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Identifying Ethical Principles that Apply to All Geoscientists: *AGI Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct*

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Many geoscience societies and organizations have developed codes of practice, ethics, and/or conduct (for example, see <http://www.americangeosciences.org/policy/policy-positions/ethics> for links to 13 codes). These codes usually emphasize specific topics that are of particular interest to that organization's members, such as research or publishing ethics, business obligations, or matters specific to a subdiscipline. While these codes are extremely important for the groups and disciplines that they address, they seldom identify broad ethical principles that would apply to all geoscientists and their professional activities.

The Geological Society of America convened a meeting in 1997 that recognized the need for a set of guidelines that would be "an expression of the highest common denominator of values for the profession" [1] and the American Geosciences Institute (AGI) was asked to coordinate the development of such guidelines. AGI is a nonprofit federation of 51 geoscientific and professional organizations that represent many facets of the geosciences. It serves as a voice for shared interests in the geosciences and one of its roles is to facilitate collaboration and discussion on matters of common or overarching concern to the approximately 250,000 members of its member societies. The *AGI Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct* were developed through a consensus process involving all member societies; they were first published in 1999 [2] and revised in 2015 [3].

The *Guidelines* are an aspirational document, addressing common ethical topics across the geoscience community. The *Guidelines* set out ideals and high levels of achievement for the profession but they have no provision for disciplinary or enforcement action. The ethics statements of individual societies and organizations may, and often do, expand beyond the *Guidelines*; nevertheless, 28 member societies have endorsed the *Guidelines for Ethical Professional Conduct* to date.

The 2015 *Guidelines* recognize the critical role that geoscientists play in decision making about stewardship of the Earth, the use of its resources, and the interactions between humankind and the planet on which we live. They exhort geoscientists to adhere to the highest ethical standards in all professional activities. The overarching standards are listed under two categories: how individual geoscientists should behave in day-to-day activities, and how they should behave as members of a professional and scientific community.

Compared to the 1999 version, the 2015 *Guidelines* place more emphasis on the societal context of the geosciences, the obligation on geoscientists to earn public trust and confidence, and the importance of communication, education, and an acceptance of the limits of our current understanding of natural systems.

References:

[1] Stephenson D et al (1997) *Geotimes* 42(11): 29-32

[2] Stow S (1999) *Geotimes* 44(8): 5, 13

[3] American Geosciences Institute (2015) <http://www.americangeosciences.org/community/agi-guidelines-ethical-professional-conduct>

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