Two Minute Challenge: Authorship
New Kid on Project

You are a beginning graduate student, having started in the program six months ago. Your advisor hands you a manuscript by one of the postdocs in your 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 on campus. 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 advisor 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?

Resources

Campus and federal regulations

Research integrity officer on campus

Mentor
Colleagues
Parents
National ethics center website

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?

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

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.

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 advsior, 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