

Code of Conduct Transparency Report: Reported Violations of the SICB Annual Meeting Code of Conduct and Harassment Policy at the 2020 SICB Annual Meeting in Austin

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Beginning this year and going forward, the SICB Code of Conduct Committee (or equivalent) plans to release a “Transparency Report” summarizing incidents, outcomes, and related actions from the Annual Meeting. The purpose of this Transparency Report is to inform the SICB community about the number and types of reported Code of Conduct violations at the annual meeting, and to give a sense of how the [Code of Conduct](#) functions. For confidentiality, reports have been aggregated to avoid inadvertently linking reporters or accused to incidents or disciplinary actions. Further comments on the level of detail in this report are provided at the end.

From the 2020 SICB meeting, SICB received 10 reports concerning six incidents (two incidents were the subject of more than one report).

The incidents were categorized by the Code of Conduct Committee as two cases of verbal harassment, two cases of verbal and physical harassment, one case of disrespectful disruption of an event, and one case of sexual assault.

Two of the harassment cases occurred in the hotel lobby or lobby bar late at night. In one case, two men harassed female SICB meeting attendees, and in the second case, two women harassed male SICB meeting attendees (for the purpose of this transparency report, binary genders were assumed based on superficial appearance rather than confirmed with the people involved in the incidents). In one case it was clear that the accused were not SICB attendees and in the other case, the report did not include whether the accused were SICB attendees or not. Hotel management was made aware of these harassment incidents and was informed that they are unacceptable to SICB. For future meetings, SICB will work more closely with venue management and security prior to the meeting to clarify that this kind of harassment is unacceptable to SICB.

In two of the harassment cases, the accused were unidentified exhibitors. Like all SICB meeting participants, exhibits staff are subject to the Code of Conduct and were informed of the Code. For future meetings, SICB will do more to make certain that exhibitors are familiar with the Code of Conduct and knowingly agree to abide by it.

All complaints were handled confidentially. For four of the six reported incidents, the identity of the accused was kept anonymous at the request of the reporter or was unknown to the reporter. Such reports provide valuable information in terms of where, when and what types of incidents occur, but investigation and disciplinary actions were not possible.

¹ This group has not previously been named the SICB Code of Conduct Committee, but the Code specifies the duties of these officers as similar to what other societies are calling a Code of Conduct Committee.

For the remaining two reported incidents, the SICB Code of Conduct Committee followed the “SICB Procedures for Responding to Harassment Complaints at Annual Meetings” as described within the [Code of Conduct](#). In one of the cases, one or more members of the Code of Conduct Committee served as independent investigators with the President and Executive Director serving as adjudicators. Relevant information was sought from witnesses and from the accused. Disciplinary actions appropriate to the offenses were imposed. Examples of disciplinary actions are listed in the section "Disciplinary Action" in the [Code of Conduct](#).

Of the 10 reports, one was made anonymously through the online EthicsPoint reporting system, eight were made non-anonymously through EthicsPoint, and one was made in person to a Safety Coordinator. Some of the reports were made by Safety Allies or other bystanders on behalf of targets who wished to remain anonymous. No reports were made using the telephone hotline. All reports were made hours to days after the incident (i.e., not during the incident). Reports were all received toward the end of meeting or after it ended: 1 report on the 3rd day of the 5-day meeting; 5 reports on the 5th day; and the remainder after the end of the meeting (3-14 days after).

Context Statement:

SICB has had an Annual Meeting Code of Conduct since the 2017 meeting and a Code of Conduct with investigation procedures and listed disciplinary actions since the 2018 meeting. This is the first year that SICB is compiling and releasing a transparency report. Conduct-related issues, particularly as they relate to inclusion, are a rapidly evolving area for SICB. With each new initiative we must balance transparency with confidentiality. In this report, we have leaned somewhat more toward confidentiality in that the report does not name specific disciplinary actions. With so few actionable reports, it would be relatively easy to determine which sanctions were applied to a particular incident, or in some cases, to a particular person. A breach of confidentiality could cause damage to the offender’s reputation that is out of proportion with the nature of the offense (this is not always the case, but the policy must be applied consistently). Building trust within the SICB community that disciplinary actions in response to Code of Conduct violations will be proportional to the offenses is important for the Code of Conduct to function well to protect our community from harassment and improve the inclusivity of our meetings.