



Elements of Professional Practice for Physicists

Prepared by the CAP Professional Affairs Committee

Overview

- The Canadian Association of Physicists has established a professional designation
 - Professional Physicist (P.Phys)
 - Although qualifying criteria have been established for applicants (to P.Phys), other aspects of professional practice have not been fully developed.
- The purpose of this talk is to explore elements of professional practice

Agenda

- What is professional practice?
- What are common elements of professional practice?
- What could P.Phys professional practice look like?
- Workshop: Closing the Gaps

What is Professional Practice?

- The term “professional practice” describes
 - The legal obligations a member of a profession owes to himself, his clients/employers, other members of the profession, and the public in general,
 - The ethical obligations a member of a profession owes to himself, his clients/employers, other members of the profession, and the public in general, and
 - The manner in which a specific profession delivers its services to its clients.

Legal Obligations

- As professionals, a number of specific legal obligations arise:
 - Expanded “Duty of Care”, reflecting the services and expertise of the profession
 - Specific legal issues which arise when professional services are “sold” to the public
 - e.g. Contract Law
 - Expanded obligations related to Health, Safety and Environment, reflecting the services and expertise of the profession.

Ethical Obligations

- Similar to legal obligations, members of professions often carry extended ethical obligations
- Most professional designations codify these obligations through Codes of Conduct (or similar), which include consideration of
 - Clients / Employers
 - The Public
 - The profession and members of the profession
- P.Phys uses a Code of Ethics covering these concerns

Obligations to Clients/Employers

(No lyin', No cheatin', No stealin')

- Must work only in area of expertise
 - Work “out of discipline” must be fully disclosed
- Must use transparency with clients & employers
 - All issues must be fully disclosed.
 - All potential conflict of interest issues must be resolved.
 - Collaborations must be disclosed.
 - Sources must be disclosed.
 - All representations must be accurate.
 - Client confidences must be maintained.

Obligations to The Public

(No lyin', No cheatin', No stealin')

- Must always ensure that professional activities (for clients) are aligned with the “public good”
 - This can be challenging at times
- When representing oneself professionally in public, a member must
 - Act in the best interests of the profession
 - Protect, to the extent practicable, client interests
 - Speak only to areas of expertise

Obligations to The Profession (No lyin', No cheatin', No stealin')

- Must respect professional activities of other members
 - Conflict of interest situations must be resolved
 - Should not denigrate expertise of other members
 - The profession needs to manage these issues
- Have an obligation to report “unprofessional activities” of other members
 - This is the essence of self-regulation

Delivery of Services

- In general, services are always delivered in accordance with legal and ethical obligations
- However, the delivery of professional activities may reflect the nature of the profession, such as:
 - Specific expectations related to preparation and verification of professional activities
 - Requirements related to the use of professional standards
 - Requirements related to Quality programs

Other Considerations

- CAP will need to acknowledge “professional practice” as an organizational objective
 - Currently the objective is
 - “SUPPORTING PHYSICS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN CANADA”

Options for Improvement

- We examined the publically available documents from a variety of professional organizations (law, medicine, finance and technical) and identified four areas for improvement for P.Phys:
 - Upgraded Code of Ethics
 - Service delivery guidelines
 - Complaint resolution mechanism
 - Professional development requirements

What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 1

- An expanded Code of Ethics, reflecting the unique aspects of P.Phys:
 - Consider all (Academic, R&D, Industrial, Government) spheres of operation
 - Clear guidelines for the use of signature and seal.
 - Might want to include sustainability and environmental protection as part of societal obligations.

What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 2

- Specific guidelines regarding the delivery of services
 - Clarity around area and scope of practice.
 - Need to deal with “public practitioners” separately?
 - Specific guidelines for educators, researchers, and industrial workers?
 - Retirees and non-practitioners?

What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 3

- An internal body to investigate professional misconduct and/or complaints
 - Need to consider internal and external complaints
 - Often, there will be clear directions related to complaints available from the Profession’s website.
 - This is usually a significant undertaking because of the legalities involved.

What “Professional Practice” Might Look Like for P.Phys: Gap 4

- Professional Development requirements
 - Usually a specific target (hrs/yr)
 - This can be challenging to organize and manage – self reporting is often used.

Workshop

- We will now begin the workshop portion of this talk ... Closing the gaps:
 1. An expanded Code of Ethics, reflecting the unique aspects of P.Phys:
 2. Specific guidelines regarding the delivery of services
 3. An internal body to investigate professional misconduct and/or complaints
 4. Professional Development requirement