CODE OF CONDUCT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN INSTITUTE FOR GEOPHYSICS: A COMMUNITY COVENANT APPROACH

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Introduction: The University of Texas Institute for Geophysics (UTIG) is a vibrant community of intellectual pursuits involving staff researchers, administrative professionals, technical experts, students, postdoctoral fellows, and visitors. UTIG emphasizes expeditionary-scale research on land, at sea, and in the air as well as computationally- and experimentally-enabled discovery to solve problems ranging from natural hazards and natural resource utilization to climate change and planetary habitability. Our diverse ideas, scientific approaches, backgrounds, priorities, and interests will, on occasion, lead to conflicts that distract from a constructive research, educational, and workplace climate. UTIG strives to minimize and resolve conflict, at home or abroad, by employing transparent and equitable procedures that are described in our code of conduct (https://ig.utexas.edu/code-of-conduct). The code of conduct offers guidance to assist in preventing behavior that is damaging to our community; however, conflict is unfortunately inevitable in any organization. Thus, the code of conduct also provides guidance toward addressing problems in ways that strengthen our community and complement the University-wide processes for conflict resolution. The purpose of such an intervention is not to seek punishment, but is in place to sustain civility, collegiality, and, if possible, collaboration.

In this abstract, we will focus on two elements that underlie the code of conduct's foundation: a restorative justice approach to conflict resolution and safety during field work. We will additionally discuss lessons learned and open issues.

Reporting Mechanisms: Depending on the nature and severity of a conflict, the decision of whether and how to raise a complaint can be one of the most difficult steps to resolution. In certain cases, reporting is mandated by law or University policy. We include a guide to help victims and witnesses identify when reporting is mandatory, and for situations that do not require mandatory reporting, to decide who to approach to resolve conflict and seek advice. When conflict occurs, those involved can decide to file either an external report to University services or an internal report to the UTIG DEAI Committee when the parties desire to resolve the situation cooperatively and an external report is not mandated. Use of the informal reaction process serves the dual purpose of educating the UTIG community about negative behaviors while working directly and confidentially with the parties involved. People may be less likely to report negative behavior if their only options would involve the UTIG Director or Human Resources; an internal report and informal reaction process can facilitate a resolution without escalating to those levels.

Restorative Justice: A restorative justice approach to conflict resolution emphasizes the reparation of harm through a cooperative process that includes all stakeholders who collectively develop a plan to both heal the inflicted harm and reintroduce the responder into the community. The restorative justice model seeks to 1) ensure that the responder understands the harm they caused; 2) offer the responder an opportunity for personal development (moral, behavioral, etc.); 3) help the reporter and responder believe the plan for reconciliation is fair and legitimate; and 4) avoid stigmatizing the responder. The process typically (but not necessarily) involves direct encounters between the reporting and responding parties. Confidentiality agreements are typically signed to promote open and honest communication throughout the process. Restorative justice is an alternative to the more conventional retributive approach to justice, which considers only the offense and related circumstances to determine a punishment commensurate to the offense, with no explicit consideration of the community. The restorative justice model can be applied at UTIG to address complex interpersonal dynamics and problematic behavior in an informal way, with one incident already resolved successfully in this manner since the code was introduced to the community at the end of last year.

Field Work: Fieldwork often offers defining moments in geoscience careers. Positive experiences can represent exceptional recruiting opportunities to spark and maintain interest in the geosciences; unfortunately, negative experiences occur far too often. Fieldwork is also frequently isolated and often austere. This creates safety concerns of all types including harassment, bullying, and cliques. In a remote field setting it may not be possible for a person to effectively remove themselves from the situation. Environmental stress and isolation can lead to poor

judgment. These concerns all require special vigilance by every person involved. Efforts have been made to clarify and improve policies by platform operators and field stations to address problematic behavior in the field; however, problems persist. In addition, some locations have safety concerns relating to race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity and/or religion. Such problems can be avoided altogether, or handled optimally, by an appropriately trained and coordinated field team. Our code of conduct details expectations for behavior, team member training and organization, and procedures and recommendations for dealing with and reporting misconduct.

The UTIG code provides several new resources to encourage safe practices in our fieldwork. For each project going to the field, an On-site Field Safety Coordinator will be designated to help create a climate within the field team where relatively minor misconduct and conflicts are addressed in a constructive manner before being allowed to escalate to the point where they may undermine individuals' safety or the ability of the team to accomplish their objectives effectively. Additionally, a UTIG Field Safety Coordinator will serve as a point of contact back in Texas to help ensure quick communication of incidents that occur in the field. When UTIG collaborates with another institution for a field program, UTIG will coordinate with the partner institution(s) before deployment to confirm that policies, guidelines, and accommodations will be in place to ensure the physical and psychological safety of all participants. All UTIG field workers will be encouraged to fill out a post-travel survey after returning from their field program as another tool for reporting unsafe conditions or incidents of harassment in the field as well as to offer suggestions that would improve the experience of future field workers.

Lessons Learned and Open Issues: Development of the UTIG code of conduct began by establishing a committee that spanned all stakeholders, including the three seniority levels of research staff, a postdoctoral scholar, a graduate student, a member of the technical staff, a member of the administrative staff, and our human resources coordinator. This combination was one of the best decisions we made when starting the process, as it ensures we learn about new problems pertaining to different groups within the Institute and offers novel perspectives for solutions. A second lesson is to set realistic expectations for the time required for both formulation and the approval process, which each took about five months with weekly hour-long meetings, as well as the need for refinements.

Open issues include anonymous reporting viability within context of federal law (e.g., Title IX) and state law (e.g., TX SB-212) policies, trainings for the committee (e.g., restorative justice, mediation, cultural awareness, etc), record keeping (e.g., retention, storage platform, confidentiality), measures of success, posters to advertise the code, and shortened versions of the code for different purposes, such as field work, seminar speakers, and on-site visitors.