

Statement of Professional Ethics Southern Finance Association

December 2011

Preamble

Our academic world is defined by three chief institutions: our workplaces, the professional conferences we attend, and academic journals in which we publish.

In the workplace, our professional and ethical behaviors are monitored and discipline can occur. If we perform poorly or behave badly, we can be denied tenure, promotion, raises, resources and even employment.

Our behavior at conferences and journals is more difficult to monitor. Minor misbehaviors typically go undisciplined—but the collective consequences of such behavior can substantially reduce the efficacy and even the viability of these institutions.

As leaders of an organization of researchers and practitioners who benefit from professional meetings and academic journals, the directors of the Southern Finance Association and the editors of the *Journal of Financial Research* ask members to practice the behaviors outlined below, and to encourage their colleagues and PhD students to do so as well.

I. Professional conduct and ethical behavior at professional meetings

A. Submitting a conference paper

- Submitting a paper to a conference creates an implicit contract that, should the paper be accepted, the submitting author or a co-author will attend the conference. It is crucial for all parties to recognize that submitting a paper sets resource allocation in motion—rejecting other worthy papers, enlisting discussants, printing programs, etc.
- The submitting author should have a high degree of certainty that travel support is in place (whether employer- or participant-paid) before submitting the paper.
- All co-authors should be aware of and in agreement with the paper being submitted to the conference.
- Session discussants and chairs are essential to the success of a conference. When you submit a paper, always volunteer to discuss a paper and/or chair a session at the conference.

B. When your paper is accepted

- Immediately volunteer to serve as a discussant. At large regional and national conferences, discussants are often scarce—in these circumstances, presenting a paper without volunteering to discuss a paper is free-riding behavior.
- Your discussant needs time to do a useful and professional job. Deliver your paper to your discussant and other session participants by the deadline indicated.

- Send your visual presentation files (e.g., PowerPoints) to the session chair before he or she must leave home to travel to the conference.
- Should you have to cancel due to unavoidable circumstances, you remain obligated to prepare your presentation visuals and to find a replacement to present them. Ideally, this would be a co-author or some other colleague attending the conference. If this is not possible, you might turn to other session participants or the session chair.

C. At the session

- Arrive at the session at least five minutes before it begins. Introduce yourself to the chairperson and make sure that your presentation file has been loaded. If time permits, introduce yourself to the other presenters and discussants.
- As a backup, bring your presentation file to the session on a jump drive.
- The session time is a zero sum game. Deliver your presentation within the assigned time limit. When you take extra time, the other authors, discussants, and audience participants get less time.

D. At the conference

- Attend additional sessions beyond just those in which you are participating, and contribute to the general discussion of papers at the sessions you attend.
- Attend conference social events. These events provide opportunities to exchange ideas and information with many more people than you will meet at your paper sessions. There are real network economies that increase exponentially with increased attendance—by attending and actively participating you are providing an important public good.
- Conferences provide a chance to meet new people and develop new colleagues. Mingle, schmooze, network. Invite your new acquaintances to join you and your friends for dinner.

E. Chairing a session

- Being a session chair is often considered the “easiest way to participate” at a conference. But the chair is more than just a time-keeper. The chair is responsible for everything that happens at, and leading up to, the session.
- Before the conference, communicate early and often with the session participants. Make sure that everyone has committed to attend the conference, and the authors get their papers to their discussants in plenty of time for a high quality discussion.
- You are responsible for bringing a laptop computer to the session; for loading all presentations onto the laptop before the session starts; for having the computer and projector running before the session starts; and for running the laptop during the session.
- Introduce yourself to all of the presenters and discussants as they arrive.
- Be polite, but strict, about time limits. A suggested procedure: provide a five-minute warning, a two-minute warning, and send a clear signal when time has expired.
- Make sure to save significant time for question and answer periods. This is the audience’s chance to participate, and this feedback is often invaluable to the authors.

F. Serving as a discussant

- It is far too easy to criticize a paper without adding any real value. A good discussant helps the authors improve their paper by avoiding negativity, providing constructive criticism, and by proposing doable solutions.
- Time is short for the discussant. Do not spend time re-stating what the author has presented. A good discussant brings new ideas and alternative perspectives to the session.
- Despite being allocated less time than a paper presenter, session discussants are not in any way subordinate to the presenting authors. Discussants are held to the same professional and ethical standards as authors, as noted above.

G. Faculty with graduate students participating in conferences

- Conference participation, either as a paper presenter or a discussant, is an excellent learning-by-doing experience for PhD students.
- Graduate students are held to the same professional and ethical standards as seasoned academics. As a faculty mentor, you are ultimately responsible for the conference behavior of your graduate students.

II. Professional conduct and ethical behavior at academic journals

A. Submitting a paper to a journal

- All co-authors should be aware of and in agreement with the paper being submitted to the journal.
- Never submit a paper to a journal just to “get some good comments.”
- Nothing frustrates a referee more than having to read a paper that is poorly written. If English is not your first language, hire a native-speaking person to edit your paper before submitting it to a journal.
- Response time from journals can be long and variable. It is acceptable to contact the journal to inquire about the progress of your manuscript, but exhibit some patience. For example, if the journal states that its typical turn-around time is “three-to-six months,” then you should wait at least six months before inquiring about the status of your submission. Then wait another three months before making a second inquiry.

B. Re-submitting a paper

- If the editor invites you to revise and re-submit your paper, make all attempts to do so quickly. This makes the tasks of the editor and the referees much easier, as the paper will still be relatively fresh in their minds.
- When re-submitting a paper, include carefully crafted letters to the editor and the referees to explain how, and exactly where, you address their concerns in your new manuscript.

- Do not re-submit the paper unless the revised version addresses substantially all of the concerns of the editor and the referees.
- If you decide against re-submitting your paper (i.e., if you send it to a different journal, or if you abandon the effort), you should inform the journal editor of this decision.

C. When your paper gets rejected

- Never argue with the editor or the referees. Letters or emails sent to the editor or the referees complaining about why they made a mistake are impolite, will come across as antagonistic, and do not make you any new friends.
- Before submitting a rejected paper to a new journal, revise the manuscript to address the valuable comments made by the referees and editor who rejected your paper at the previous journal. Do not simply submit the paper to a new journal unchanged. By doing this, you are disrespecting the referee...who may very well be asked to review your paper by the editor of the next journal.

D. When invited to referee a journal submission

- Respond quickly to the request. If you cannot do it, the journal editor will want to search for a replacement referee as quickly as possible.
- If you cannot referee the paper, always suggest another qualified referee.
- If the paper lies in your area of expertise, you owe it to the profession to accept the assignment. You are one of the true experts, so you will be one of the best to judge.
- If the paper is not in one of your areas of expertise, recognize that you will have to do some reading of the cited literature to come up to speed. Accept the assignment only if you are willing to do this extra work.
- If you are running behind and are about to miss the deadline for submitting your report, contact the journal and let them know. This gives the editor options, e.g., make a decision based on just a single report, find a different referee, or re-contract with you.
- A good referee report informs the journal editor: The report summarizes the paper, identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, and makes a clear recommendation (in a separate cover letter) for rejecting, revising, or accepting the paper.
- A good referee report helps the author: It is far too easy to criticize a paper without offering good solutions. Always provide feasible solutions for the authors so that they may improve their paper.