School of Physics and Astronomy Climate Committee – Charge

The mission of the SPA Climate Committee (CC) is to maintain a welcoming and supportive climate within the School with special emphasis on inclusion, diversity and community building. The CC will guide the School’s administration and staff in establishing structures to support communication and prevent bullying and sexual harassment. The committee will include representation from the School’s faculty, postdoctoral researchers, graduate students, and staff. It will be charged with assessing and monitoring the overall climate within the School and recommending any actions or changes in procedures and policies that could enhance it. The committee’s members will be points of contact for any individual in the School to obtain advice and support in dealing with situations of concern, including challenges in adviser-advisee relationships and any instances of behavior incompatible with the environment of respect and collegiality that the School is committed to maintain.

The composition of the CC will be three members of the faculty (one of whom will serve as chair), one postdoctoral researcher, two graduate students, and one member of the School staff. Except for the first year, terms will be for two years, with roughly half of the committee appointed each year. While the initial composition will not include undergraduate students, the committee is invited to consider whether an undergraduate representative, possibly selected in coordination with SPS, should be added.

As a new committee during the 2016-2017 academic year the CC will have the following special charge:

1. Carry out discussions of the full range of policies and activities that define and affect the School's social climate. Specific topics for consideration should include collegiality and professionalism, maintaining a welcoming and inclusive environment, and support for those experiencing bullying and harassment or observing misconduct. This process should include broad consultations with the School community, including open meetings and discussions with individuals and student groups.

2. To the extent possible, survey other University departments and peer programs at other universities to identify effective measures aimed at enhancing the climate. Discuss how these can be incorporated into best practices for implementation in the School.

3. Consider how the School and the CC can best provide channels to individuals or groups for reporting issues of concern, with no limitations on the nature of the problems to be addressed and no threshold for consideration by the committee. The committee’s membership will be diverse, allowing individuals in need of assistance to select appropriate initial points of contact. These points of contact should provide counseling, information about available support on campus and appropriate advice on possible
courses of action. Sensitivity to concerns about potential academic or career consequences is essential, for example in instances such as adviser-advisee or supervisor-employee conflicts. Confidentiality should be respected to the extent allowed by University reporting requirements.

4. Evaluate the need for the School to communicate expectations about appropriate behavior in the context of relationships that are personal, professional and academic to members of the School community, as well as educating them about the University’s policies and procedures for dealing with conflict and misconduct. Mechanisms to engage stakeholders in the above issues will likely include web-posted materials on a School Wiki, content developed for orientation programs and dedicated educational sessions.

5. Formulate overall recommendations about policies and resources that can help improve and sustain the School’s social climate. Present these recommendations to the School Executive committee and in sessions open to all members of the School community.