

# Statement of Ethics for Latinamericanist Geographers<sup>1</sup>

*Adopted by Unanimous Vote at the LASG Business Meeting, Washington D.C.*

*April 15, 2010 8 to 9 pm.*

We, the Latin America Specialty Group of the AAG, are committed to uphold the highest principles of ethical conduct in our teaching, research, service, publications, mentoring/advising, and fieldwork. Latinamericanist geographers (LAGs) hail from many different communities, each endowed with its own moral guidelines. We also hold allegiances to scholarly disciplines, the broader society and culture, the human species, other species, and the integrity of places and things.

Given the complexity of international field research, it is possible that conflict and misunderstanding may arise. LAGs are responsible for coping with such difficulties and striving to mitigate them in ways compatible with the principles stated here. This Code aims to foster dialogue and education and embraces the Association of American Geographers (AAG) intolerance of unethical conduct.

The principles and guidelines in this Code provide LAGs with some of the skills in creating an ethical context for geographical work in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## **II. Introduction**

The purpose of this Code is to provide members of the Latin American Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers (AAG) with guiding principles for making ethical choices in carrying out geographical work. Because geographers often find themselves in intricate situations and subject to more than one code of ethics, the [Professional Statement on Ethics \(rev. 10/2009\)](#) provides a guideline, not a steadfast metric, for arriving at ethically-sensitive decisions. Our starting point is the AAG's Professional Statement on Ethics' Preamble, which notes that "No one statement can possibly cover the range of ethical matters confronted by geographers." In that spirit, we highlight particular conundrums that are germane to carrying out research in the places we work.

LAGs have an obligation to be informed about codes of conduct germane to their work in both home countries and throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

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<sup>1</sup> The basis of this code draws heavily from [the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association](#).

The Latin America Specialty Group encourages members to seek out training on current research activities and ethical issues that are relevant to geography and related disciplines but also throughout Latin America and the Caribbean where geopolitical, economic, environmental, gender, ethnic, and cultural relationships are in flux.

LAGs must carefully assess ethical choices and be ready to outline clearly the facts, assumptions, and issues that underpin such choices. Accordingly, these guidelines address *broad* contexts, priorities and relationships that should be considered in ethically sensitive geographical work at home and abroad.

### **III. Research**

LAGs must be transparent when proposing and conducting research, which is often, though not always, conducted outside their home country. This requires clear, full, and open acknowledgment of the source(s) of funding for their research projects, the uses of the resulting research findings, and the impacts that work might have on sponsors, informants, colleagues, students, and others who might be directly or indirectly affiliated with or impacted by their research. Furthermore, LAGs must use their research findings in an appropriate manner and disseminate said findings through legitimate and timely activities.

LAGs must be sensitive to the particular challenge of conducting research in what is often a cross-cultural context for geographers working outside their home countries. LAGs are committed to conducting research and disseminating research findings and data in the language(s) appropriate to the countries and particular populations where they are working.

LAGs must be aware of the risk of compromising geographers' ethics as a prerequisite to conducting research, while also respecting the obligations of maintaining good citizenship or guest-host relationships. Research results should be made available as promptly as is feasible, and, ideally, will be presented by the researchers themselves to, local communities or others who have participated in the research process, with opportunities for feedback and discussion of findings.

#### **A. Consideration of people and all living entities (animals and plants) with whom LAGs work and whose lives, institutions, places, heritage, and cultures they study.**

1. LAGs have ethical commitments to the people, species, environments, institutions and materials they research and to the people with whom they work. Such commitments may outweigh the aim of discovering new knowledge, and result in decisions not to undertake or to abort a research project when the main obligation diverges with other duties, such as those owed to clients or sponsors.

These ethical commitments include, but are not limited to:

Avoid doing harm such that the creation of new knowledge will harm the people or animals being studied

Respect the welfare of humans and animals

Promote a beneficial and working relationship with parties involved

2. LAGs must strive to ensure that their research does not hurt the well-being, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work overseas and at home. LAGs who work with animals should protect their safety.

3. LAGs must determine proactively whether their informants, contacts, or subjects wish to maintain anonymity or confidentiality, or to be recognized when research findings are disseminated. LAGs will do everything possible to grant such requests. They must tell their research participants about the possible outcomes of the choices, and that despite the researcher's best intentions, anonymity or confidentiality may be jeopardized.

4. Although most research with humans and animals will be vetted by LAGs' host Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) before a research project commences, the codes presented here supplement IRB appraisal. LAGs will strive to maintain the laws, and ethics of the community or country in which the research is done. It is understood that the understandings between the principal investigator (PI) and the informant will not always require a written form. Rather, the quality and substance of understandings between the PI and informant matters most.

## **B. Responsibility to scholarship**

1. LAGs obey the general moral rules of scientific and scholarly conduct: they shall not deceive or misrepresent (i.e., falsify, plagiarize), impede the reporting of misconduct, or obstruct others' research.

2. LAGs shall seriously consider all reasonable requests for access to their data and related materials for purposes of research. In considering any requests for access to data and related materials, they should also weigh the merits of these requests against needs to ensure the preservation of their fieldwork data, and the confidentiality and anonymity requests and expectations of those with whom they work. LAGs shall openly disclose to research participants at the initiation of research how data and related materials garnered from their research will be shared with and accessible to their funding agencies, and others.

## **C. Responsibility to the public**

Those who work in Latin America and the Caribbean take pride in the redeeming efforts of their research. Their duties also include respect for the parameters of civil society in host countries.

1. LAGs are responsible for the factual content of their statements but also must consider carefully the social and political implications of the information they disseminate. Practitioners should make their research appropriately available to sponsors, students, decision makers, and others, especially those residing in the Latin American and Caribbean communities in which they work. Practitioners will also make plain the empirical bases of their reports, be honest about their qualifications and political biases, and make it known that their expertise is limited.

2. LAGs have the right to consider taking a position of political advocacy which may or may not have ethical implications for their research in both Latin America and the Caribbean, and beyond.

3. Preservation of archival records is often paramount for carrying out scholarship in the region. LAGs will work to ensure that their use of public, private and archival materials of all forms—hard copy or electronic—does not jeopardize the preservation of these materials for future generations.

## **IV. Teaching**

### **Responsibility to students**

1. Mentors should conduct their research in ways that avoid discrimination against students or potential students on the basis of sex, marital status, "race," social class, political convictions, disability, religion, ethnic background, national origin, sexual orientation, or age.

2. LAGs will be available and responsive to student or trainee interests; they will supervise and encourage research; help students/trainees in getting research support; and they will help students/trainees when they seek professional placement.

3. LAGs will encourage students/trainees to engage in dialogue with colleagues and classmates on ethical issues; and encourage discussions about the ethical dimension of research projects.

4. LAGs will acknowledge student/trainee assistance in research and preparation of their work; give appropriate credit for co-authorship to both students and colleagues; and compensate students/trainees fairly for their help in all

geographic research.

5. Mentor and teacher LAGs should beware of the exploitation and grave conflicts of interest that may happen if they engage in sexual relations with students/trainees. They must avoid liaisons with students/trainees for whose training they might be in any way responsible.