Northwestern | OFFICE FOR RESEARCH INTEGRITY

NEWS

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Deering Library / Photo by Jim Prisching

IN THIS ISSUE

Northwestern Adopts Authorship Guidelines

Scholarly publication is the main currency for researchers. The number of high-impact factor, highly cited papers one has on their CV may, in most cases, make the difference in a researcher receiving a job offer, obtaining tenure, receiving grant funding, and maintaining their future in research. In a "publish or perish" research culture, being an author matters, and can be more contentious than it first appears.

Over the past decade, a number of universities across the United States have published or adopted authorship guidelines and policies to help clarify the authors' roles on a project and paper, and to help improve accountability in their research communities. The need for clearer guidelines in this arena was also one of the take-home messages of the latest National Academies report on research ethics, "Fostering Integrity in Research" (2017). This report called for institutions to go beyond simple compliance, and Northwestern has taken an important first step.

Last April, Northwestern's Faculty Senate endorsed the Authorship Guidelines proposed by its Research Affairs Committee. The main objective of the guidelines is to "enhance the scholarly environment and promote a coherent approach to authorship across the University." They provide a framework for anyone involved in scientific and scholarly writing and publications, including presentations, books, articles, and grants at any stage, and assist in clarifying the basis for authorship assignment as well as delineating authors' roles and responsibilities.

In order to be considered an author, the guidelines state that an individual should meet the three criteria of scholarship, authorship, and approval. This means that he/she needs to contribute significantly to "the conception, design, execution, and/or analysis and interpretation of data," participate in drafting, reviewing, and/or revising the publication, and, finally, approve the final manuscript prior to publication.

The document also identifies roles and responsibilities of Lead Author and Co-authors. It clarifies that all the authors are responsible for both content and integrity of the data. Unacceptable practices such as guest, gift, and ghost authorship are also defined, creating a strong standard for the Northwestern community as a whole.

By defining acceptable behavior in authorship, these guidelines complement Northwestern's Responsible Conduct of Research education, policies regarding research misconduct, and reiterate authors' responsibility for their publications and the data presented within them.

If you have a question or possible authorship concern, the Office for Research Integrity can help you identify resources and potential next steps. For assistance, please contact ORI at nu-ori@northwestern.edu or 312-503-0054.

A Faculty Perspective on Authorship

With the University's adoption of new Authorship Guidelines in 2017, ORI asked Dr. Rick McGee, associate dean for professional development and professor of medical education at the Feinberg School of Medicine, for his insights. As a Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) instructor for more than 20 years, mentor, and faculty researcher with over 60 scholarly publications, Professor McGee brings a multi-faceted perspective on authorship guidelines and best practices. His research and academic interests in the arena of professional development of young scientists span the continuum, including: the "basic science" of how undergraduate and PhD students fine tune career decisions; the application and study of new coaching-based models to support early career scientists; and a randomized, controlled trial of a totally different approach to fostering diversity in academia.

What are your thoughts about the new authorship guidelines recently adopted by the Faculty Senate? How do you think these guidelines will help the Northwestern research community?
I think the new Northwestern guidelines will be extremely valuable as they will decrease the ambiguity of criteria for authorship and hopefully minimize or eliminate inappropriate authorship. These guidelines are consistent with those that are accepted by a large number of journals in the biomedical sciences, and are the same as those we teach in the Responsible Conduct of Research courses required by NIH and NSF for all research trainees. [Editor's Note: Feinberg has endorsed the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' guidelines for a number of years.]

What is your practice for determining authorship, and how do you communicate about these decisions?
My practices are the same as those in the guidelines, and we openly discuss both the guidelines and authorship decisions in my research group.

What advice do you have for PIs or labs that wish to develop a standard practice for determining authorship?
I don't have much more to add than simply following these guidelines and making sure they are conveyed to and discussed within the research group. They can also be extremely helpful to refer to, if anyone is seeking inappropriate authorship in exchange for research material or any other contribution that does not meet the authorship criteria. It allows the decision not to grant authorship to be based on institutional guidelines, not individual preference.

Do you feel that your experiences with determining authorship have evolved over time? Is it different from when you were a graduate student or trainee? If so, how?
It actually has evolved since I began teaching RCR back in the 1990s when NIH first started requiring RCR training. At that time, I might have included lab techs or rotating PhD student as authors without significant contribution to writing of manuscripts. Since teaching RCR, I make sure they have the opportunity to contribute to writing and approval so they can reach authorship-level contributions.

> "[Trainees] should also have honest conversations with research mentors and supervisors *before* they join a group and at the start of any research project."
>
> *— Professor Rick McGee, Feinberg School of Medicine*

What do you think trainees should know or do to ensure fair authorship practices in their careers?
Knowing this set of guidelines and its basis is the essential first step. They should also have honest conversations with research mentors and supervisors *before* they join a group and at the start of any research project. If they go to other institutions, they should find out if those institutions have similar guidelines. If not, they should be sure to clarify the policy or guidelines of the lab and potentially ask for clarification if they differ from Northwestern's guidelines.

What advice do you have for someone with an authorship concern or dispute?
It is always best to attempt to discuss and resolve the dispute with the most senior person responsible for the research. Without these guidelines, authorship practices can be much more variable and ambiguous among research groups, and make seeking assistance more difficult. But with these guidelines in place, if the dispute is significant and unresolved, some guidance is provided on seeking advice from a higher level individual. Personally, I think it would be better to have a specified appeal procedure to protect trainees and others who feel they are not getting sufficient credit for their contributions.

Is there anything else you think Northwestern can do to support best practices in authorship?
I think it would be very valuable to have deans and department chairs communicate these guidelines to their faculty, along with their support and expectation that it will be the accepted practice. The guidelines should be provided to and discussed with all new graduate students as an integral part of orientation to graduate programs. Similarly, it should be provided in written form to all new postdoctoral fellows and clinical fellows engaging in research.

Changes to and unifying of "cultural" norms can only be achieved through a broad-based dissemination of expected practices both top-down and bottom-up. There actually has been quite a bit written about the variations in authorship policies and practices around the world. While there may be room for some cultural and local variation, it is essential that authorship expectations be made very clear and open at the institutional level where academic freedom and responsibility begin.

For additional articles on authorship and related resources, visit the Office for Research Integrity's authorship site: researchintegrity.northwestern.edu/resources/authorship

Did You Know?

The National Science Foundation has revised its Proposal & Award Policies & Procedures Guide. Changes include updates to the Proposal Preparation Checklist and a new Collaborators & Other Affiliations template. NSF also updated its Grants.gov Application Guide. Both guides will be effective for proposals submitted, or due, on or after January 29, 2018.

The University has an institutional license with the nonprofit organization ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID). Faculty, staff, and students can obtain an ORCID iD, which is a unique identifier that associates you with a full record of your scholarly work, even if your name or insitutional affiliation changes. This can help streamline your grant and publication workflow, as funding organizations and publishers are increasingly using ORCID to manage applications and submissions. For more information, visit libguides.northwestern.edu/orcid

Roig, M. (n.d.). Avoiding plagiarism, self-plagiarism, and other questionable writing practices: A guide to ethical writing. Retrieved September 01, 2016, from https://ori.hhs.gov/ethical_writing

Infographic: Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Research Integrity

Notable Quote

"Above all, don't fear difficult moments. The best comes from them."

— Rita Levi-Montalcini
neurobiologist, Nobel Laureate

Register for January's Research Administration Training Seminar

The Research Administration Training is a four-session seminar, offered each quarter. It is geared toward research administrators, staff involved in research administration, and anyone who wants to learn about the University's research administration process, policies, and procedures.

The seminar serves as an introduction to Northwestern's research enterprise and the extensive systems involved. It is a great educational opportunity for staff new to research, or experienced staff who would like a refresher in certain areas. Representatives from offices throughout the University will be on hand to present and answer questions. This is also an excellent chance to network with colleagues in Northwestern's research community.

The next seminar will run **January 22, 24, 29, and 31** from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at the Baldwin Auditorium in the Lurie Medical Research Center (303 E. Superior, Chicago). Topics will include: Roles and Responsibilities, Research Misconduct and Compliance, OSR, Pre-Award Overview/Working with Industry, Cost Principles for Sponsored Project Administration, Cost Studies, Cost Transfers, IRB, IACUC, CCM, NURAP, NUCATS, INVO, OFR, Corporate Engagement, and Research Safety. For the complete agenda, visit ORI's website.

Registration is open and can be completed through the University's training management system, myHR Learn. Simply login using your NetID and password, then use the search tool to find the Research Administration Training Seminar class. When you select "Enroll," you will be registered for all four days of the seminar.

If you have any questions about the seminar or registration, please email or call the Office for Research Integrity at 312-503-0054.

We look forward to seeing you in January!

EthicsPoint is a third-party vendor that allows you to confidentially raise ethical concerns, ask questions, and/or report activities that may involve misconduct or violations of Northwestern University policy.

For more information, visit EthicsPoint online

ORI MISSION

Identifying compliance risks in our research practices and communicating those risks to the research community;

Partnering with the research community in innovative and effective ways to minimize and manage research risks;

Educating the research community with respect to appropriate business practices related to the conduct of research at Northwestern University; and

Monitoring and correcting non-compliance in accordance with University and federal guidelines.

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