

## Suggestions for Community Norms Documents

Prepared by Bill Donohue (Faculty Grievance & Dispute Resolution Office) and Juli Wade (Academic Advancement Network),  
April 2018

Michigan State University outlines three core values: [Quality, Inclusiveness, and Connectivity](#). Many of us are reflecting on how well we and the individuals we lead are upholding these principles, and what we all can do to create and maintain a climate in which our actions genuinely embody them. MSU's statement on our core value of inclusiveness highlights the importance of "varying perspectives and a promise of mutual respect".

In support of this idea, handbooks and other materials outlining policies and procedures for MSU employees, for both academics and support staff, contain sections on expectations of professional behavior. We encourage you to increase awareness of these university-level requirements, and suggest that each unit consider corresponding sections for their bylaws.

Regardless of whether units approve regulations within their governing documents, we encourage the development of texts outlining [Community Norms](#). Here, we offer some suggestions for process and topics. The material below is not exhaustive and may not apply to all units, but is intended to provide ideas for consideration.

### Development of Document

Please be inclusive in the creation of the text, in terms of both ideas and language. All stakeholders should be involved, and substantial buy-in will be required for meaningful impact. Refrain from excessive detail, but provide sufficient examples for clarity. It is impossible to imagine every situation that may arise. Consider including language related to expectations that:

1. We each take responsibility for our words and actions.
2. When a violation of community norms occurs, observers will speak up and will be listened to (you might also note where they should report various types of incidents).

### Examples

*Collegiality Standards* might address factors including, but not limited to:

1. **Power Differences:** University life can be hierarchical, and power differentials exists across numerous levels, including students, administrators, faculty, and academic and support staff. These differences can create an atmosphere in which power is an overt dimension of the relationship, or the effects of differential control can be far more subtle. Professional conduct assumes that individuals are aware of, and avoid abusing, increased rights and capacities that can be associated with a range of positions and degrees of experience.
2. **Respect and Civil Behavior:** Language endorsed by the University Committee on Faculty Affairs and the University Committee on Student Affairs, and approved by the Academic Council on April 20, 2010, includes a "call upon all who participate in university events to promote tolerance and civil behavior and to hold themselves to high standards that reflect the university's commitment to respect viewpoints that may be different from their own. Only by respecting individuals with diverse perspectives and ideas can we build an environment of civility that is conducive to advancing knowledge and transforming lives".
3. **Bullying:** MSU has clear [policies against harassment and discrimination](#), which relate to protected characteristics. While MSU does not yet have a university level definition of or policy on bullying, it is

useful to consider related material from similar institutions. For example, Oregon State University defines bullying in the following manner (<http://eoa.oregonstate.edu/bullying-policy>): “conduct of any sort directed at another that is severe, pervasive or persistent, and is of a nature that would cause a reasonable person in the victim's position substantial emotional distress and undermine his or her ability to work, study or participate in his or her regular life activities, and actually does cause the victim substantial emotional distress and undermines the victim's ability to work, study, or participate in the victim's regular life activities.” Bullying can take many forms, including overt verbal or physical aggression to exert power, as well as more subtle forms that often come from individuals C.K. Gunsalus calls “victim Bullies... [who] are aggrieved and are trying to get their own way as recompense for their perceived mistreatment” (from the College Administrator’s Survival Guide, 2006, p. 124).

4. **Rude or Inconsiderate Behavior, Microaggressions:** Conduct that is not severe, pervasive or persistent is generally not viewed as bullying, but it may fall short of reasonable expectations for behavior toward others. Some language regarding appropriate interactions with others may be valuable.
5. **Transparency and Privacy:** What types of information should be shared within a unit, under what conditions, and by whom? Clarifying intentions and decision making processes, as well as relevant data on which decisions are based, can facilitate a culture of respect and enhance productivity. However, it is not appropriate that all individuals have access to all information.
6. **Fairness and Balance:** Consider providing material on the importance of engaging multiple, diverse perspectives in decision making.
7. **Good Intentions:** It may be of value to include a statement related to underlying assumptions about the behavior of others. Perhaps an agreement to avoid jumping to conclusions and to start from the idea that others mean well (or at least are not acting with an intention to harm) might be useful.

*Communication Practices* that facilitate adherence to collegiality standards might include, but not be limited to, situations such as:

1. **Email:** This form of communication should not be used to disrespect, demean or in any other ways foment an atmosphere of intimidation or intellectual dishonesty. For example, email should be succinct, respectful, and not be used to harass or slander individuals in any way. When is it appropriate to use all CAPS? When is it appropriate to bcc, cc, and/or reply to all? By when is a response expected?
2. **Scheduling:** Procedures associated with scheduling (and control of shared calendars) should be clearly understood. The importance of involvement of stakeholders in meetings and the potential impact of scheduling at particular times based on availability should be considered.
3. **Faculty Meetings:** Deliberations in meetings must be respectful and aimed at addressing issues; personal attacks must be avoided. These exchanges should demonstrate intellectual honesty and openness to criticism and change.