

## Semester One Capstone Case Study: Authorship Dispute

Over the past year, two students, Alex (a fifth-year PhD candidate) and Jamie (a second-year PhD student), have collaborated on a project. The original idea and experimental design were Jamie's, with Alex providing mentoring and guidance.

Initially, Alex was meant to provide guidance and contribute mainly through supervision; everyone agreed Jamie would be first author, reflecting the project's origins and work plan. As the research evolved, though, Jamie—balancing classes and research—fell further behind in the lab work than planned or hoped. Alex, increasingly anxious and uncertain about job prospects, dove deeper into hands-on experiments, analysis, and manuscript preparation.

Alex suggested changing the authorship order, pointing out the imbalance of the work, and Alex's need for a first-author paper for the job market, Jaime vociferously disagreed. In Jaime's view, the original agreement should apply because of the idea and the balance of overall work on experiments, analysis, and drafting.

They are at an impasse and have come to you to resolve it.

Apply the DMF and use it to address these questions:

- 1) What should the authorship order for the paper be and how should it be resolved?
  - account for the contributions to the final manuscript and authorship criteria/requirements
  - consider the professional stakes involved for Alex and Jamie
  - consider the potential impact to the group culture and your relationship with Alex and Jamie
- 2) How should you address Alex's concerns? Be specific about the process—who should be involved, in what order, and what words will you use for conveying a decision/imposing authorship?
- 3) What should you do going forward, if anything, to set clear expectations and authorship protocols in the lab?

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." - Aristotle*

## Decision Making Framework

*An analytical habit to assess problems and develop constructive approaches to their resolutions.*

### PART ONE: OPENING UP THE PROBLEM

- 1) What are the issues?
  - what is at stake? what are the potential consequences?
  - what caused the problem? how urgent or serious is it?
- 2) What rules or regulations apply?
  - institutional regulations? laws? unwritten rules? code of ethics?
  - what family or community-based expectations are there?
- 3) What questions do you have or data do you need?
  - what is the context? what information do you have? what information do you not have?
  - what data would share more light on the issue? how do you get it?
  - how will other perceive the problem? what if you're wrong?

### PART TWO: MOVING TOWARDS ACTION

- 4) Who, and what, are the resources you have available?
  - what were you taught? what does your internal compass tell you?
  - what do the rules and regulations say? are there personal values that apply here?
  - are there any mentors or reliable confidants you could consult with?
- 5) What are your options?
  - what are the like consequences of each option?
  - who is affected by each option?
  - are there any preventative measures you can take to address predictable problems?
- 6) What will you do? What will you say? How (exactly) will you say it?
  - what is your plan of action, including a timeline of execution?
  - what are the pertinent materials? what goals will you set? what scripts will you need?
  - what is the option that best serves a fair and just outcome?