

**Code of Ethics of the Human Biology Association (HBA) to be circulated to membership prior to a vote by the HBA Membership at the annual business meeting April 13, 2016**

**Preamble**

Human biologists are part of many academic and professional communities—including anthropology, public health, medicine, and other disciplines—each with its own moral rules or codes of ethics. Human biologists have obligations to their scholarly disciplines, their colleagues and students, the wider society, and the environment. Furthermore, many human biologists work with living human study participants, whose rights in such roles place obligations upon researchers and with whom researchers may develop close relationships that generate additional ethical considerations.

In a field of such complex involvement and obligations, it is inevitable that misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values will arise. Human biologists are responsible for grappling with such difficulties and struggling to resolve them in ways compatible with the principles stated here. The purpose of this Code is to foster discussion and education. The Human Biology Association (HBA) does not adjudicate claims of unethical behavior.

The principles and guidelines in this Code provide human biologists with discipline-relevant tools with which to develop and maintain an ethical framework as they engage in their work. This Code is intended to complement those in place at academic and other institutions, and those formulated by other associations to which a human biologist may belong. Ethical codes and guidelines have and will continue to change, and there are few rules that fit all situations. The sources for this Code are noted in the Acknowledgments, and additional resources to help inform human biologists are listed at the end of this document.

This Code comprises the following sections:

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## **I. Introduction**

Human biology is a multidisciplinary field of science and scholarship that includes the study of biological, behavioral, cognitive, demographic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects of contemporary and past human individuals and populations. Human biology has roots in both the natural and social sciences, ranging in approach from basic to applied research and to scholarly interpretation. The purpose of the Human Biology Association (HBA) is to support and disseminate innovative research and teaching on human biological variation in its evolutionary, sociocultural, historical, and environmental contexts worldwide, and thereby advance the science of human biology. This Code holds the position that generating and appropriately utilizing knowledge (i.e., publishing, teaching, developing programs, and informing policy) of the biology of peoples of the world, past and present, is a worthy goal; that generating knowledge is a dynamic process using many different and ever evolving approaches; and that for moral and practical reasons, the generation and utilization of knowledge should be achieved in an ethical manner.

The purpose of this Code is to provide HBA members and other interested persons with guidelines for making ethical choices in the conduct of their human biological work. Because human biologists can find themselves in complex situations and subject to more than one code of ethics, the HBA Code of Ethics provides a framework, not an ironclad formula, for making decisions.

No code or set of guidelines can anticipate unique circumstances or the direct actions required in any specific situation. The individual human biologist must be willing to make carefully considered ethical choices and be prepared to make clear the assumptions, facts and issues on which those choices are based. These guidelines therefore address general contexts, priorities and relationships that should be considered in ethical decision making in human biological work.

Human biologists have a duty to be informed about ethical codes relating to their work and ought periodically to receive training on ethical issues. In addition, departments offering degrees related to human biology should include ethical training in their curriculums.

## **II. Research**

In both proposing and carrying out research, human biologists must be open about the purpose(s), potential impacts, and source(s) of support for research projects with relevant parties affected by the research including the persons studied or providing information, collaborators, institutional review boards, funders, and the wider scientific community. Researchers are expected to utilize the results of their work in an appropriate fashion and to disseminate the results through appropriate and timely activities. Active contribution and leadership in seeking to shape public or private sector actions and policies may be as ethically justifiable as inaction, detachment, or noncooperation, depending on circumstances. Similar principles hold for human biologists employed or otherwise affiliated with non-academic institutions, government institutions, or private enterprises.

In all dealings with employers, persons hired to pursue human biological research or apply

human biological knowledge should be honest about their qualifications, capabilities, and aims. Prior to making any professional commitments, they should review the purposes of prospective employers, taking into consideration the employer's past activities and future goals. In working for governmental agencies or private businesses, they should be especially careful not to promise or imply acceptance of conditions contrary to professional ethics or competing commitments.

### **III. Responsibilities**

#### **a. To people and animals with whom human biologists work**

1. Researchers have primary ethical obligations to the people they study and to the people with whom they work, as well as to research animals and materials. These obligations supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge and can lead to decisions not to undertake or, once begun, to discontinue a research project when the primary obligation conflicts with other responsibilities, such as those owed to sponsors or clients. These ethical obligations include:
  - To respect the well-being of humans and research animals.
  - To work for the long-term conservation of the data that human biologists collect
  - To consult actively with the affected individuals or group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved.
  - To protect the privacy of personal information gathered from human research participants.
2. Human biologists must abide by their institutional regulations regarding human study participants and make every reasonable effort to ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities.
3. Human biologists should determine in advance the local attitudes and regulations regarding anonymity for research participants and sites. Where appropriate, human biologists should ask study participants and communities whether they wish to remain anonymous or receive recognition and should make reasonable efforts to comply with those wishes if doing so does not violate the rights of others. Researchers must present to their research participants the possible impacts of the choices and make clear that, despite their best efforts, anonymity may be compromised or recognition fail to materialize.
4. Human biologists should obtain in advance the informed consent of persons being studied, providing information, owning or controlling access to material being studied, or otherwise identified as having interests that might be affected by the research. It is understood that the degree and breadth of informed consent required will depend on the nature of the project and may be influenced by requirements of other codes, laws, and ethics of the country or community in which the research is pursued, as well as of the researcher's home institution. Further, it is understood that the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous; the process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of

dialogue and negotiation with those studied. Researchers are responsible for identifying and complying with the various informed consent codes, laws and regulations affecting their projects. Informed consent, for the purposes of this code, does not necessarily imply or require a particular written or signed form. It is the quality of the consent, not the format, which is relevant.

5. Researchers who have developed close and enduring relationships with either individual persons providing information or with hosts must adhere to the obligations of openness and informed consent, while carefully and respectfully negotiating the limits of the relationship.
6. Human biologists often work with genetic data, medical records, secondary analyses of biological materials, or other data that may be classified as personal health information (PHI). When these conditions apply, human biologists must strive to comply with all relevant data protection and confidentiality standards. Researchers should take care to comply with these standards as set out both by their own institutions/nations as well as the home countries of the participants from whom the data were obtained.
7. Human biologists must ensure that overall benefits exceed costs in their work with individuals, groups, animals, or cultural or biological materials. They should recognize their debt to the societies in which they work and their obligation to reciprocate with research participants in appropriate ways.

#### **b. To scholarship and science**

1. Human biologists can expect to encounter ethical dilemmas at every stage of their work and should make good-faith efforts to identify potential ethical claims and conflicts in advance when preparing proposals and as projects proceed.
2. Human biologists bear responsibility for the integrity and reputation of their discipline, of scholarship, and of science. Thus, human biologists are subject to the general moral rules of scientific and scholarly conduct: they must not deceive or knowingly misrepresent (i.e., fabricate evidence, falsify, plagiarize), attempt to prevent reporting of misconduct, or obstruct the scientific/scholarly research of others.
3. Human biologists should make good-faith efforts to preserve opportunities for future workers who may follow them to field research locations.
4. Human biologists should utilize the results of their work in an appropriate fashion, and whenever possible disseminate their findings to the scientific, scholarly, and host communities.
5. Many funding agencies and publication venues now require the sharing of data and other materials and products of research. Human biologists are expected to comply

with such applicable requirements. They should also seriously consider and respond to all reasonable requests for access to their data and other research materials for purposes of research. In so far as possible and with all due diligence in protecting the rights of individual study participants, human biologists should also take concrete steps to ensure preservation of their data for use by posterity (e.g., deposition in a reliable accessible repository).

### **c. To the public (Broader impacts)**

1. Human biologists should make the results of their research appropriately available to sponsors, students, decision makers, and other members of the public. In so doing, they must be truthful; they are responsible for the factual content of their statements and also must consider carefully the social, political, and public health implications of the information they disseminate. Human biologists should make good-faith efforts to foster understanding, proper contextualizing, and responsible use of the information they generate. They should make clear the empirical bases upon which their reports stand, be candid about their qualifications and philosophical or political biases, and recognize and make clear the limits of human biological expertise. At the same time, they should be alert to possible harm their information may cause people with whom they work or colleagues. Because human biology can, and in many cases intends to, affect health policy or medical practice, the responsibility of researchers to the public is of central concern.
2. Human biologists may choose to move beyond disseminating research results to a position of advocacy. This is an individual decision but not an ethical responsibility. Adopting a position of advocacy, however, can come with additional ethical responsibilities that must be considered.

## **IV. Teaching and Mentoring**

In addition to adhering to ethical and legal codes governing relations between teachers/mentors and students/trainees and junior colleagues at their educational institutions or as members of wider organizations, teachers of human biology should be particularly sensitive to the ways in which such codes apply in their discipline (for example, when teaching involves close contact with students/trainees in field or laboratory situations). Among the widely recognized precepts which human biology teachers, like other teachers and mentors, should follow are:

- a. Teachers and mentors should conduct their programs in ways that preclude discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, reproductive or parental status, "race," social or economic class, political convictions, disability, religion, ethnic background, national origin, age, physical appearance, military/veteran status or other attributes irrelevant to academic performance.
- b. Teachers' and mentors' duties include continually striving to improve their teaching and training techniques; being available and responsive to student and trainee interests; counseling students and trainees realistically regarding career opportunities;

conscientiously supervising, encouraging, and supporting students' and trainees' studies; being fair, prompt, and reliable in communicating evaluations; assisting students and trainees in securing research support; and helping students and trainees when they seek professional placement.

- c. Teachers and mentors should impress upon students and trainees the ethical challenges involved in every phase of human biological work; encourage them to reflect upon this and other codes; encourage dialogue with colleagues on ethical issues; and discourage participation in ethically questionable projects or behaviors.
- d. Teachers and mentors should publicly acknowledge student and trainee assistance in research and preparation of their work; give appropriate credit for co-authorship to students and trainees just as one would to peer colleagues who have participated in the generation, analysis, and/or writing of research findings; encourage publication of worthy student/trainee papers; and compensate students and trainees justly for their participation in all professional activities.
- e. Teachers and mentors must, at a minimum, adhere to the regulations at their institutions regarding sexual relations with, and sexual harassment of, any student, trainee, or junior colleague. Moreover, teachers and mentors should be aware of the exploitation and serious conflicts of interest which may result if they engage in sexual relations with students, trainees, or junior colleagues. They must avoid sexual liaisons with those whose education and professional training they are in any way directly responsible. These guidelines on sexual relations extend to all contexts (including but not limited to the classroom, laboratory, fieldwork, and professional meetings or events) in which human biologists interact with students/trainees they directly supervise. Among all persons and in all circumstances, sexual harassment is unacceptable.
- f. Non-sexual forms of harassment (e.g., bullying, intimidation, coercion, threats, demeaning remarks) by teachers/mentors towards students/trainees or junior colleagues are unacceptable.

## **V. Collegiality**

All human biologists and members of the HBA are expected to treat colleagues with respect and courtesy, based on principles of equality and mutual respect. Respect and courtesy include a number of different elements:

- a. Sexual and other forms of harassment (including bullying, intimidation, coercion, and threats) in any and all professional contexts (including but not limited to classrooms, laboratories, fieldwork, and professional meetings or events) are prohibited. The term harassment includes but is not limited to verbal conduct such as epithets, derogatory comments, slurs, or jokes; visual conduct, such as deliberately derogatory posters, photography, cartoons, drawings, or gestures; physical conduct such as an assault, unwanted touching, blocking normal movement; interfering with professional activities because of the person's sex, race, physical appearance or any other attributes irrelevant to

scholarly performance; retaliation for having reported or threatened to report prohibited harassment or discrimination; and any other verbal, visual, or physical conduct that unreasonably interferes with a person's work or other professional effort or creates an intimidating and/or hostile environment. Harassment also encompasses threats, demands or subtle pressure for sexual favors as a condition of favorable treatment or offers of benefits in return. Differences of opinion and disagreements that arise in the course of professional life do not in and of themselves necessarily constitute harassment; involved individuals should nonetheless endeavor to be respectful and refrain from ad hominem remarks and, depending on the specific circumstances, perhaps seek conflict resolution assistance from their workplace(s). Neither the professional status nor the personal attributes of individuals (including but not limited to sexual orientation, religion, dress, physical appearance, ancestry) excuse harassment. The risk of experiencing harassment is not necessarily limited to those persons with less stature - an individual may be subjected to harassment from someone of higher, comparable or lower professional standing. In particular, seniority does not confer a prerogative to be disrespectful but rather an obligation to avoid exploiting the vulnerability of junior colleagues. In all circumstances, harassment is unacceptable.

- b. Differences of interpretation among scientists/scholars are to be expected. Science works best when there is an open and honest sharing of ideas. It is not unusual for scientists to have different interpretations of the same data or analysis, and these differing views should be aired in an atmosphere of respect and dignity. Human biologists should be conscientious in acknowledging that such differences of opinion may constitute a conflict of interest (COI) in the evaluation of each other's work and should disclose any potential COI to cognizant person(s).
- c. Human biologists should make good-faith efforts to avoid conflicts of interest (COIs) in all aspects of their professional lives including their research, publications, reviews of papers and research proposals by others, and in their roles as editors, teachers/mentors, evaluators, and administrators. Because financial incentives and/or personal or professional conflicts or allegiances can color anyone's judgement, an individual should declare such real or apparent COIs to cognizant person(s) (e.g., to an editor if asked to review a paper, to a funder if asked to review a grant, to journal staff if one is seeking to publish work from which one stands to gain financially). The individual may be recused or may recuse oneself, or an apparent COI may be deemed acceptable and/or to be taken into consideration after the individual has provided their review/evaluation. An individual whose identity is withheld from those being evaluated should be particularly scrupulous regarding COIs. Depending on context, the specific details of the COI may or may not be required to be disclosed. Nonetheless, before rendering judgements or otherwise impacting others' work and/or professional development, human biologists are expected to be forthright in disclosing to cognizant person(s) the *existence* (at a minimum) of any real and/or apparent COIs.
- d. Recognition of others' contributions to one's own work is essential to good scholarship. Depending on the type of contribution, this may include co-authorship, written acknowledgment in scientific papers and publications, other public expressions of deserved credit pertinent to the venue, and citation of the relevant prior work of others.

There are many practices and preferences within and across disciplines regarding whether and how to appropriately recognize the work of others, and a large body of literature and numerous guidelines are available (see, for example, COPE in Section VIII). Notably, it is commonly recommended that agreements (preferably written) regarding recognition, especially co-authorship, should be reached before collaborative work is begun. Human biologists should be proactive with collaborators, hosts, facilitators, technicians, students, trainees and all other relevant persons in addressing appropriate recognition for their planned or realized contributions.

## **VI. Epilogue**

Human biology research, teaching, and application, like any human actions, pose choices for which human biologists individually and collectively bear ethical responsibility. Since human biologists are members of a variety of groups and subject to a variety of ethical codes, choices must sometimes be made not only between the varied obligations presented in this code but also between those of this code and those incurred in other statuses or roles. This statement does not dictate choice or propose sanctions. Rather, it is designed to promote discussion and provide general guidelines for ethically responsible decisions.

## **VII. Acknowledgments**

This Code is based in part on the Codes developed and approved by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA). The HBA has the permissions of the AAA and AAPA to use and modify their Codes for inclusion in this document.

The AAA Code was originally drafted by the Commission to Review the AAA Statements on Ethics during the period January 1995-March 1997, and was updated from 2007-2009 by the AAA Committee on Ethics. The AAPA code was developed modified by the AAPA Committee on Ethics prior to April 25, 2003. The HBA Executive Committee worked from these codes and approved a finalized version on March 31, 2016.

The HBA Executive Committee members were Andrea S. Wiley (president), Carol M. Worthman, Virginia J. Vitzthum, Andrew W. Froehle, Amanda L. Thompson, Ellen W. Demerath, Susan L. Johnston, and Inês Varela-Silva.

## **VIII. Additional Resources**

The following list of other Codes of Ethics may be useful to human biologists, teachers and practitioners:

### **Animal Behavior Society**

1991 Guidelines for the Use of Animals in Research. *Animal Behavior* 41:183-186.

### **Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)**

Human Subjects Research and HIPAA ethics training



**National Academy of Sciences**

1995 On Being a Scientist: Responsible Conduct in Research. 2nd edition. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

**National Association for the Practice of Anthropology**

1988 Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners.

**Sigma Xi**

1992 Sigma Xi Statement on the Use of Animals in Research. American Scientist 80:73-76.

**Society for Applied Anthropology**

1983 Professional and Ethical Responsibilities. (Revised 1983).

**United Nations**

1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

1983 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

1987 Convention on the Rights of the Child.

2007 Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**Publication Guidelines**

COPE (Committee on Publication Ethics) <<http://publicationethics.org/>> and also <[http://publicationethics.org/files/u7141/Authorship\\_DiscussionDocument\\_0\\_0.pdf](http://publicationethics.org/files/u7141/Authorship_DiscussionDocument_0_0.pdf)>