



# PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES COMMITTEE

## 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

*This report was prepared by Christian Reus-Smit, acting as the chair of the ISA Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee (members include Kristian Gleditch, Cameron Thies, Aseem Prakash, and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell, with ex-officio Tom Volgy). The report was submitted December 22, 2014 for the 2015 Governing Council meeting in New Orleans.*

## FULL REPORT

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In the past year the Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee addressed two issues: it conducted an inquiry into charges of misconduct against two ISA members; and it considered the issue of ISA Editors and blogging. In both cases, the Committee has recommendations for the Governing Council to consider at the New Orleans meeting.

### REVISION OF THE GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE OF THE ISA CODE OF CONDUCT

The Committee's report on the misconduct inquiry was submitted to, and endorsed by, the ISA Executive Committee meeting held at the 2014 American Political Science Association Conference in Washington. The details of the case cannot be set out here, but the case highlighted an issue that requires clarification in the grievance procedure of the ISA Code of Conduct.

The Code clearly states that it 'refers to ISA members in the course of ISA activities'. The Committee believes that this should be reiterated in the section of the Code that sets out the grievance procedure. It thus recommends that under 'Addressing Grievances' Article I be revised to read:

'The Procedure for investigating allegations of a breach of this code will normally commence with the mediation process outlined under II below; however, in exceptional cases, the formal procedure may be used without exhausting the mediation process. As this Code of Conduct applies to relations between ISA members in the course of ISA activities, this Procedure will be undertaken only when the complainant is an ISA member and was a member at the time of the alleged misconduct.

### ISA EDITORS AND BLOGGING

The Toronto meeting of the Governing Council asked the Committee to consider the issues associated with ISA Journal Editors engaging in blogging, in particular them convening private blog sites, and to make recommendations to the Council where appropriate. The Committee's report and two recommendations are attached here.

# ADDENDUM: ISA EDITORS AND THE QUESTION OF BLOGGING – DECEMBER 2014

Report of the Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee

## BACKGROUND

At the 2013 American Political Science Association Conference, the Executive Committee of ISA drafted a proposal restricting the rights of editors of ISA journals to maintain private ‘blogs’. The Committee was responding to a controversy surrounding an offensive entry posted on the Duck of Minerva blog site, a blog run in part by an ISA editor-elect. While there was no suggestion that the editor-elect, or the blog’s other convenors, had acted improperly, the Committee was concerned about a) the responsibilities of ISA editors to foster a professional workplace that now extended in complex ways into new media, and b) that postings on blog sites associated with ISA editors might be misconstrued as the Association’s policy, position, or opinion. The Committee’s proposed solution, which was to be submitted to the Governing Council meeting in Toronto in 2014, sought to deal with the issue by requiring ISA editors to forego running private blogs during their terms as editors.

News of the Committee’s proposal generated considerable concern and debate among the ISA’s membership, and the Association was criticized in a number of high profile newspaper articles (in the New York Times and the Guardian) for restricting editors’ freedom of expression. In response, then ISA President Harvey Starr withdrew the proposal and recommended instead that the issue be sent to the Professional Rights and Responsibilities Committee for further consideration, a recommendation endorsed by the Toronto Governing Council meeting. This report presents the Committee’s findings and recommendations. Please note that the Committee explored whether other cognate associations (APSA, BISA, for example) have policies in this area, but found nothing of direct relevance.

## THE POLICY CHALLENGE

A review of the reasons behind the original Executive Committee proposal and the many responses that followed highlight three imperatives that need to be reconciled in any future ISA policy.

1. *Upholding the professional responsibilities of ISA Editors.* This appeared in two forms in the debates. First, that Editors have a responsibility, as ISA Office Holders, to foster a professional workplace, a workplace made more complex by the extension of academic debate across new media. Even when Editors behave professionally, it was suggested, postings on their private blogs may compromise such a workplace. Second, that the role of the Editor is to serve as a neutral judge of other scholars’ work, and that this neutrality can be compromised by blogging that often involves opinion and policy advocacy.
2. *Protecting the Association from false attribution.* The controversy surrounding the original Duck of Minerva posting raised concerns on the Executive Committee that postings on private blogs run by ISA Editors might be read as reflecting the policy, position, or opinion of the Association. It should be noted here that the original posting was not made by an ISA Editor, and the Editor-elect associated with the blog moved, along with the blog’s other convenors, to remove it immediately.
3. *Protecting Editor’s freedom of expression and capacity to exploit new media in their research.* While many of those who criticized the Executive Committee’s original proposal acknowledged the importance of the first two imperatives, they insisted that no policy adopted by the Association should undermine ISA Editors’ freedom of expression, or impede their ability to meet the needs of their research by actively engaging in blogging and other social media. Many argued that while private blogs provide Editors with forums in which they can air opinions and intervene in policy debates, this was not unique to blogs: other social media afford the same opportunities, as do more traditional forums.

## THE CONTEXT OF DECISION

Any viable policy response to the issue of ISA Editors and blogging has to accommodate all three of these imperatives, not the least because the debate that followed the original Executive Committee proposal shows that an approach that fails to reconcile all three is unlikely to be approved by the Governing Council. If this is true, then a viable policy response is likely to fall into the realm of ‘soft norms’ rather than ‘hard rules’. While the first two imperatives might be met by rules circumscribing the activities of Editors, it is difficult to see how such rules can meet all three.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Pursuing the soft norms approach, the Committee recommends two changes to the Association’s Code of Conduct, changes that clarify the Association’s realm of activity, and state, for the first time, the special responsibilities of ISA Office Holders, including Editors, to uphold and observe the Code of Conduct within that realm of activity.

### *Recommendation 1:*

That Article Ia be revised to include editing of ISA journals within the Associations specified activities. Revised, it would state:

‘ISA activities include the ISA’s annual conventions, international conventions, regional meetings, pre- or post-conference workshops, and editing of the Association’s journals’.

### *Recommendation 2:*

That a new Article II be inserted that specifies the special responsibilities of ISA Office Holders, including Editors. It would state:

‘ISA Office Holders, from the President and Executive Director to members of the Governing Council and Editors of ISA journals, have a special responsibility to uphold and observe the Code of Conduct, promoting in the Association’s activities a professional environment characterized by constructive debate and the treatment of all members with dignity and respect’.

While these recommendations are ‘light’ they have three advantages. First, by expanding the specified activities of the Association to include editing of ISA journals, and specifying the special responsibilities of Office Holders, including editors, they clarify the Association’s norms in which its Editors work without limiting their freedom of expression or ability to engage social media. Second, their effectiveness depends on something the Association already invests in—the professional judgement of its Editors—while providing a normative basis on which to call Editors to account for lapses in such judgement. Indeed, one strength of these recommendations is that they reaffirm the Association’s trust in its Editors’ judgement. Third, while the recommendations are broad enough to cover the professionalism of Editors’ blogging activities, they do not single out blogging from forums of communication, thus addressing the concern that blogging is no more problematic than other forms of new or traditional media.

## THE QUESTION OF A DISCLAIMER

In the debate that followed the Executive Committee’s original proposal, it was suggested that ISA Editors might attach disclaimers to their private blogs or blog postings stating that the opinions expressed there do not reflect the policy, position, or opinion of the Association. Indeed, the first draft of this report recommended that such a disclaimer be posted on any blog site where an ISA Editor was a convenor. However, for the following reasons we decided, in the end, against such a recommendation.

First, in the original draft of this report we expressed two misgivings about the use of disclaimers: that requiring them on individual blog postings would be cumbersome, even impossible, to implement (hence our original recommendation that they be used on blog sites not postings), and, more importantly, that a disclaimer does not absolve an Office Holder

of her responsibility to uphold the ISA's Code of Conduct: a sexist or racist remark, or a breach of confidentiality, calls into question Officer Holder's professionalism irrespective of whether it is made under cover of a disclaimer. In fact, we noted that disclaimers might have the perverse effect of protecting unprofessional behaviour behind a disclaimer.

Second, when we circulated the original draft report our recommendation that a disclaimer be used on the blog sites of ISA Office Holders met with a repeated criticism, one that we ultimately found compelling: that we had wrongly singled out blogging as a uniquely problematic mode of communication, where our stated objective was not to do this. It was argued persuasively that blogging is not, in essence, any different from communication through other new media, or, for that matter, traditional academic forums, all of which can be vehicles for unprofessional conduct, and all of which enable the expression of views that might be confused with those of the Association. To be consistent, it was argued, we would have to require ISA Office Holders to use disclaimers when engaging in all of these modes of communication, which everyone agreed was undesirable and impractical.

## FINAL REMARKS

Advent of new media is transforming the academic workplace, affecting the location and boundaries of the classroom, providing new forums for the dissemination of knowledge, and creating new arenas for scholarly debate, arenas that often blur the boundaries between professional and private communication. This is affecting the ISA's realm of activities, raising challenging questions about how best to maintain a professional, open, and respectful community of scholarship. The issue of Editors and blogging shows how difficult these challenges can be. The Duck of Minerva posting, the original Executive Committee proposal, and the subsequent debate (within and outside ISA) highlighted at least three imperatives that we, as a community, want to meet as we seek to address this issue: ensuring the professional conduct of ISA Editors as they navigate new media; protecting the reputation of the Association; and respecting Editors' freedom of expression and right to engage new media in their research. The recommendations above are designed to meet these imperatives.