

Bylaws of the ACM SIGSAC Committee on Preserving Professional Conduct and Academic Ethics (SIGSAC PROTECT)

Article I: Name

The name of the committee shall be the **SIGSAC Committee on Preserving Professional Conduct and Academic Ethics (SIGSAC PROTECT)**.

Article II: Purpose and Mission

Purpose:

SIGSAC PROTECT is established to uphold and promote professional conduct and academic ethics within the SIGSAC community and across the academic security & privacy community. In response to a surge in unethical behaviors reported across computer security and related conferences, this committee aims to safeguard the integrity of the peer review process and maintain trust within our community.

Mission Statement:

SIGSAC PROTECT is dedicated to preserving the highest standards of professional conduct and academic ethics by engaging with the community, providing timely responses to ethical risks, and developing long-term mechanisms to ensure the scientific integrity of security and privacy conferences.

Article III: Background

Recent reports have highlighted growing unethical behaviors in cybersecurity conferences, including but not limited to:

- **Review Disclosure:** Revealing the content of reviews and the identities of reviewers.
- **Author-Reviewer Favoritism:** Authors contacting Program Committee (PC) and relevant reviewers for favorable reviews.
- **Collusion Rings:** Coordinated bidding for papers and mutual support among PC members.
- **Cross-Region Collusion:** Universities in different regions assisting each other's submissions.
- **Reviewer Manipulation:** Reviewers allowing authors to write their own reviews.

- **Manipulation of Conflicts:** both under-declaring or over-declaring conflicts of interest.
- **Other Issues:** Coercion, lack of reproducibility of results, AI-generated text in both papers and reviews, etc.

This ethical crisis mirrors challenges faced in other communities, such as Computer Architecture, Databases, Networking, or AI/ML, where similar issues have threatened the integrity of the review process. The rapid expansion of conferences has exacerbated these challenges, necessitating immediate and sustained action.

Article IV: Objectives and Missions

Top Three Missions for SIGSAC PROTECT:

- 1. Establish, propose, and promote key principles for fair and transparent peer review**
 - **Expertise-Based Matching:** Advocate the use of detailed reviewer profiles and advanced algorithms to assign papers based on topic alignment, gradually moving away from manual bidding. Previous attempts at automated assignments were discontinued; reviving and refining this approach will enhance assignment accuracy and fairness.
 - **Conflict of Interest and Collusion Detection:** Implement stringent conflict of interest (COI) policies and implement tools such as collusion ring detection. Provide/collect suggestions for the vetting of PC members. These measures will help identify and mitigate potential collusions and unethical behaviors, maintaining the integrity of the review process.
 - **Diverse Reviewer Pool:** Advocate the recruitment of a diverse group of reviewers from various backgrounds and regions to incorporate multiple perspectives and reduce potential biases. A diverse reviewer pool enhances the quality and fairness of reviews by bringing in a wide range of insights and experiences.
- 2. Facilitate Community Support and Engagement**
 - **Resource Hub:** Develop an online platform offering resources such as best practice documents, review templates, and FAQs. This hub will serve as a go-to place for both new and experienced community members to find support.
 - **Regular Feedback Collection:** Conduct surveys and open forums to gather input from authors and reviewers about their experiences. Use this feedback to identify areas for improvement and adjust practices accordingly.
- 3. Promote Transparency and Facilitate Reporting**
 - **Whistleblower Reporting Mechanism:** Create a secure and confidential channel for community members to report concerns or unethical behavior. This system will accept anonymous reports with verifiable evidence, protecting

whistleblowers and ensuring genuine issues are addressed without emphasizing punitive actions.

- **Open Communication Channels:** Provide platforms for authors and reviewers to seek clarifications or express concerns about their reviews. Facilitating respectful and constructive dialogue enhances trust and understanding within the community.

Additional Initiatives:

- **Leverage Existing ACM Mechanisms:** Collaborate with ACM's [Committee on Professional Ethics \(COPE\)](#) and the [Publication Ethics and Plagiarism Committee](#) to ensure our efforts complement existing structures. Formal ethical complaints can be directed to these bodies, allowing SIGSAC PROTECT to focus on proactive improvements.
 - **Continuous Improvement:** Establish metrics and feedback loops to regularly assess and refine our review processes, ensuring that SIGSAC PROTECT remains responsive to the community's evolving needs.
-

Article V: Membership

Committee Composition:

The SIGSAC PROTECT committee shall consist of the following members to ensure comprehensive representation and effective functioning:

- **Chair:**
 - Appointed by the SIGSAC Executive Committee.
 - Responsible for leading meetings, setting agendas, and overseeing the committee's initiatives.
- **Vice Chairs:**
 - Appointed by the SIGSAC Executive Committee.
 - Assist the Chair in their duties and act as Chair in their absence.
- **Secretary:**
 - Appointed by the SIGSAC Executive Committee.
 - Responsible for maintaining records, documenting meeting minutes, and handling correspondence.
- **Steering Committee Representatives:**
 - The steering committee of each of the following major security conferences designates one representative:
 - **Oakland (IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy)**
 - **CCS (ACM Conference on Computer and Communications Security)**
 - **NDSS (Network and Distributed System Security Symposium)**
 - **USENIX Security Symposium**

- **Regional Representatives:**
 - Appointed by the chair. One representative each from the following regions to ensure global perspectives:
 - **North America**
 - **Asia**
 - **Europe**

Selection Criteria:

- **Expertise:** Members should have a strong understanding of academic ethics and professional conduct.
- **Commitment:** Demonstrated dedication to upholding the integrity of the SIGSAC community.
- **Diversity:** Representation from various backgrounds, institutions, and geographic regions to promote a wide range of perspectives.

Terms of Service:

- **Duration:** Members shall serve for a term of two years, with the possibility of renewal based on performance and community needs. A member can serve at most two consecutive terms.

Article VI: Conflict of Interests

Definition:

A **Conflict of Interest (COI)** arises when a committee member has a personal, financial, or professional interest (e.g., those defined by the National Science Foundation <https://www.nsf.gov/pubs/manuals/manual15.pdf>) that could improperly influence their judgment or actions within the committee.

Disclosure:

- All committee members must disclose any potential conflicts of interest upon joining the committee and whenever a new conflict arises during their tenure.
- Disclosures should be made in writing to the Chair and recorded in the committee's official records.

Recusal:

- Committee members must recuse themselves from any investigation, discussion, or decision-making process where a COI exists.

- Recusal ensures that the investigation remains impartial and that the integrity of the committee is maintained.

Procedure for Managing COIs:

1. **Identification:**
 - Upon disclosure, the Chair will assess the nature and extent of the conflict.
2. **Action:**
 - If a conflict is deemed significant, the affected member will be asked to step aside from related activities.
 - The committee may appoint an alternative member to handle the specific task to maintain continuity and impartiality.
3. **Documentation:**
 - All instances of COI disclosures and subsequent actions will be documented to ensure transparency and accountability.

Non-Disclosure:

- Committee members are prohibited from concealing any conflicts of interest.
- Failure to disclose a COI may result in removal from the committee to preserve its integrity.

Support:

- The committee will provide guidance and support to members in identifying and managing potential conflicts of interest.
-

Article VII: Responsibilities and Duties

- **Confidentiality:** All reports and committee deliberations are confidential to protect the privacy of involved parties.
 - **Engage with Community:** Actively gather input and identify ethical risks through engagement with community members.
 - **Response Coordination:** Provide timely and coordinated responses to identified ethical risks, ensuring that actions are both effective and respectful.
 - **Develop Long-Term Safeguards:** Create mechanisms and policies to sustain academic integrity and ethical conduct in the long term.
-

Article VIII: Reporting Procedures

Submission of Reports:

- Community members can submit reports anonymously to sigsac.protect@acm.org with verifiable evidence. Access to this email account is restricted to the Chair, Vice Chairs, and Secretary of SIGSAC Protect.
- Partial information can be provided to protect the reporter's identity.

Handling Complaints:

Formal Complaints: structured reports submitted with verifiable evidence detailing specific instances of unethical behavior or misconduct.

- The Procedure:
 - Upon receiving a formal complaint, the chairs will appoint a team of non-conflicted committee members to review the case.
 - The appointed team will evaluate the evidence and report their findings to the chairs and the rest of the committee (excluding conflicted members).
 - The committee and chairs will then decide on the appropriate course of action, potentially through a voting process.
- In cases deemed viable, SIGSAC PROTECT will assist in preparing materials and provide guidance for submitting formal complaints to ACM committees
- To ensure impartiality, any PROTECT committee members with conflicts of interest related to the offenders will be excluded from handling the case.

Informal Complaints: initial discussions or reports about perceived unethical behavior without the submission of formal evidence.

- For informal issues, the committee will take timely and coordinated actions to address and mitigate ethical risks. It may lead to formal complaints if further investigation confirms the issues.

Confidentiality:

- All reports and interactions are confidential to protect the privacy of involved parties and whistleblowers.
-

Article IX: Collaboration and Coordination

- **Within ACM Committees:** Coordinate closely with ACM's COPE and the Publication Ethics and Plagiarism Committee to ensure comprehensive handling of ethical issues.
 - **Cross-Conference Collaboration:** Work with PC chairs of major security conferences to standardize review policies and practices, and to share best practices for maintaining ethical standards.
-

Article X: Enforcement and Sanctions

- **No Punitive Power:** SIGSAC PROTECT will not impose sanctions. Instead, it will advise and support the removal or limitation of PC members involved in unethical behavior.
 - **Recommendation Policies:** Advise Steering Committees on Program Chair selections and other key roles based on ethical evaluations and reports.
-

Article XI: Amendments

- **Proposal:** Amendments to the bylaws may be proposed by any committee member.
 - **Approval:** Amendments require a two-thirds majority vote from the committee members to be adopted.
-

Article XII: Miscellaneous

- **Transparency:** While maintaining confidentiality, the committee will share aggregated data and insights with the community to promote transparency and trust.
-

Article XIII: Dissolution

- **Procedure:** The committee may be dissolved by a two-thirds majority vote of its members. In the event of dissolution, any ongoing issues will be handed over to the appropriate ACM committees or other designated bodies to ensure continued oversight and integrity.
-

Article XIV: Adoption

These bylaws shall be effective upon approval by the SIGSAC Executive Committee and shall remain in effect until amended or dissolved by the procedures outlined herein.

Somesh Jha
ACM SIGSAC PROTECT Committee Chair

XiaoFeng Wang
ACM SIGSAC Chair