

Authorship Cases

1. You are a member of a large scientific society that publishes several peer-reviewed journals. The publications board of this society has proposed a new rule that is being voted upon by the entire society. The rule states: "Any manuscript submitted for publication in a journal of the society which lists more than 4 (four) authors must be accompanied by a letter from the corresponding author stating the respective contributions of each and every listed author on the manuscript." How will you vote? Why? Discuss your perception of the proposed rule, including any modifications you'd like to see made to it.

2. A graduate student in a cell biology department has purified two recombinant proteins as part of his dissertation research. These proteins differ only in a few key amino acid positions. Based on standard available biochemical data, the student believes the proteins are virtually identical. In discussions with a graduate student from the biochemistry department, the cell biology student concludes that it would be reasonable to compare these two purified proteins by circular dichroism. The graduate student in biochemistry offers to collaborate on the project by analyzing the two proteins by this technique and presenting the data to the cell biology student. The faculty advisor of the biochemistry student is told of this and proceeds to tell the advisor of the cell biology student that he expects this will be a fruitful collaboration which should result in a coauthored publication. He argues that his rationale for this is based on his student's intellectual contribution in presenting the data and operating highly technical instrumentation and on his own intellectual and financial support of the circular dichroism instrument facility. The advisor of the cell biology student is strongly opposed to a coauthored paper, arguing that the biochemistry student's contribution is largely technical and does not merit co-authorship. He suggests that the biochemistry graduate student's name be placed in the acknowledgment section of any paper that comes from this work and that any of this mentor's grants used to support the circular dichroism facility be cited in the acknowledgments as well. Discuss the relevant issues of authorship in this case. Are there facts which are not presented that might sway you in one way or the other in terms of resolving the differences between the two mentors? What would be some examples of such facts?

3. A faculty investigator develops a DNA probe as a "side project" working under NIH grant funding. Although not immediately applicable, this DNA has potential in the diagnosis of a latent viral disease in humans. She publishes her results in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. Following the appearance of this work, the faculty investigator is called by a director of research of a large U.S. pharmaceutical firm. The research director requests a plasmid carrying the probe sequence for use in his company's research. The research director assures the faculty investigator that the company has no intent of commercializing the DNA probe. The investigator refuses to comply with the request for the DNA probe, claiming that the potential for commercialization is always present in the research environment of a for profit company. The director of research counters with the fact that the faculty investigator has published her results and must release the material under the standards of publication set by the peer-reviewed journal. What are the intellectual property and data ownership considerations that surround this issue? Can it be resolved? How?

4. A new postdoc is recruited to a laboratory where research is centered on the cell biology of a specific mammalian cell type. The postdoc's training has been in eucaryotic gene cloning and molecular genetics; no such technology is available in this laboratory or the department. The new postdoc completely trains a senior-level graduate student working in the group. The student proceeds to build a cDNA library of the cell type in question and isolates by molecular cloning a gene for a membrane protein. Several months later a manuscript describing this work is prepared for submission. The principal investigator (PI) of the laboratory and student are listed as coauthors. The postdoc is listed in the acknowledgment section of the paper. The postdoc is upset with this disposition and confronts the principal investigator. The PI indicates that she has strict rules about authorship and that the postdoc's contribution was a technical one which does not merit qualification for authorship. The PI quotes from several different standards of conduct documents indicating that authorship must be strictly based on intellectual and conceptual contributions to the work being prepared for publication. Technical assistance, no matter how complex or broad in scope, is not grounds for authorship. Comment on this situation.

Cases are from:

Macrina, Francis L. 1995. *Scientific Integrity: An Introductory Text with Cases*. Washington, D.C.: ASM Press.