

Report and Review of Ethical Matters at SETAC in 2022

SETAC leadership (governance members, editors, and staff) are continuously working to foster an inclusive culture, consistent with SETAC values. Transparency and integrity are two of our core values, so we are sharing with the membership a report of our work in the area over the past year.

Summary

SETAC received eleven complaints from members, all were investigated and resolved.

Two were from the SETAC Europe meeting; two were from the SETAC North America meeting.

One report of a past breach.

Six were from the SETAC journals.

Thirty-three incidents of potential plagiarism were caught by screening software.

SETAC Work Related to Ethics

Most [SETAC Policies](#) were promulgated to ensure an affirming culture at the society that nurtures high ethical and scientific integrity standard. This year, we focused on providing proactive guidelines to support our priorities of nurturing a collaborative and inclusive environment by developing [tips for fostering inclusive scientific discussions](#). We provided the guidelines to chairs at the SETAC North America meeting, and encourage you to read them, too!

Concerns Related to Ethics in 2022

We received several reports of policy breaches. Below is a summary of the concerns raised and how they were addressed organized by policy:

Code of Conduct

Three incidents related to the code of conduct were reported in conjunction with our meetings program in 2022. Two complaints centered on uncivil behavior and disrespect. The executive director spoke with the people who were accused of disrespectful behavior and resolved the matter simply, as described in the problem resolution procedure. In the other case, a meeting attendee did not feel physically safe around another attendee. There, the compliance officers developed a safety plan with the individual and monitored the situation throughout the meeting to the satisfaction of the individual.

Code of Ethics and Scientific Integrity

SETAC received a complaint that some members breached SETAC's Code of Ethics during presentations given at SETAC meetings in 2017, 2018, and 2019 by including "fraudulent content in terms of falsified science data, ecotoxicological and toxicological data that were copied from other sources and not properly accredited." The complaint further questioned some scientific methods used that were reported in those presentations.

SETAC Participants Policy requires all meeting participants to adhere to SETAC policies including the Code of Ethics and Copyright Policy. SETAC code of ethics states that members should "conduct themselves and their work responsibly and with integrity" and that "observe the spirit of research integrity." However, SETAC has no way of policing what participants share in presentations as they are not peer-reviewed. Therefore, we did not find the complaint actionable. We clarified to the complainant that meeting presentations are not peer-reviewed content. We then took action to note that meeting presentations are not peer reviewed content in abstract books being developed.

The SNA Board received a report of a past breach. The ED asked the reported target if they would like to file a complaint and did not hear back.

Publications Ethics

The most common ethical issue at the SETAC journals is plagiarism. Typically, this is the result of an author drawing too heavily from their own work and not the theft of someone else's work, though we did have one instance of the latter. Both journals use software that screens submissions and provides a "similarity report." If the threshold of similarity to another published work is too high, an editor will review the material to determine if it is suitable to continue through the process. Neither SETAC journal considers publication on a preprint server "prior publication," so that would be one such exception to the similarity rule of rejection.

Manuscripts rejected for plagiarism

ET&C: 21

IEAM: 12

Plagiarized work after publication

An ET&C author raised concerns about a paper they were asked to review at another journal. This paper drew heavily from one recently accepted at ET&C. The editorial offices of both journals collaborated to compare both submissions. The paper from the other journal was rejected; the article at ET&C was published.

Reviewer standards

The other matters that arose in 2022 largely pertained to the review process. The biggest issue we saw was that reviewers recommended that authors cite several of their own papers with little to no justification. This is unacceptable. Reviewers are warned against the practice on the first instance and let go from the journal's reviewer pool if it happens again.

Paper mills

A "paper mill" is a term used in publishing to reference manufactured manuscripts that sell researchers authorship on a publication for a fee. Four paper mill papers were identified in 2022: three at IEAM and one at ET&C. All four were rejected without review, being out of scope and of poor quality.

Data transparency

Every article published in both ET&C and IEAM has a [data availability statement](#), which is intended to direct the reader to the underlying data. Both journals still allow, though they both discourage, authors to indicate that their "data is available upon request." Anecdotally, we have heard that readers have had mixed results when reaching out to authors to provide the data. The journal editorial office will help you procure the data, if you are unsuccessful; and if the author continues to evade their responsibility to provide the data, an editorial note of concern will be added to the article in question.

Future SETAC Work Related to Ethics

We are resolved to continue to foster a culture that nurtures scientific and ethical integrity. We will continue to provide tips and encourage adherence to guidelines. We welcome [feedback](#) as it gives us the opportunity to address issues as they arise.