

Rhetoric Society of America
Policy on Discrimination, Harassment and Respectful Behavior

The Rhetoric Society of America is committed to providing a supportive environment for conducting all the scholarly and professional activities under its sponsorship. It seeks to host meetings, conferences, institutes, projects, and other RSA-sponsored activities that uphold its core values of inclusion, safety, and mutual respect. RSA expects participants at all its sponsored activities to follow the same standards of ethical engagement there as they do elsewhere in their practice as scholars and educators and in everyday life.

Our standards do not tolerate any discrimination, harassment, or other unwelcome conduct that is based on a person's age, body size, color, physical or mental disability, medical condition, employment status, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, national origin, physical appearance, military or veteran status, ancestry, political perspective, race, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and medical conditions related to pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding), sex stereotyping, sexual orientation, genetic information, or any other protected status of an individual or that individual's associates or relatives. We interpret these protected statuses broadly to include both the actual status and also any perceptions and assumptions made regarding these statuses. Our standards call for sensitivity to power dynamics, exhibited in part through respect for the ideas, work, personal autonomy, and contributions of individuals in more junior positions in the field. Our standards include a belief in the rights of free speech and open inquiry, as well as respect and tolerance for people with worldviews, opinions, and experiences different from our own. RSA counts on all its members to hold themselves and each other to these expectations.

Non-Harassment Policy

In accordance with these core values, the Society's anti-harassment policy states:

In order to maintain a professional and comfortable environment for its members, conference and institute registrants, and staff, the society requires certain standards of behavior. These standards include, without limitation, courtesy of discourse, respect for the diversity of RSA members and sponsored event attendees, and the ability to conduct RSA business and participate in the RSA conference/institute in a nonthreatening, collegial atmosphere. RSA members and conference/institute participants who do not uphold these standards may jeopardize their membership and/or event participation.

Prohibited Conduct

The conduct prohibited by this policy, whether verbal, physical, or visual, includes any discriminatory action and any unwelcome conduct that is inflicted on someone because of that individual's protected status. Among the types of unwelcome conduct prohibited by this policy are epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping, intimidating acts, and the circulation or posting of written or graphic materials that show hostility toward individuals because of their protected status.

The RSA also prohibits advocating for or encouraging such conduct, which includes, but is not limited to:

- Remarks that reinforce damaging social structures of domination (e.g., related to an individual's sex (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, physical appearance, class, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, national identity, employment status, or other legally protected characteristics).
- Photography or recording without the subject's consent.
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events.
- Retaliation against any person for consulting or cooperating with members of the Professional Conduct Committee, or for filing a complaint.
- Demeanor and behavior that is recognized or ought to be recognized as offensive to non-dominant or vulnerable groups.
- Verbal abuse, jokes, and epithets that target race, ethnicity, religion, or national identity.
- Harassing, discriminatory or other forms of communication that a reasonable person would consider threatening, intimidating, hostile or offensive, which includes spoken and written words in or on social media supported by RSA, clothing, etc.

The RSA prohibits that conduct during RSA-sponsored events, meetings, and other business, even if the conduct is not sufficiently severe or pervasive to constitute a violation of law.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment deserves special mention. Harassing conduct based on gender often is sexual in nature but sometimes is not. This policy forbids harassment based on gender regardless of whether the offensive conduct is sexual in nature. Any unwelcome conduct based on gender is also forbidden by this policy regardless of whether the individual engaged in harassment and the individual being harassed are of the same or are of different genders.

This policy forbids harassment based on gender regardless of whether it rises to the level of a legal violation. Examples of gender-based harassment forbidden by this policy include (1) offensive sex-oriented verbal kidding, teasing or jokes, (2) repeated unwanted sexual flirtations, advances or propositions, (3) verbal abuse of a sexual nature, (4) graphic or degrading comments about an individual's appearance or sexual activity, (5) offensive visual conduct, including leering, making sexual gestures, the display of offensive sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons or posters, (6) unwelcome pressure for sexual activity, (7) offensively suggestive or obscene letters, notes or invitations, (8) offensive physical contact such as patting, grabbing, pinching, or brushing against another's body, and (9) sexual favoritism.

Member Responsibility

Every member of RSA can help assure that our Society is free from prohibited discrimination or harassment.

Avoiding Prohibited Conduct

Everyone is expected to avoid any behavior or conduct that could reasonably be interpreted as prohibited harassment; no RSA members, including RSA's officers and members of its Board of Directors, are exempt from the requirements of this policy.