposals as

well as to scientific publications.

- (b) RSS members ensure that principal authorship and other publication credits are based on the relative scientific, professional, and substantive contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their status. In claiming or determining the ordering of authorship, RSS members seek to reflect accurately the contributions of main participants in the research and writing process.
- (c) A student is usually listed as principal author on any multiple-authored publication that substantially derives from the student's class papers, dissertations or theses.
- (d) When engaging in participatory or community-engaged research, RSS members are encouraged to engage in conversation with key research partners early and throughout the research process as to their desire for co-authorship and/or acknowledgements within published and other project materials (e.g., websites, presentations), so as to accurately and inclusively recognize contributions to research formulation, conduct, and interpretation.

17. Publication Process

RSS members adhere to the highest ethical standards when participating in publication and review processes when they are authors or editors.

17.1 Submission of Manuscripts for Publication

- (a) In cases of multiple authorship, RSS members confer with all other authors prior to submitting work for publication and establish mutually acceptable agreements regarding submission.
- (b) In submitting a manuscript to a professional journal, book series, or edited book, RSS members grant that publication first claim to publication except where explicit policies allow multiple submissions. RSS members do not submit a manuscript to a second publication until after an official decision has been received from the first publication or until the manuscript is withdrawn. RSS members submitting a manuscript for publication in a journal, book series, or edited book can withdraw a manuscript from consideration up until an official acceptance is made.
- (c) RSS members may submit a book manuscript to multiple publishers. However, once RSS members have signed a contract, they cannot withdraw a manuscript from publication unless there is reasonable cause to do so.

17.2 Duplicate Publication of Data

When RSS members publish data or findings that they have previously published elsewhere, they accompany these publications by proper acknowledgment.

17.3 Responsibilities of Editors

- (a) When serving as editors of journals or book series, RSS members are fair in the application of standards and operate without personal or ideological favoritism or malice. As editors, RSS members are cognizant of any potential conflicts of interest.
- (b) When serving as editors of journals or book series, RSS members ensure the confidential nature of the review process and supervise editorial office staff, including students, in accordance with practices that maintain confidentiality.
- (c) When serving as editors of journals or book series, RSS members are bound to publish all manuscripts accepted for publication unless major errors or ethical violations are discovered after acceptance (e.g., plagiarism or scientific misconduct).
- (d) When serving as editors of journals or book series, RSS members ensure the anonymity of reviewers unless they otherwise receive permission from reviewers to reveal their identity. Editors ensure that their staff conform to this practice.
- (e) When serving as journal editors, RSS members ensure the anonymity of authors unless and until a manuscript is accepted for publication or unless the established practices of the journal are known to be otherwise.
- (f) When serving as journal editors, RSS members take steps to provide for the timely review of all

manuscripts and respond promptly to inquiries about the status of the review.

18. Responsibilities of Reviewers

- (a) In reviewing material submitted for publication, grant support, or other evaluation purposes, RSS members respect the confidentiality of the process and the proprietary rights in such information of those who submitted it.
- (b) RSS members disclose conflicts of interest or decline requests for reviews of the work of others where conflicts of interest are involved.
- (c) RSS members decline requests for reviews of the work of others when they believe that the review process may be biased or when they have questions about the integrity of the process.
- (d) If asked to review a manuscript, book, or proposal they have previously reviewed, RSS members make it known to the person making the request (e.g., editor, program officer) unless it is clear that they are being asked to provide a reappraisal.

19. Education, Teaching, and Training

As teachers, supervisors, and trainers, RSS members follow the highest ethical standards to ensure the quality of sociological education and the integrity of the teacher-student relationship.

19.1 Administration of Education Programs

- (a) RSS members who are responsible for education and training programs seek to ensure that the programs are competently designed, provide the proper experiences, and meet all goals for which claims are made by the program.
- (b) RSS members responsible for education and training programs seek to ensure that there is an accurate description of the program content, training goals and objectives, and requirements that must be met for satisfactory completion of the program.
- (c) RSS members responsible for education and training programs take steps to ensure that graduate assistants and temporary instructors have the substantive knowledge required to teach courses and the teaching skills needed to facilitate student learning.
- (d) RSS members responsible for education and training programs have an obligation to ensure that ethics are taught to their graduate students as part of their professional preparation.

19.2 Teaching and Training

- (a) RSS members conscientiously perform their teaching responsibilities. They have appropriate skills and knowledge or are receiving appropriate training.
- (b) RSS members provide accurate information at the outset about their courses, particularly regarding the subject matter to be covered, bases for evaluation, and the nature of course experiences.
- (c) RSS members make decisions concerning textbooks, course content, course requirements, and grading solely on the basis of educational criteria without regard for financial or other incentives.
- (d) RSS members provide proper training and supervision to their teaching assistants and other teaching trainees and take reasonable steps to ensure that such persons perform these teaching responsibilities responsibly, competently, and ethically.
- (e) RSS members do not permit personal animosities or intellectual differences with colleagues to foreclose students' or supervisees' access to these colleagues or to interfere with student or supervisee learning, academic progress, or professional development.

20. Contractual and Consulting Services

- (a) RSS members undertake grants, contracts, or consultation only when they are knowledgeable about the substance, methods, and techniques they plan to use or have a plan for incorporating appropriate expertise.
- (b) In undertaking grants, contracts, or consultation, RSS members base the results of their professional work on appropriate information and techniques.
- (c) When financial support for a project has been accepted under a grant, contract, or consultation,

RSS members make reasonable efforts to complete the proposed work on schedule.

- (d) In undertaking grants, contracts, or consultation, RSS members accurately document and appropriately retain their professional and scientific work.
- (e) In establishing a contractual arrangement for research, consultation, or other services, RSS members clarify, to the extent feasible at the outset, the nature of the relationship with the individual, organizational, or institutional client. This clarification includes, as appropriate, the nature of the services to be performed, the probable uses of the services provided, possibilities for the RSS member's future use of the work for scholarly or publication purposes, the timetable for delivery of those services, and compensation and billing arrangements.

21. Adherence to the Code of Ethics

RSS members have an obligation to confront, address, and attempt to resolve ethical issues according to this Code of Ethics.

21.1 Familiarity with the Code of Ethics

RSS members have an obligation to be familiar with this Code of Ethics, other applicable ethics codes, and their application to RSS members' work. Lack of awareness or misunderstanding of an ethical standard is not, in itself, a defense to a charge of unethical conduct.

21.2 Confronting Ethical Issues

- (a) When RSS members are uncertain whether a particular situation or course of action would violate the Code of Ethics, they consult with other RSS members knowledgeable about ethical issues, with the RSS's Ethics Committee, or with other organizational entities such as institutional review boards.
- (b) When RSS members take actions or are confronted with choices where there is a conflict between ethical standards enunciated in the Code of Ethics and laws or legal requirements, they make known their commitment to the Code and take steps to resolve the conflict in a responsible manner by consulting with colleagues, professional organizations, or the RSS's Ethics Committee.

21.3 Fair Treatment of Parties in Ethical Disputes

- (a) RSS members do not discriminate against a person on the basis of his or her having made an ethical complaint.
- (b) RSS members do not discriminate against a person based on his or her having been the subject of an ethical complaint. This does not preclude taking action based upon the outcome of an ethical complaint.

21.4 Reporting Ethical Violations of Others

When RSS members have substantial reason to believe that there may have been an ethical violation by another RSS member, they attempt to resolve the issue by bringing it to the attention of that individual if an informal resolution appears appropriate or possible, or they seek advice about whether or how to proceed based on this belief, assuming that such activity does not violate any confidentiality rights. Such action might include referral to the RSS Ethics Committee.

21.5 Cooperating with Ethics Committees

RSS members cooperate in ethics investigations, proceedings, and resulting requirements of the Rural Sociological Society. In doing so, they make reasonable efforts to resolve any issues of confidentiality. Failure to cooperate may be an ethics violation.

21.6 Improper Complaints

RSS members do not file or encourage the filing of ethics complaints that are frivolous and are intended to harm the alleged violator rather than to protect the integrity of the discipline and the public.