



# Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct

*Approved by Professional Division, December 9, 2004 and adopted by Council, January 6, 2005.*

*(Wholly revised from an earlier statement adopted May 1987; amended May 1990, May 1995, June 1996, January and May 1999, May 2000, June 2001, and January 2003.)*

This *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* addresses dilemmas and concerns about the practice of history that historians have regularly brought to the American Historical Association seeking guidance and counsel. Some of the most important sections of this *Statement* address questions about employment that vary according to the different institutional settings in which historians perform their work. Others address forms of professional misconduct that are especially troubling to historians. And some seek to identify a core set of shared values that professional historians strive to honor in the course of their work.

## Contents

- [1. The Profession of History](#)
- [2. Shared Values of Historians](#)
- [3. Scholarship](#)
- [4. Plagiarism](#)
- [5. Teaching](#)
- [6. History in the Public Realm](#)
- [7. Employment](#)
- [8. Reputation and Trust](#)
- [9. Additional Guidance](#)

## 1. The Profession of History

History is the never-ending process whereby people seek to understand the past and its many meanings. The institutional and intellectual forms of history's dialogue with the past have changed enormously over time, but the dialogue itself has been part of the human experience for millennia. **We all interpret and narrate the past, which is to say that we all participate in making history.** It is among our most fundamental tools for understanding ourselves and the world around us.

Professional historians benefit enormously from this shared human fascination for the past. Few fields are more accessible or engaging to members of the public. Individuals from all backgrounds have a stake in how the past is interpreted, for it cuts to the very heart of their identities and world views. This is why history can evoke such passion and controversy in the public realm. All manner of people can and do produce good history. Professional historians are wise to remember that they will never have a monopoly on their own discipline, and that this is much more a strength than a weakness. The openness of the discipline is among its most attractive features, perennially renewing it and making it relevant to new constituencies.

What, then, distinguishes a professional historian from everyone else? Membership in this profession is defined by self-conscious identification with a **community of historians who are collectively engaged in investigating and interpreting the past as a matter of disciplined learned practice.** Historians work in an extraordinary range of settings: in museums and libraries and government agencies, in schools and academic institutions, in corporations and non-profit organizations. Some earn their living primarily from employment related to the past; some practice history while supporting themselves in other ways. Whatever the venue in which they work, though, professional historians share certain core values that guide their activities and inform their judgments as they seek to enrich our collective understanding of the past. These shared values for

conducting and assessing research, developing and evaluating interpretations, communicating new knowledge, navigating ethical dilemmas, and, not least, telling stories about the past, define the professional practice of history.

## 2. Shared Values of Historians

Historians strive constantly to improve our collective understanding of the past through a complex process of **critical dialogue**—with each other, with the wider public, and with the historical record—in which we explore former lives and worlds in search of answers to the most compelling questions of our own time and place.

Historians cannot successfully do this work without mutual trust and respect. By practicing their craft with integrity, historians acquire a reputation for trustworthiness that is arguably their single most precious professional asset. The **trust and respect** both of one's peers and of the public at large are among the greatest and most hard-won achievements that any historian can attain. It is foolish indeed to put them at risk.

Although historians disagree with each other about many things, they do know what they trust and respect in each other's work. All historians believe in honoring the **integrity of the historical record**. They do not fabricate evidence. Forgery and fraud violate the most basic foundations on which historians construct their interpretations of the past. An undetected counterfeit undermines not just the historical arguments of the forger, but all subsequent scholarship that relies on the forger's work. Those who invent, alter, remove, or destroy evidence make it difficult for any serious historian ever wholly to trust their work again.

We honor the historical record, but understand that its interpretation constantly evolves as historians analyze primary documents in light of the ever-expanding body of secondary literature that places those documents in a larger context. By “documents,” historians typically mean all forms of evidence—not just written texts, but artifacts, images, statistics, oral recollections, the built and natural environment, and many other things—that have survived as records of former times. By “secondary literature,” we typically mean all subsequent interpretations of those former times based on the evidence contained in primary documents. This distinction between primary and secondary sources is among the most fundamental that historians make. Drawing the boundary between them is a good deal more complicated than it might seem, since determining whether a document is primary or secondary largely depends on the questions one asks of it. At the most basic level, though, the professional practice of history means respecting the integrity of primary and secondary sources while subjecting them to critical scrutiny and contributing in a fair-minded way to ongoing scholarly and public debates over what those sources tell us about the past.

Honoring the historical record also means **leaving a clear trail for subsequent historians to follow**. This is why scholarly apparatus in the form of bibliographies and annotations (and associated institutional repositories like libraries, archives, and museums) is so essential to the professional practice of history. Such apparatus is valuable for many reasons. It enables other historians to retrace the steps in an argument to make sure those steps are justified by the sources. Apparatus often evaluates evidence to indicate gaps in the historical record that might cast doubt on a given interpretation. Knowing that trust is ultimately more important than winning a debate for the wrong reasons, professional historians are as interested in defining the limits and uncertainties of their own arguments as they are in persuading others that those arguments are correct. Finally, the trail of evidence left by any single work of history becomes a key starting point for subsequent investigations of the same subject, and thus makes a critical contribution to our collective capacity to ask and answer new questions about the past. For all these reasons, historians pride themselves on the accuracy with which they use and document sources. The sloppier their apparatus, the harder it is for other historians to trust their work.

The trail of evidence in bibliographies, notes, museum catalogs, databases, and other forms of scholarly apparatus is crucial not just for documenting the primary sources on which a work of history depends, but the

secondary sources as well. **Practicing history with integrity means acknowledging one's debts to the work of other historians.** To copy the work of another and claim it for one's own is plagiarism—an act historians abhor. Plagiarism violates the historical record by failing to reveal the secondary sources that have contributed to a given line of argument. It is a form of fraud, and betrays the trust on which the historical profession depends. Much more will be said about it later in this *Statement on Standards*.

Among the core principles of the historical profession that can seem counterintuitive to non-historians is the conviction, very widely if not universally shared among historians since the nineteenth century, that **practicing history with integrity does not mean being neutral or having no point of view.** Every work of history articulates a particular, limited perspective on the past. Historians hold this view not because they believe that all interpretations are equally valid, or that nothing can ever be known about the past, or that facts do not matter. Quite the contrary. History would be pointless if such claims were true, since its most basic premise is that within certain limits we can indeed know and make sense of past worlds and former times that now exist only as remembered traces in the present. But the very nature of our discipline means that historians also understand that all knowledge is situated in time and place, that all interpretations express a point of view, and that no mortal mind can ever aspire to omniscience. Because the record of the past is so fragmentary, absolute historical knowledge is denied us.

Furthermore, the different peoples whose past lives we seek to understand held views of their lives that were often very different from each other—and from our own. Doing justice to those views means to some extent trying (never wholly successfully) to see their worlds through their eyes. This is especially true when people in the past disagreed or came into conflict with each other, since any adequate understanding of their world must somehow encompass their disagreements and competing points of view within a broader context. **Multiple, conflicting perspectives are among the truths of history.** No single objective or universal account could ever put an end to this endless creative dialogue within and between the past and the present.

What is true of history is also true of historians. Everyone who comes to the study of history brings with them a host of identities, experiences, and interests that cannot help but affect the questions they ask of the past and the answers they wish to know. When applied with integrity and self-critical fair-mindedness, the political, social, and religious beliefs of historians can appropriately inform their historical practice. Because the questions we ask profoundly shape everything we do—the topics we investigate, the evidence we gather, the arguments we construct, the stories we tell—it is inevitable that different historians will produce different histories.

For this reason, historians often disagree and argue with each other. That historians can sometimes differ quite vehemently not just about interpretations but even about the basic facts of what happened in the past is sometimes troubling to non-historians, especially if they imagine that history consists of a universally agreed-upon accounting of stable facts and known certainties. But universal agreement is not a condition to which historians typically aspire. Instead, we understand that interpretive disagreements are vital to the creative ferment of our profession, and can in fact contribute to some of our most original and valuable insights.

Frustrating as these disagreements and uncertainties may be even for historians, they are an irreducible feature of the discipline. In contesting each other's interpretations, professional historians recognize that the resulting disagreements can deepen and enrich historical understanding by generating new questions, new arguments, and new lines of investigation. This crucial insight underpins some of the most important shared values that define the professional conduct of historians. They believe in vigorous debate, but they also believe in civility. They rely on their own perspectives as they probe the past for meaning, but they also subject those perspectives to critical scrutiny by testing them against the views of others.

Historians celebrate intellectual communities governed by **mutual respect and constructive criticism.** The preeminent value of such communities is reasoned discourse—the continuous colloquy among historians

holding diverse points of view who learn from each other as they pursue topics of mutual interest. A commitment to such discourse—balancing fair and honest criticism with tolerance and openness to different ideas—makes possible the fruitful exchange of views, opinions, and knowledge.

This being the case, it is worth repeating that a great many dilemmas associated with the professional practice of history can be resolved by returning to the core values that the preceding paragraphs have sought to sketch. **Historians should practice their craft with integrity. They should honor the historical record. They should document their sources. They should acknowledge their debts to the work of other scholars. They should respect and welcome divergent points of view even as they argue and subject those views to critical scrutiny. They should remember that our collective enterprise depends on mutual trust. And they should never betray that trust.**

### 3. Scholarship

Scholarship—the discovery, exchange, interpretation, and presentation of information about the past—is basic to the professional practice of history. It depends on the collection and preservation of historical documents, artifacts, and other source materials in a variety of institutional settings ranging from libraries to archives to museums to government agencies to private organizations. Historians are committed to protecting significant historical evidence wherever it resides. Scholarship likewise depends on the open dissemination of historical knowledge via many different channels of communication: books, articles, classrooms, exhibits, films, historic sites, museums, legal memoranda, testimony, and many other ways. The free exchange of information about the past is dear to historians.

Professional integrity in the practice of history requires awareness of one's own biases and a readiness to follow sound method and analysis wherever they may lead. Historians should document their findings and be prepared to make available their sources, evidence, and data, including any documentation they develop through interviews. Historians should not misrepresent their sources. They should report their findings as accurately as possible and not omit evidence that runs counter to their own interpretation. They should not commit plagiarism. They should oppose false or erroneous use of evidence, along with any efforts to ignore or conceal such false or erroneous use.

Historians should acknowledge the receipt of any financial support, sponsorship, or unique privileges (including special access to research material) related to their research, especially when such privileges could bias their research findings. They should always acknowledge assistance received from colleagues, students, research assistants, and others, and give due credit to collaborators.

Historians should work to preserve the historical record, and support institutions that perform this crucial service. Historians favor free, open, equal, and nondiscriminatory access to archival, library, and museum collections wherever possible. They should be careful to avoid any actions that might prejudice access for future historians. Although they recognize the legitimacy of restricting access to some sources for national security, proprietary, and privacy reasons, they have a professional interest in opposing unnecessary restrictions whenever appropriate.

Historians sometimes appropriately agree to restrictive conditions about the use of particular sources. Certain kinds of research, certain forms of employment, and certain techniques (for instance, in conducting oral history interviews) sometimes entail promises about what a historian will and will not do with the resulting knowledge. Historians should honor all such promises. They should respect the confidentiality of clients, students, employers, and others with whom they have a professional relationship. At much as possible, though, they should also strive to serve the historical profession's preference for open access to, and public discussion of, the historical record. They should define any confidentiality requirements before their research begins, and

give public notice of any conditions or rules that may affect the content of their work.

## 4. Plagiarism

The word *plagiarism* derives from Latin roots: *plagiarius*, an abductor, and *plagiare*, to steal. **The expropriation of another author's work, and the presentation of it as one's own, constitutes plagiarism and is a serious violation of the ethics of scholarship.** It seriously undermines the credibility of the plagiarist, and can do irreparable harm to a historian's career.

In addition to the harm that plagiarism does to the pursuit of truth, it can also be an offense against the literary rights of the original author and the property rights of the copyright owner. Detection can therefore result not only in sanctions (such as dismissal from a graduate program, denial of promotion, or termination of employment) but in legal action as well. As a practical matter, plagiarism between scholars rarely goes to court, in part because legal concepts, such as infringement of copyright, are narrower than ethical standards that guide professional conduct. **The real penalty for plagiarism is the abhorrence of the community of scholars.**

Plagiarism includes more subtle abuses than simply expropriating the exact wording of another author without attribution. Plagiarism can also include the limited borrowing, without sufficient attribution, of another person's distinctive and significant research findings or interpretations. Of course, historical knowledge is cumulative, and thus in some contexts—such as textbooks, encyclopedia articles, broad syntheses, and certain forms of public presentation—the form of attribution, and the permissible extent of dependence on prior scholarship, citation, and other forms of attribution will differ from what is expected in more limited monographs. As knowledge is disseminated to a wide public, it loses some of its personal reference. What belongs to whom becomes less distinct. But even in textbooks a historian should acknowledge the sources of recent or distinctive findings and interpretations, those not yet a part of the common understanding of the profession. Similarly, while some forms of historical work do not lend themselves to explicit attribution (e.g., films and exhibitions), every effort should be made to give due credit to scholarship informing such work.

Plagiarism, then, takes many forms. The clearest abuse is the use of another's language without quotation marks and citation. More subtle abuses include the appropriation of concepts, data, or notes all disguised in newly crafted sentences, or reference to a borrowed work in an early note and then extensive further use without subsequent attribution. Borrowing unexamined primary source references from a secondary work without citing that work is likewise inappropriate. All such tactics reflect an unworthy disregard for the contributions of others.

No matter what the context, **the best professional practice for avoiding a charge of plagiarism is always to be explicit, thorough, and generous in acknowledging one's intellectual debts.**

All who participate in the community of inquiry, as amateurs or as professionals, as students or as established historians, have an obligation to oppose deception. This obligation bears with special weight on teachers of graduate seminars. They are critical in shaping a young historian's perception of the ethics of scholarship. It is therefore incumbent on graduate teachers to seek opportunities for making the seminar also a workshop in scholarly integrity. After leaving graduate school, every historian will have to depend primarily on vigilant self-criticism. Throughout our lives none of us can cease to question the claims to originality that our work makes and the sort of credit it grants to others.

The first line of defense against plagiarism is the formation of work habits that protect a scholar from plagiarism. The plagiarist's standard defense—that he or she was misled by hastily taken and imperfect notes—is plausible only in the context of a wider tolerance of shoddy work. A basic rule of good note-taking

requires every researcher to distinguish scrupulously between exact quotation and paraphrase.

The second line of defense against plagiarism is organized and punitive. Every institution that includes or represents a body of scholars has an obligation to establish procedures designed to clarify and uphold their ethical standards. Every institution that employs historians bears an especially critical responsibility to maintain the integrity and reputation of its staff. This applies to government agencies, corporations, publishing firms, and public service organizations such as museums and libraries, as surely as it does to educational facilities. Usually, it is the employing institution that is expected to investigate charges of plagiarism promptly and impartially and to invoke appropriate sanctions when the charges are sustained. Penalties for scholarly misconduct should vary according to the seriousness of the offense, and the protections of due process should always apply. A persistent pattern of deception may justify public disclosure or even termination of a career; some scattered misappropriations may warrant a formal reprimand.

All historians share responsibility for defending high standards of intellectual integrity. When appraising manuscripts for publication, reviewing books, or evaluating peers for placement, promotion, and tenure, scholars must evaluate the honesty and reliability with which the historian uses primary and secondary source materials. Scholarship flourishes in an atmosphere of openness and candor, which should include the scrutiny and public discussion of academic deception.

## 5. Teaching

Teaching is basic to the practice of history. It occurs in many venues: not just classrooms, but museums and historic sites, documentaries and textbooks, newspaper articles, web sites, and popular histories. In its broadest definition, teaching involves the transmission of historical knowledge to people who do not yet have such knowledge. Whether it occurs in the classroom or the public realm, it performs the essential work of assuring that the past remains a part of living memory in the present.

Good teaching entails **accuracy and rigor** in communicating factual information, and strives always to place such information in context to convey its larger significance. Integrity in teaching means presenting competing interpretations with fairness and intellectual honesty. Doing so can support one of the most important goals of teaching: exciting the interest of those who are encountering a new historical topic for the first time, leading them toward the insight that **history is a process of living inquiry**, not an inert collection of accepted facts.

The **political, social, and religious beliefs** of history teachers necessarily inform their work, but the right of the teacher to hold and express such convictions can never justify falsification, misrepresentation, or concealment, or the persistent intrusion of material unrelated to the subject of the course. Furthermore, teachers should be mindful that students and other audience members have the right to disagree with a given interpretation or point of view. Students should be made aware of multiple causes and varying interpretations. Within the bounds of the historical topic being studied, the free expression of legitimate differences of opinion should always be a goal. Teachers should judge students' work on merit alone.

Course offerings, textbooks, and public history presentations should address the diversity of human experience, recognizing that historical accuracy requires attention both to individual and cultural similarities and differences and to the larger global and historical context within which societies have evolved. The American Historical Association is on record as encouraging educational and public history activities to **counter harassment and discrimination** on campuses and in the public realm. It encourages administrators to speak out vigorously against such incidents. At the same time, the Association disapproves of efforts to limit or punish free speech. We **condemn the violation of First Amendment rights to free speech**, as well as the harassment and vilification to which individuals have sometimes been subjected for exercising these rights.

## 6. History in the Public Realm

Because **interpreting the past is so vital to democratic debate and civic life** in the public realm, historians regularly have the opportunity to discuss the implications of their knowledge for concerns and controversies in the present—including present controversies about past events. It is one of the privileges of our profession to share historical insights and interpretations with a wider public, wherever the locus of our employment. We should welcome the chance to do so, and the institutions that employ historians should recognize the importance of this aspect of our work. Historians should not be subject to institutional or professional penalties for their beliefs and activities, provided they do not misrepresent themselves as speaking for their institutions or their professional organizations when they are not authorized to do so.

Practicing history in the public realm presents important challenges, for when historians communicate with a wider public, they must represent not just a particular interpretation or body of facts, but the best practices of the discipline of history itself. This means they must inevitably walk a tightrope in balancing their desire to present a particular point of view with their responsibility to uphold the standards and values that underpin their professional authority as historians. This challenge can be especially complex for public historians, whose daily working lives frequently require multiple levels of accountability, and for historians working in advocacy roles.

Public discussions of complex historical questions inevitably **translate and simplify** many technical details associated with those questions, while at the same time suggesting at least some of the associated complexities and divergent points of view. While it is perfectly acceptable for historians to share their own perspectives with the public, they should also strive to demonstrate how the historical profession links evidence with arguments to build fair-minded, nuanced, and responsible interpretations of the past. The desire to score points as an advocate should never tempt a historian to misrepresent the historical record or the critical methods that the profession uses to interpret that record.

Historians who work in government, corporate, and nonprofit institutions, as well as those occasionally entering public arenas as political advisers, expert witnesses, public intellectuals, consultants, legislative witnesses, journalists, or commentators, may face a choice of priorities between professionalism and partisanship. They may want to prepare themselves by seeking advice from other experienced professionals. As historians, they must be sensitive to the complexities of history, the diversity of historical interpretations, and the limits as well as the strengths of their own points of view and experiences and of the discipline itself. In such situations, historians must use sources, including the work of other scholars, with great care and should always be prepared to explain the methods and assumptions in their research; the relations between evidence and interpretation; and alternative interpretations of the subjects they address.

## 7. Employment

The American Historical Association firmly supports **fairness and due process** in all decisions involving the appointment, promotion, and working conditions of historians. Institutions should develop **published rules** governing their employment practices, and it should go without saying that they should follow these rules.

Although some historians are self-employed, most work for academic institutions, corporations, government agencies, law firms, archives, historical societies, museums, parks, historic preservation programs, or other institutions. To the extent they can influence the policies and practices of their workplace, the AHA encourages historians to do whatever they can to persuade their institutions to accept and enforce rules to ensure equity in conditions of employment. If they work in an academic institution, they should urge it to accept the 1966 *Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, jointly formulated by the American Association of

University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education, and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges.

Fairness begins with **recruitment**. Historians have an obligation to do all possible to ensure that employment opportunities in the field are widely publicized and that all professionally qualified persons have an equal opportunity to compete for those positions. This means not only the placement of job notices in appropriate publications (for example, the AHA's *Perspectives*) but also the inclusion in such notices of a completely accurate description of the position and of any contingencies, budgetary or otherwise, that might affect the continued availability of the position. An institution should not deceive possible candidates by omitting qualifications or characteristics that favor certain candidates over others (for example, a preference for unspecified minor fields). If an employer decides to alter a job description or selection criteria, the institution should re-advertise.

Fairness also involves **equal treatment** of all qualified applicants and procedures that are considerate to all applicants. For example, an employing institution should promptly acknowledge all applications and, as soon as practicable, inform applicants who do not meet the selection criteria. Likewise, it should keep competitive applicants informed of the progress of the search and promptly notify those who are no longer under consideration. It should do everything possible to accommodate finalists in arranging interviews, including the payment of expenses, where appropriate. Finally, it should ensure that those who conduct interviews adhere to professional standards by respecting the dignity of candidates, focusing their questions on the qualifications needed for the position, and avoiding questions that violate federal or state antidiscrimination laws.

Employment decisions always involve judgments. But, except in those cases in which federal law allows a specific preference, institutions should base hiring decisions as well as all decisions relating to reappointment, promotion, tenure, apprenticeship, graduate student assistantships, awards, and fellowships **solely on professional qualifications** without regard to sex, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, veteran status, age, certain physical handicaps, or marital status. A **written contract** should follow a verbal offer in a timely manner, and institutions have an obligation to explain as clearly as possible the terms of such contracts. Once signed, a contract should be honored by all parties as both a legal and ethical obligation. Employers have an obligation to clarify all rules and conditions governing employment and promotion.

Once employed, any person deserves the professional respect and support necessary for professional growth and advancement. Such respect precludes unequal treatment based on any nonprofessional criteria. In particular, it precludes any **harassment or discrimination**, which is unethical, unprofessional, and threatening to intellectual freedom. Harassment includes all behavior that prevents or impairs an individual's full enjoyment of educational or workplace rights, benefits, environment, or opportunities, such as generalized pejorative remarks or behavior or the use of professional authority to emphasize inappropriately the personal identity of an individual. Sexual harassment, which includes inappropriate requests for sexual favors, unwanted sexual advances, and sexual assaults, is illegal and violates professional standards.

Historians should receive promotions and merit salary increases exclusively on the basis of professional qualifications and achievements. The best way to ensure that such criteria are used is to establish **clear standards and procedures** known to all members of the institution. An institution should have an established review process, should offer candidates for promotion or merit raises opportunities to substantiate their achievements, should provide early and specific notification of adverse promotion or salary decisions, and should provide an appeal mechanism.

Of particularly grave concern to historians are those institutional decisions that lead to **disciplinary action**—most important, questions of suspension and dismissal, because they may involve issues of intellectual freedom. All institutions employing historians should develop and follow clearly written procedures governing

disciplinary action. These procedures should embody the principles of due process, including adequate mechanisms for fact-finding and avenues for appeal. Academic institutions should adhere to the AAUP's 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. Other institutions that employ professional historians should provide a comparable standard of due process.

Historians who work **part time or off the tenure track** should receive compensation in proportion to the share of a full-time work load they carry, including a proportionate share of fringe benefits available to their full-time colleagues; they also should have access to institutional facilities and support systems, and appropriate involvement in institutional governance.

## 8. Reputation and Trust

Historians are obligated to present their **credentials** accurately and honestly in all contexts. They should take care not to misrepresent their qualifications in resumes, applications, or the public record. They should apply the same rigor and integrity in describing their own accomplishments as their profession applies to the historical record itself.

The status of a book, article, or other publication that is still in the production pipeline is often an important piece of information for search committees, tenure/promotion review committees, and fellowship committees. Yet the profession has no **standardized terminology** for works in progress, often rendering their status unclear. The AHA suggests the following lexicon.

- “In Press”: the manuscript is fully copyedited and out of the author’s hands. It is in the final stages of the production process.
- “Forthcoming”: a completed manuscript has been accepted by a press or journal.
- “Under contract to . . .”: a press and an author have signed a contract for a book in progress, but the final manuscript has not yet been submitted.
- “Submitted” or “under consideration”: the book or article has been submitted to a press or journal, but there is as yet no contract or agreement to publish.

Historians should not list among the completed achievements on their resumes degrees or honors they have never earned, jobs they have never held, articles or books they have never written or published, or any comparable misrepresentations of their creative or professional work.

Historians should be mindful of any **conflicts of interest** that may arise in the course of their professional duties. A conflict of interest arises when an individual’s personal interest or bias could compromise (or *appear* to compromise) his or her ability to act in accordance with professional obligations. Historians frequently encounter such situations as participants in some form of peer review—for example, reviewing grant applications, vetting manuscripts for publication, evaluating annual meeting program proposals, or selecting prize or award recipients. Historians should identify and, where appropriate, recuse themselves from any decisions or other actions in which a conflict of interest or the appearance thereof arises; they should avoid situations in which they may benefit or appear to benefit financially at the expense of their professional obligations. An individual should normally refuse to participate in the formal review of work by anyone for whom he or she feels a sense of personal obligation, competition, or enmity.

## 9. Additional Guidance

This *Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct* offers general guidance about core values and practices of the historical profession. Because no document of this sort could ever be comprehensive, the AHA typically

amends this *Statement* only when some new issue arises that is of such general concern that a formal policy declaration seems warranted.

For additional advice about ethics and best practices among professional historians, readers are urged to consult other declarations and publications of the American Historical Association, including best practice statements and wise counsel documents readily available on the [AHA web site](#).

Valuable insights can also be gleaned from the publications of several other historical associations, for instance, the *Ethics Guidelines* of the National Council on Public History; the *Statement of Professional Standards and Ethics* of the American Association for State and Local History; the *Evaluation Guidelines* of the Oral History Association; and the *Principles and Standards for Federal Historical Programs* of the Society for History in the Federal Government, among others.

We encourage all historians to uphold and defend their professional responsibilities with the utmost seriousness, and to advocate for integrity and fairness and high standards throughout the historical profession.

---

Copyright © American Historical Association.

Printed from: <http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm> on February 7, 2007

[Return to Full View](#)