A Message from MPSA's President, Past President, and President-Elect

April 13, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

We are writing to update you on recent developments regarding allegations of misconduct against AJPS Editor William Jacoby. As we explained in our previous postings on this site on Jan 22 and March 26, 2018, the MPSA leadership was made aware of allegations made by several members of our community, and of subsequent investigations being conducted the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. We initially intended to await the completion of the universities’ investigations before making any independent decisions as we - volunteer non-experts with no special training or experience in investigating sexual harassment/ misconduct charges - felt ill prepared to conduct an investigation of our own. We informed the MPSA membership of this decision via the messages posted on the MPSA website. However, when it became apparent that these university processes would extend past the MPSA conference and council meeting, the MPSA hired an attorney with experience in this area to conduct a separate investigation, gathering facts and speaking with all the individuals involved. Our attorney shared this information in person with the MPSA council in executive sessions on Thursday April 5 and Friday April 6. Based on the information provided to us at those two sessions, the council engaged in an extremely robust and thoughtful discussion - dealing with the difficult tradeoffs involved in any possible course of action, including the need to be transparent and expeditious, to balance the interests of all affected parties, to uphold the association's deeply held commitment to the highest standards of professional conduct, to follow legal standards of due process, and to limit the harm done by our actions to our membership and the association as an institution. However, after hours of deliberation, the council was not able to come to a firm conclusion about the most appropriate course of action and resolved to meet again at a later time during the conference.

After the Friday meeting, Professor Jacoby met with MPSA leaders and offered his resignation because he did not want these ongoing allegations to cause damage to the MPSA or the AJPS. He announced his decision at the AJPS Editorial Board meeting on April 6. He also offered to help the association facilitate a smooth transition to a new editor(s).

Since Professor Jacoby announced his decision to step aside from the editorship, we have heard from some of our members your concerns about keeping Jacoby on as editor through the transition, particularly authors who might wish to submit their manuscripts to the journal but are concerned about Jacoby’s ability to conduct the review in an objective and unbiased manner. To address this concern, and to have a general policy in place to allow for such situations, the council also passed an editorial conflict of interest policy. This policy allows authors to report a potential conflict of interest, triggering a process whereby an independent Publishing Ethics Committee will evaluate the request and can direct the manuscript to an alternate reviewer (typically a previous AJPS editor or editorial board member). We are currently hammering out the details of this policy with the journal's publisher and the AJPS editorial office, and hope to have it in place and available to the membership within the next few weeks. We will post the details of the policy on this site as soon as they are available. We very much hope that this COI policy - and the other steps we have taken - provide strong assurance to the membership that the MPSA leadership takes the responsibility of protecting its members from any bias or discrimination very seriously.

-- Liz Gerber, MPSA President, Vince Hutchings, Past President, Sarah Binder, President Elect