

Codes of Conduct for Field Scenarios

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University of Colorado, Boulder
June 2023

Purpose

The primary purpose of this document is to **establish a common guidance within the GEOL department for drafting Codes of Conduct (CoCs) for field scenarios**. This document was drafted with the input of GEOL faculty with experience using CoCs in their field courses and/or field work. It is intended to be distributed to faculty, staff, and students who are leading trips to the field. The term '*trips to the field*' is meant to be broad and encompass field work at remote or international sites, routine field work at sites local to the university, or field courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This document was written by Tristan Caro with professors Kristy Tiampo, Leilani Arthurs, Lizzy Trower, Irina Overeem, and Bob Anderson

Introduction

Field work is a crucial component of geoscience and is often the motivating reason why people pursue the environmental sciences. Field work is often crucial for the completion of academic degrees and results in important scientific outcomes that cannot be achieved in the lab alone. Despite its importance, considerations of interpersonal interactions in the field are often neglected in the planning process. Harassment and bullying in the field remain a persistent problem. Cultures that enable or do not actively combat discrimination and harassment exacerbate these issues. A code of conduct (CoC) for fieldwork is a starting point for addressing these problems, where guidelines for behavior in the field are outlined and agreed upon by all field participants. A CoC alone is by no means the end goal: the expectations and best practices defined in the CoC must be practiced by its authors.

Motivation: Why do we need a code of conduct?

CoCs for field work serve a variety of purposes.

1. CoCs give the field participants an opportunity to discuss expectations for the field. In this way, a CoC serves to proactively combat issues of harassment, bullying, and threats to safety, both physical and social, while also setting the tone for the field work.
2. CoCs can give students a stake in the norms generated. If CoCs are developed with students as active partners (see: *Writing a Collaborative Code of Conduct*), students will more readily see themselves as active participants in and sculptors of the field community.
3. CoCs aim to remove ambiguity with regard to behavior for the students, instructors, and TAs. They provide clarification on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior and delineate clear courses of action if an individual wishes to seek help.

What should a Code of Conduct include?

1. Physical safety

A CoC outlines the field plan, makes specific recommendations for required personal gear, the physical risks involved, contingency plans, and expected safety behavior. These can include the use of physical tools, appropriate PPE, high-visibility vests, cell coverage, driving behavior, nearby hospitals, the nature of any on-foot movement (e.g., how strenuous is a hike?) and risks posed by the field environment (heat, cold, sun, wildlife, altitude, etc.).

2. Social safety

A CoC describes “expedition behavior.” The CoC should allow students to feel that they have permission to hold themselves accountable, and that they are active partners in the group mentality. A CoC should outline a zero-tolerance policy for bullying or other harassing behaviors. A CoC can outline group camp rules; to respect others’ privacy and allow for personal space or discuss behavior around alcohol/marijuana use. A CoC could describe the manner in which people should communicate, especially when under stress. Additionally, a CoC should outline steps for reporting problems to advisors or people external to the field work.

3. Discussion of Cultural Interaction

Field sites do not exist in a vacuum – they are inhabited and/or stewarded by people who likely exist at a distance from the academic community. Cultural interaction is a two-way street: first, participants should be aware of how to respect the land and its people. Second, participants should be aware of how a community may interact with them.

Considering these aspects requires nuanced and thoughtful discussion of:

- a. How can participants respect the land, its cultural heritage, and the people who inhabit and/or steward it, or whose livelihoods depend on it? What broader cultural significance does the field site have to local, indigenous, past, or present communities?
- b. What is the cultural “temperature” of the place being visited? What societal, political, or cultural differences exist and how should they be prepared for? This applies both in the sense of ensuring field participants from marginalized communities are safe, but also in the sense of respecting local norms when applicable. In other words, take care to consider the *positionality* (the social and political context that creates personal identity) of people both within and external to the field work.

Collaborative Codes of Conduct

While many instructors may see a CoC as a “top down” document, coming from them and being applied to their students, the generation of group collaborative CoC can be a valuable exercise.

A collaborative CoC is recommended because it ensures that all field participants become active partners in their field experience. Early and proactive discussions about behavior ahead of time opens dialogue about individual expectations, comfort, safety, etc. and allows everyone to be heard.

A collaborative CoC can be drafted in a variety of ways. Instructors in the past have used some of the following strategies:

1. **Jam Boards**

The class breaks into groups, each with a white board, sticky note board, or other sketching device. The instructor prompts them to consider what they would like to see in a CoC, including the facets described above (physical, social, cultural.). Individuals write down short ideas that could be condensed into a CoC. Representatives from each group can share their main takeaways, or the instructor can collate the responses.

2. **Guiding questions**

An instructor opens a document and asks guiding questions to the students related to the facets described above (physical, social, cultural). Through active discussion, the class inputs ideas to the document through a dedicated notetaker (can be the instructor or a student). The document can be formally streamlined and compiled by the instructor or by volunteers.

3. **Asynchronous**

An instructor provides an editable document (e.g., Google Doc) that prompts guiding questions, similar to above. This document is filled out asynchronously by students, either after or in replacement of a “guiding questions” discussion. This allows students who may feel uncomfortable speaking up to provide their thoughts in writing.

Sign off on the CoC and safety plan.

After the brainstorm and discussions, the document will be finalized by the group and instructor. Then ask all participants to ‘sign off’ on the completed safety plan and the CoC, this allows for a last moment of reflection and creates buy-in and ownership.

Example Code of Conduct

This is an example of a CoC that touches on important aspects of expedition behavior. It does not include attention to physical safety (e.g., PPE, emergency plans, etc.) as these are specific to each field scenario. The goal of providing this example is to display a representative example of what a CoC could include and how it might be formatted.

1. **We work as a team.**

We discuss our contributions and roles as a group. Although tasks or roles may be individual, these are developed through collaborative practice. We all make an effort to be prepared. This can be by providing good information on expectations of the travel

schedule/work, by providing good information on required equipment

2. We prioritize the spaces and communities that host us.

Whether or not our work directly focuses on local needs, respecting the spaces we visit and the people who inhabit these spaces is our first priority. We respect the landscape where we stay and follow “leave no trace” principles.

3. We represent the University of Colorado Boulder and the professional organizations to which we and our project leaders are subscribed.

We recognize our duty to act in a professional manner as our behaviors reflect on these institutions.

4. We recognize that fieldwork can be intense, emotional, and tiring.

Things can go wrong, we may need to compromise, and the goals/outcomes of the project may need to be modified. These decisions will be decided by serious conversations, facilitated by the project leads. We allow all team members to partake in decision making and do not exclude anyone from meetings.

5. We have a right to a safe, secure, and non-threatening working and living environment.

We do not tolerate any form of discriminatory, abusive, aggressive, harassing, or any other related problematic behavior that compromises the well-being, equality, security, or dignity of others. We respect personal boundaries of both space, bandwidth, and time. We respect personal privacy and ask permission to take photos/recordings. We respect personal privacy during field camping.

6. We have a plan for reporting unwanted behavior.

This includes clear information on who to report to in case of unwanted behavior, including on who to report to if unwanted behavior comes from the lead of the fieldwork. We will have a plan to give all field work participants access to communication devices in remote areas.

References / Further Reading

Further resources are cited below:

1. Association of Polar Early Career Scientists - Field Code of Conduct [Internet]. [cited 2023 Apr 18]. Available from: <https://www.apecs.is/career-resources/diversity-equity-inclusion/field-code-of-conduct.html>
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