

# Ethical Decision Making:

Understanding the legislation, laws, codes and policies that affect the work, as well as the roles and responsibilities of Registered Sign Language Interpreters at VCC

Interpreting Services  
Vancouver Community College

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## Introduction

When making ethical decisions, Registered Sign Language Interpreters (RSLIs) employed by Vancouver Community College (VCC) are working with multiple codes and policies while at the same time working under federal and provincial law. At times, these appear to conflict with each other. RSLIs have long struggled with how to incorporate this aspect into their ethical decision making process. This document will not provide definitive answers to all the dilemmas an RSLI will face, but it will assist in the process by doing the following: outlining the context for the creation of this document; providing an overview of relevant laws, codes and policies and their hierarchical relationship; offering a working example of where these laws, codes and policies conflict; and detailing the roles and responsibilities of an RSLI employed by VCC.

## Context

The ability to articulate the legislation, laws, codes and policies RSLs work under as one part of decision making serves two main purposes. The first is to facilitate transparency in

## Overview of the legislation, laws, codes and policies and their hierarchical relationship

When working at VCC, RSLIs are held accountable to numerous pieces of legislation, laws, codes and policies which affect their work. The BC Human Rights Code and Duty to Care supersedes both AVLIC's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct as well as VCC's policies. In general, codes of ethics supersede policies. The VCC Violence Prevention Policy is an example of an exception. Below is a schematic overview of how they relate to each other followed by a further explanation of relevant publications.<sup>2</sup>

### Hierarchical Diagram of Legislation, Codes and Policies

(Marks, 2013)

<sup>2</sup> This is a working document intended for use by RSLIs working at VCC. RSLIs, depending on their background and experience, will have various levels

## Relevant Legislation, Codes and Policies

### BC Human Rights Code

“In BC, it is against the law to harass a person because of their race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital or family status, sex, sexual orientation, disability or age” (BC Ministry of Attorney General, 2008). These are called protected grounds.

When considering the situation where a number of codes are in place, the BC Human Rights Code (2013) stipulates that, “If there is a conflict between this Code and any other enactment, this Code prevails” (Code Prevails, section 4). BC Human Rights is “considered quasi-constitutional and takes precedence over, and often influences, other pieces of legislation” (The BC Human Rights Coalition, Overview section, para.1).

### Duty of Care

Duty of Care is a criminal/civil legal concept used by judges and courts to determine if there has been negligence (Canadian Criminal Law/Duty of Care, 2013). As employees of the College, RSLIs are expected to prevent physical and emotional harm to self and others as well as damage to health and property. A person could be considered negligent if they are not doing what a reasonable person acting under s

appropriate professional decisions and conduct themselves in a manner befitting the setting and the profession (p.2).

### **VCC Violence Prevention Program**

Codes of ethics supersede policies. One exception is the VCC Violence Prevention Policy which outlines expectations of VCC employees when there is a direct threat to their personal safety. The Violence Prevention Policy is closely linked to Duty of Care, thus ranking it higher than other VCC policies (Marks, 2013).

### **VCC Prevention of Harassment, Discrimination and Bullying Policy**

This policy is related to the BC Human Rights Code. In the hierarchical diagram shown earlier, it falls below AVLIC's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct due to the fact that it is a policy, yet it supersedes the other policies since its principles are closely related to the BC Human Rights Code (Marks, 2013).

### **VCC Standards of Employee Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy (2012)**

On April 4, 2013, VCC's

## Whistleblower Policy (2013)

This policy outlines how College employees are expected to report suspected wrongdoing without facing retaliation when reporting in good faith.



## Potential conflict with relevant policies, codes, and legislation

Below is an example of where conflicts may arise between legislation, law, codes and policies. It must be reiterated that each ethical dilemma is highly context-based and no two decisions can be identical. The example below is limited to highlighting the legislation, codes and policies as an example of how they relate to one another in a hierarchical fashion.

### Example: Harassment in the Classroom

An RSLI is working in a classroom and is experiencing harassment. A student or VCC employee is making jokes based on sexual orientation and racial stereotyping. The jokes are not being directed at the RSLI, and no one in the group is protesting. The following legislation, codes and policies address this issue and are listed in hierarchical order.

The BC Human Rights Code as interpreted by the Ministry of Attorney General (2008) highlights three competing rights that apply in this situation. The rights below are listed in no particular order.

1. The RSLI has the right to work in a harassment free environment and has a responsibility to protect him/herself. Even though the comments are not directed towards the RSLI, the environment is still one that contains harassment.
2. Disability is a protected ground. The RSLI is present as an accommodation and there is a duty to provide service.
3. There is a responsibility, as a service provider in a public institution, to provide a harassment free environment.

The AVLIC Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct (2000) states:

- x 1.1.1 Members will respect the privacy of consumers and hold in confidence all information obtained in the course of professional service. Members may be released from this obligation only with their consumer's authorization or when ordered by law (p.2).

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parameters of their professional duties. They will not counsel, advise or interject personal opinions (p.2) .

- x 4.2.1 Members shall remain neutral, impartial and objective. They will refrain from altering a message for political, religious, moral, or philosophical reasons, or any other biased or subjective consideration (p.5) .

#### VCC Standards of Employee Conduct and Conflict of Interest Policy (2013)

- x Content and Purpose

Vancouver Community College (VCC) expects all employees of the College to adhere to the highest standards of conduct, ethics and professionalism, in accordance with VCC's Policies and Procedures, and local, provincial and federal legislation. In addition, employees are expected to instil public confidence, exhibit a commitment to excellence in learning and teaching, and demonstrate consideration for the dignity, respect, and well-being of all College members and the broader society in which all exist.

College members are expected to report employee misconduct and conflicts of interest to the Senior Administrator without delay , using the protocols

- x College employees have the responsibility to report significant incidents of infractions to their supervisor or the Dean of the area (p.2).
- x For major or repeated infractions such as but not limited To- (see appendix A)
  - uttering racist remarks (p.2)

The VCC Standards of Student Conduct Policy (2007) does not make any references to allowing College employees to take into consideration other professional codes. Since this is a policy, it is superseded by both the BC Human Rights Code and AVLIC's Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. At the same time, AVLIC's Code of Ethics allows RSLIs to take into consideration other professional codes of conduct.

## Roles and Responsibilities

As practice professionals, RSLs must take all relevant legislation, codes and policies into consideration, as well as the unique context of the situation in order to make optimal decisions. Each situation presents a

## Conclusion

IS's goal is to work towards a transparent and accountable ethical practice that upholds the professional expectations of AVLIC, VCC, federal and provincial law and the communities RSLs work in .

## References

Association of Visual Language Interpreters Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct. ( July 2000 ). Retrieved from <http://www.avlic.ca/ethics-and-guidelines/english>

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Vancouver Community College Prevention of Harassment, Discrimination, and Bullying. (2013). Retrieved from [http://www.vcc.ca/deptUploads/policies/A\\_03\\_01.pdf](http://www.vcc.ca/deptUploads/policies/A_03_01.pdf)

Vancouver Community College Student Standards of Student Conduct Policy. (2007). Retrieved from [http://www.vcc.ca/deptUploads/policies/D\\_04\\_03.pdf](http://www.vcc.ca/deptUploads/policies/D_04_03.pdf)

Vancouver Community College Whistler Blower Policy. (2013). Retrieved from:

## Appendix A: Letter of Information

### Interpreting Services at VCC

Welcome to VCC. Interpreters at VCC aim to have everyone to understand some of the laws, legislation, codes and policies that are a part of our ethical decision making. Have more questions? Just ask us. We are open to questions and discussion.

Did you know that the BC Human Rights Code applies to everyone in BC and Duty of Care applies to everyone in Canada? These are examples of a code and law that interpreters have to consider when making ethical decisions. Registered Sign Language Interpreters also follow AVLIC's Code of Ethics and



## Appendix B: Ethical decision making note

### Ethical Decision Making Note

Date:

Interpreter:

Primary Consumer:

Dilemma:

Conflicting principles, policies, codes or laws:

Decision

Action:

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Ethical decision-making directive

**Directive:** Interim Ethical Decision-Making: Interpreting Services

**Version Date:** February 3, 2015

**Scope of Directive:** This directive will outline the interim parameters for ethical decision-making by Registered Sign Language Interpreters working in Interpreting Services at Vancouver Community College pending sanctioned protocol put in place by VCC Administration.

**Process Trigger:** The interpreter finds themselves in a situation where there is a perceived conflict between or within:

- x VCC policies;
- x The BC Human Rights Code;
- x AVLIC (Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada) Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct; and/or
- x Other codes, policies, and/or laws they are operating within.

**Interim Process:** Until directed otherwise by the College, Interpreters will make ethical decisions as follows:

1. Interpreting Services staff member will meet with and discuss relevant codes and policies.
2. Interpreting Services Department Supervisor will communicate codes and policies to Casual Interpreters.
3. Interpreters will use their professional judgment in making ethical decisions, taking into consideration all relevant codes and policies.
4. Interpreters will document ethical decisions appropriately.
5. Interpreting Services will inform students of the role of Registered Sign Language Interpreters employed by VCC. This will be done through a dialogue between Interpreting Services and the student receiving services. Informed consent will be reiterated throughout the students' tenure at VCC by Interpreting Services.

**Examples of Decision-Making Guidelines:**

1. Interpreters will continue to interpret all lectures, /TT1 1 Tf002 Tw 1.16 0 1.9(lin)13(e)-2(s)-2(:)15( )JTJ 0w 1.1 iodtm(at)2(e)1e

