



Statement from the SEPA Executive Committee Regarding the 70th Annual Meeting in Orlando (March 13-16, 2024)

Date: August 2, 2023

On behalf of the Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA), the Executive Committee wishes to address the members and broader SEPA community on matters of concern over holding our 70th Annual Meeting in the state of Florida, due to the exclusionary political ideology and policies of the current administration, and its passage of laws prohibiting representation of minority communities in the classroom and beyond.

We feel it is important to recognize that at least 12% of our 2023 meeting attendees, and our membership more broadly, are representatives of Florida institutions. We continue to support *all* of our members, despite their living in areas facing political challenges over inclusion. Importantly, they must not be left to face these challenges alone. We are committed, as Florida's regional psychological association, to support the state's professional and academic communities. Furthermore, we are committed to promoting programming and content that is rooted in science and empiricism, upholds intellectual freedom as an ideal, and resists marginalization and/or disenfranchisement of specific individuals or groups.

We believe SEPA's mission statement, policies, and code of conduct (full documents appended at the end of this document) clearly articulate the association's commitment to our promotion of, and advocacy for, inclusion, diversity, equality, and justice in all forms. In part, SEPA's mission statement reads:

The purpose of SEPA is to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare. Our mission is to stimulate the exchange of scientific and professional ideas across the diverse areas of psychological inquiry and application. **SEPA has historically celebrated the diversity within psychology, and today, the Awards Program of SEPA is designed to encourage and reward presentation of the highest quality research by our professional and student members in both popular and traditionally underrepresented fields of psychological inquiry.**

SEPA's policy on inclusion of under-represented groups and gender equality for featured speaker invitations reads, in part:

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) condemns ALL forms of discrimination. We support the diversity of members and guests as well as the involvement of individuals who are interested in psychology in all its forms. The diversity of the SEPA community is reflected in terms of research interests, areas of practice, pedagogical efforts, theoretical training backgrounds and institutional affiliations of SEPA members. It also is reflected in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, language, national origin, veteran status, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental status, and religion of SEPA members. **SEPA celebrates this diversity.**

Lastly, years ago SEPA's Executive Committee formally adopted a Code of Conduct policy for its members and meeting attendees, which reads in part:

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) aims to provide a harassment-free meeting experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, or nationality. We do not tolerate harassment, in any form, of meeting participants including SEPA staff and volunteers, and also hotel employees.

It is also worth noting that the SEPA Executive Committee continues to engage in discussion with our host hotel, the Doubletree by Hilton at the Entrance to Universal Orlando regarding these issues. Representatives of the hotel wished to convey the following message to the SEPA community:

"As a place of business providing public accommodation and meeting and event venues, we are committed to diversity and inclusion. Providing a hospitable, welcoming environment is the essence of our business and we welcome guests from all over the world. We appreciate your business, and per our non-discrimination policies, all of our guests and associates will remain welcome and respected in our hotel."

SEPA is contractually obligated to fulfill a financial commitment to our conference host, with whom arrangements were made years in advance. We do not wish to place the viability of the association at risk and thus jeopardize our ability to continue serving our members and associates, given the significant economic strain a breach of contract would impose on SEPA.

Ultimately, our goal is to cultivate and provide a friendly, welcoming meeting experience where attendees can freely and openly present their scholarly work in accordance with SEPA's mission to stimulate the exchange of scientific and professional ideas across the diverse areas of psychological inquiry and application. We hope you will choose to join us in honoring our commitment to proudly serve all those we represent as the Southeastern Psychological Association. In upholding our commitment to the free exchange of ideas, we welcome your feedback, questions, or concerns about our stance on these issues. Thank you, as always, for your continued and steadfast support of SEPA.

Sincerely,

R. Christopher Qualls, John N. Bohannon III, Chuck Robertson, Todd Joseph, Brooke Bennett-Day, Lauren Fowler, Lydia Qualls, Linda Jones, Jared Keely, Jenny Mason, Debra Sue Pate, Timothy Hanchon

Members of the SEPA Executive Committee

SEPA Mission Statement:

The purpose of SEPA is to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting human welfare. Our mission is to stimulate the exchange of scientific and professional ideas across the diverse areas of psychological inquiry and application. The professional members of SEPA hold positions in settings such as universities, colleges, business and industry, hospitals and clinics, government, and private practice. In these and other settings, the psychologists of SEPA teach, conduct research, engage in psychological assessment and therapy, serve as administrators and consultants, and publish scholarly works on all aspects of the human experience. The student members of SEPA, from psychology undergraduate and graduate programs throughout the southeast and beyond, reflect the varied interests of their mentors in the behavioral sciences, from the functions of the brain to the actions of nations.

SEPA is unique in many ways. As the first regional psychological association to establish a committee to enhance the role of women in the organization, the mandate of that early committee has subsequently been expanded to include psychologists in underrepresented groups broadly (Committee on Equality of Professional Opportunity, or CEPO). SEPA was also the first regional psychological association to provide continuing education workshops for its members (popular in early days not only for their breadth of scholarship, but also for their location on the cruise ships of the Caribbean). SEPA has historically celebrated the diversity within psychology, and today,

the Awards Program of SEPA is designed to encourage and reward presentation of the highest quality research by our professional and student members in both popular and traditionally underrepresented fields of psychological inquiry.

SEPA Policy on Inclusion of Underrepresented Groups and Gender Equality for Speaker Invitations to the Annual Meeting:

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) condemns ALL forms of discrimination. We support the diversity of members and guests as well as the involvement of individuals who are interested in psychology in all its forms. The diversity of the SEPA community is reflected in terms of research interests, areas of practice, pedagogical efforts, theoretical training backgrounds and institutional affiliations of SEPA members. It also is reflected in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, language, national origin, veteran status, socioeconomic status, marital status, parental status, and religion of SEPA members. SEPA celebrates this diversity. The annual meeting presents SEPA with its premier opportunity to highlight member accomplishments and welcome new attendees (and potential new members) to the association to share their accomplishments and learn from others while in a supportive and inclusive environment. We have many student members and attendees, as well as early, middle, and late career members. SEPA strives to maintain an intellectually engaging, diverse and respectful program for all attendees.

The Executive Committee of the SEPA believes that the organization of the annual meeting, as well as the choice of all invited speakers for the meeting, must be done in careful recognition of the need to highlight the diversity of our membership in terms of topic areas. It is also important that our programmatic activities engage and recruit speakers/panelists/workshop facilitators that mirror the diversity of SEPA's community. Our annual meeting program attests to our mission to promote gender equality and inclusion of presenters from underrepresented groups.

SEPA Code of Professional Conduct:

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) aims to provide a harassment-free meeting experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, or nationality. We do not tolerate harassment, in any form, of meeting participants including SEPA staff and volunteers, and also hotel employees.

Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Aggressive or hostile verbal comments that reinforce social structures of domination related to gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, or nationality
- Sexual images not intended for research or scholarly purposes
- Deliberate intimidation, stalking, or following
- Harassing photography or recording
- Sustained disruption of talks or other events
- Inappropriate physical contact
- Unwelcome sexual attention
- Advocating for or encouraging any of the above behavior

We expect participants to follow these rules at all meeting venues and meeting-related social activities.

*** - this Code of Professional Conduct was adapted with permission from the Western Psychological Association.*