

Nurse Author & Editor

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Student Faculty Authorship

Student Faculty Authorship: Challenges and Solutions

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The standard of practice for faculty/student co-authorship varies widely across disciplines and within the field of nursing. In recent years, collaborative authorship projects have become increasingly common between faculty and students. For faculty, a track record of successful publication as well as the number of first-authored articles is tied to academic promotion and tenure status (Costa & Gatz, 1992). For students, being published helps to set them apart from their peers, strengthens applications for graduate programs, and makes them more desirable to

employers as they start their professional careers (Oberlander & Spencer, 2006). Students are in a vulnerable position in relationships with faculty. Given the importance of authorship credit and authorship order for faculty, students need to be aware that they may be at risk for loss of intellectual property rights when writing collaboratively with faculty.

This article addresses issues and practices related to faculty and student co-authorship. Issues to be discussed include protection of students' intellectual property, guidelines for faculty/student co-authorship, and authorship order. Existing literature regarding faculty/student co-authorship will be summarized to explore issues and to describe the formation and implementation of a co-authorship policy in one school of nursing.

BACKGROUND

In the past, publication was considered the purview of faculty alone, and was closely tied with salary, promotion, and tenure opportunities (Costa & Gatz, 1992). In recent years, student/faculty collaborations have become increasingly common, as the demand for dissemination of doctoral work has placed more emphasis on student publications. The literature reveals a wide variation in the standard of practice for student/ faculty co-authorship across disciplines and within the field of nursing. With relatively little governance or oversight, these co-authorships are a cause for considerable professional and ethical concern (Oddi & Oddi, 2000, Sandler & Russell, 2005). Considering the power differential between students and faculty, co-authorship with faculty puts students in a vulnerable position that potentially puts them at an increased risk for the loss of their intellectual property rights or insufficient credit for their contribution to the article

(Barretta-Herman & Garrett, 2000; Costa & Gatz, 1992; Rose & Fischer, 1998). Research data suggests that students who perceive unethical or unfair co-authorship practices are not likely to report these occurrences for fear of negative repercussions (Rose & Fischer, 1998).

There is little existing literature that addresses the actual prevalence of unethical assignment of authorship credit. Sandler and Russell (2005), in a study with American Psychology Association (APA) members, found that 27% of respondents involved in student/faculty collaborations perceived an unethical or unfair authorship assignment. Less than 4% of those incidences were reported to a person of authority. Similarly, a study of social workers reported five of the six student respondents involved in student/faculty collaboration felt exploited by their faculty collaborators (Barretta-Herman & Garrett, 2000).

An abundance of non-research literature exists on authorship credit and order. Literature in the area of student/faculty collaborations is limited and what is available is largely out of date. The resources that do address student/faculty co-authorship primarily discuss co-authoring of research articles or dissertations, where the participation and oversight by faculty is much more substantial. Guidelines exist that address faculty authorship credit on dissertations, but there are few resources available for non-research collaborations. Moreover, there is a paucity of nursing literature that focuses on this subject. Other disciplines, including sociology and psychology, have emerged as the main disciplines that have published on the subject, while nursing has widely been absent from the discussion.

In response to these concerns, many professional organizations and state

agencies have developed guidelines and policies with regard to authorship credit, authorship order, and, more recently, student/faculty co-authorship. The APA Ethics Committee developed guidelines in a policy statement asserting that students' doctoral dissertations are their own intellectual property and that supervising faculty can, at most, publish a student's doctoral findings as the second author (as cited in Fine, 1993). Additional guidelines were offered in the APA Ethical Principles of Psychology and Code of Conduct in 1992 and revised in 2002. Section 8.12, which addresses publication credit, went unchanged in the most current revision (APA, 2013). These guidelines have been criticized as being vague and allowing room for misinterpretation (Sandler & Russell, 2005).

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE, 2008) developed the Uniform Requirements document, a small section of which pertains to assignment of authorship credit and contributorship. Whereas other guidelines have contained vague terminology for authorship credit, the ICMJE Uniform Requirement specifically defines authorship and describes circumstances in which authorship credit is or is not appropriate. However, the ICMJE guidelines do not address authorship order or student faculty collaboration.

In an effort to provide more structure and clarity about the issues surrounding student/faculty co-authorship, many academic institutions have recognized the need for co-authorship policies and taken it upon themselves to develop them. A review of university policies available via web searches revealed an increasing number of such documents across disciplines and nationwide, including nursing, psychology, social work and sociology. Although most of these policies incorporate aspects of the ICMJE and APA

guidelines, the majority did not provide student or faculty authors with structured procedures for publishing within this complex and unique relationship.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

At the University of Hawaii, School of Nursing, a small group of faculty formed a working group as part of the School's Faculty Senate to explore this issue and develop a draft of a policy to guide student/faculty co-authorships. The working group consisted of junior and senior, tenured and non-tenured faculty members, faculty who had co-authored with students, as well as those who had not, faculty members who had published, and novice authors. The group was aware of the variation in student/faculty co-authorship practices in general and in our university and department in particular; however, the group's work began with a review and summary of the research and non-research resources available.

Concurrently, the working group developed and distributed an anonymous survey to the nursing faculty to assess their knowledge and practices of student/faculty co-authorship. In addition, survey participants were asked about their values concerning student/faculty co-authorship activities. Of the 90 School of Nursing faculty members, 42 (46%) responded to the survey. Results of the survey indicated that most of the faculty had not published with students but among those that had there was a significant variation in practice. Some faculty had course objectives that required students to produce manuscripts for publication with the faculty as a co-author. Other faculty reported that they only published with students after the course grades had been posted. Many faculty expressed concern about the

student/faculty power differential and student vulnerability when co-authoring with faculty. On the basis of the responses to the survey and the results of the literature search that was completed, a draft policy and guidelines were prepared by the working group.

The primary issue for the policy was the protection of students, both in terms of intellectual property and protection from undue influence that could exploit them in student/faculty co-authorship situations. In addition, it was agreed by the working group members that co-authorship with faculty could not be included as part of the required activities of any course. The policy that was developed also states that co-authorship agreements must be finalized outside the context of a student's coursework in which the co-author is the instructor, and only after course grades from a co-authoring instructor have been finalized. Another essential document that was developed and included in the policy was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that identifies authorship order and the work each participant is assigned to complete the project. The document provides a timeline for co-authors to complete the work to which they initially agree. If this is not accomplished, a reviewing process to reassign authorship status and assigned work is delineated. If the latter situation develops, a new MOU between the co-authors needs to be completed and signed. The document is intended to be prepared at the beginning of the co-authorship relationship and revised as needed as the project progresses.

PROCEDURE FOR APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AUTHORSHIP POLICY

Once the working group completed the drafts of the authorship policy and

the MOU, the draft was presented to the faculty during the School's regularly scheduled Faculty Senate meeting. During this meeting, the working group presented the process that they followed to develop the drafts so that questions could be addressed by the working group members. After the Faculty Senate presentation, the drafts were submitted via email to all members of the faculty for their review. Faculty were requested to provide feedback in a timely fashion so that their suggestions could be incorporated prior to the next Faculty Senate meeting.

Overall, the responses were positive with only a few minor edits suggested; however, none of these substantially altered the content. A final draft was prepared and submitted via email to faculty for their ultimate review. This version was presented at the Faculty Senate meeting where it was approved by the faculty and forwarded to the Dean, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and Department Chair for their review and approval. The authorship policy and MOU were approved by the School's administration without revisions. The policy and procedure are being disseminated to all faculty and students through its posting on the School's intranet, its incorporation into the Student and the Faculty Handbooks, and as a required element of the regularly scheduled new faculty and student orientations.

CONCLUSION

Scholarly contributions are essential for professional development and authoring papers is considered a critical activity in any profession for career progression. Collaboration between student and faculty authors is a natural fit since students often perceive manuscript preparation as a daunting new task, requiring encouragement and editorial services. Faculty naturally assist

in this process and invest a great deal of time and energy to ensure successful publication. Due to the power differential in the student/faculty relationship and the vested interest by both parties in authoring papers, the student is at a potential disadvantage when authorship order and credit is determined.

Although the literature is not entirely clear about how to determine authorship order, this project was an attempt to add more clarity to the process and communicate a written policy to students and faculty members. Ongoing evaluation will determine its success.

Resource: The Student/Faculty Authorship Policy and the MOU can be found in the Graduate Student Handbook at this site: <http://bit.ly/11EgX88>; see pp. 61, Appendix F.

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