

TWO MINUTE CHALLENGE: AUTHORSHIP

New Kid on Project

You are an undergraduate research intern, just starting in a lab. Your supervisor hands you a manuscript by a postdoc in the group and asks you to check the correspondence between numbers in a data sheet and the paper and to proofread it carefully. All of the work described in the paper was completed before you arrived at the lab. You do as you are asked, verifying that all the numbers were transferred correctly to the paper from the data sheet and suggesting some minor editorial changes. Your supervisor then sends you and the postdoc the following note:

Your name: You need to send me an email stating that you have examined the data with Dr. PostDoc and find the presentation of data in the manuscript to be accurate (as best you can tell.)

Postdoc's name: upon discussion with [your name], after you are done modifying the manuscript with figures, etc., send me a separate email note stating that you feel the manuscript is ready for journal submission to enable me to confirm that with the editor-in-chief.

A week or so later, you learn that the paper was submitted for publication the day after your proofreading was complete and accepted for publication not long thereafter. The authors on the paper are the postdoc and you. What are the issues in this situation and what, if anything, should you do?

By C.K. Gunsalus, Based on the investigation report dated 4/18/08 and available at <http://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2008b/080718PurdueReport.pdf>.

Issues

Do you qualify for authorship?
How can you find out?
If you do not qualify, how can you get your name taken off the article without alienating your advisor?

Rules and Regulations

Journal policies on authorship
University policies on research integrity
Federal regulations on research integrity

Questions

What is the editorial policy of the journal to which the manuscript was submitted?
Do you qualify as an author under that policy?
Is this just a perk of being in this lab?
If asked to sign a copyright form that specifies your contributions to the paper, what will you say?
Are you comfortable being listed as an author on this paper?

Takeaway Lessons:

- 1) **Authorship carries privileges and responsibilities.** It is your obligation to stand behind publications that have your name on them. If you are not able to do that, you should not be an author.
- 2) **Getting help.** If you are uncomfortable with what your advisor has asked you to do, or has later notified you has already taken place, you need to know how to get assistance.

Resources

Campus and federal regulations
Research integrity officer on campus
Mentor
Colleagues
Parents
National ethics center website

Options

Add the paper to your CV right away
Talk to a mentor or someone you trust about whether this is a problem and what you might do
Talk to the research integrity officer on your campus
Talk with the PI and say you do not think you qualify for authorship
Talk with the graduate advisor in your department for advice

The Real Story Behind This 2MC

Adam Butt is a real person who was a graduate student at Purdue University when this happened to him. His advisor, Rusi Taleyarkhan, was subsequently charged and found guilty of research misconduct.

Before that happened, Butt was featured in Purdue news releases about the research reported in the paper he proofread:

<http://news.uns.purdue.edu/html4ever/2005/050712.Xu.fusion.html>

and gave videotaped presentations on the work, which can be seen at:

<http://www.newenergytimes.com/v2/bubblegate/BubblegateTimelineOverview.shtml>

Butt later testified at the misconduct hearings. His statement can be read at:

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/science/13purd.adambutt.pdf>

Professor Taleyarkhan submitted documents, since posted on the web, contradicting Butt's statement and calling him "immature."

<http://www.newenergytimes.com/v2/bubblegate/2007/2007TAL-on-ButtStatement.shtml>

The entire Purdue investigation report can be found at:

<http://news.uns.purdue.edu/x/2008b/080718PurdueReport.pdf>



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National Center for
Professional and
Research Ethics



CSL

Coordinated Science Laboratory