

Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct

Of the many activities of the Society, possibly the most visible is the publication of our two journals, *The Plant Cell* and *Plant Physiology*. With the publication of these two journals comes the responsibility to ensure that the highest ethical standards are maintained at all stages of the research and publication processes. The subject of ethics is both relevant and interesting. Most of us have well-formed ethical opinions, especially about scientific practice. We all know that fabricating data is wrong. But how do we evaluate the more complex issues associated with authorship? Courtesy authorships afforded to the head of the department are not unheard of, yet most acknowledge this to be inappropriate. But other questions are much less clear. Does a timely question posed in a lab meeting that leads to a breakthrough constitute a contribution that merits inclusion as an author? Should the undergraduate who counted the samples, yet did not contribute to the experimental design or to the detailed interpretation of the work, be included as an author? After all, what better way to encourage students to continue in science than to give them a taste of the euphoria of seeing their name in print? Most universities are adding courses on scientific ethics to their curricula, recognizing the importance of laying a foundation that will allow one to pose and to answer the difficult ethical issues frequently encountered during research and publication. We are all aware of the pressures placed on the scientific community to generate a steady stream of timely publications that have high impact. We are all also sadly aware that this pressure can lead to an erosion of high ethical standards.

In an effort to emphasize the importance placed by ASPB on the maintenance of high ethical standards, as well as to codify how the Society should respond to allegations of ethical lapses, the Society has developed and adopted the following document, entitled *Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct*.

A number of people contributed to this document. Staff collected statements from other scientific societies and prepared the initial draft for review by the Publications Committee. Becky Chasan, then chair of the Publications Committee, worked diligently to

refine the document for review by her colleagues on the committee. After a number of iterations that took place over more than a year, and that included input from the editors-in-chief of the two journals and the Office of Research Integrity (Office of Public Health and Science, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), the committee approved the document and sent it to legal counsel for review. The document was then presented to the Executive Committee in

July 2003 during the Society's annual meeting in Honolulu, final comments were solicited from the editors and all Executive Committee members, changes were reviewed by legal counsel, and the final document was approved by the Executive Committee in October 2003.

Rob McClung

Publications Committee Chair
c.robertson.mcclung@dartmouth.edu

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The American Society of Plant Biologists expects members of the Society to maintain high ethical standards for scholarship. The Society's Statement of Conduct stipulates that "members shall demonstrate proper conduct in communicating scientific information in an open and timely manner." Editors, officers of the Society, and staff have a responsibility to the journals to ensure that allegations of scientific misconduct are properly investigated. *Ethics in Publishing: ASPB Policies and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Author Misconduct* has been developed to help editors, APSB officers, and staff members deal with ethical issues related to the Society's journals.

Expectations for Publishing in ASPB Journals

The American Society of Plant Biologists expects authors submitting to and publishing in its journals to adhere to ethical standards for scholarship and to ensure that the work they submit to or publish in the journals is free of scientific misconduct. Authors shall

- Take credit only for work that they have produced.
- Properly cite the work of others as well as their own related work. It is the responsibility of the authors, not the Society or the editors or reviewers, to ensure that relevant prior discoveries are appropriately acknowledged with the original citations in manuscripts submitted for publication.
- Submit only original work to the journals, no part of which has been previously published in print or online as, or is under consideration as, a peer-reviewed article in another journal, as a non-peer-

reviewed article (such as a review) in another journal, or as a book chapter.

- Determine whether the disclosure of content requires the prior consent of other parties and, if so, obtain that consent prior to submission.
- Maintain access to original research results; primary data should remain in the laboratory and should be preserved for a minimum of five years or for as long as there may be reasonable need to refer to them.

All authors of articles submitted for publication assume full responsibility, within the limits of their professional competence, for the accuracy of their paper.

Instances of possible scientific misconduct related to papers submitted to or published in the ASPB journals will be addressed by following the procedure outlined below.

Procedure for Addressing Allegations of Scientific Misconduct or Other Ethical Violations

Scientific misconduct in publishing includes but is not limited to

- *Fraud*: fabricating a report of research or suppressing or altering data
- *Duplicate publication*: publication of the same article first in an ASPB journal and subsequently in another journal or vice versa
- *Plagiarism*: taking material from another's work and submitting it as one's own
- *Self-plagiarism*: republishing one's own material that has previously been published elsewhere in the primary literature without citing the earlier publication.

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Procedure for handling allegations of misconduct

- A. All allegations of scientific misconduct or ethical violation will be referred to the Executive Director of the Society. Persons making oral allegations will be advised by the Executive Director that no action will be taken by the Society unless the allegation is made in writing.
- B. The Executive Director will notify the President and the Editor-in-Chief of the complaint. The Executive Director, President, and Editors-in-Chief of both journals, the Chair of the Publications Committee, and *The Plant Cell* co-editor or *Plant Physiology* monitoring editor who handled the manuscript (hereafter known as the Review Committee) will review the allegations and determine whether further action is necessary.
- C. If further action is deemed necessary, the Executive Director shall notify the author in writing of the allegations. The author shall be given the opportunity to respond to the allegations in writing within 30 days.
- D. The Review Committee shall consider all relevant information, including any response received from the author, in making its findings.
- E. The Executive Director, President, and Editor-in-Chief, with consultation from the Review Committee, shall determine the appropriate course of action, which

can range from simply returning the manuscript to the author to prohibiting further publication. The Executive Director, after discussion with legal counsel, shall then determine if Executive Committee and/or legal review is necessary before the Society takes action. It is important to recognize that the Society's investigation shall focus on our concerns as a publisher and that the appropriate course of action shall not exceed the constraints of this interest. If deemed appropriate, the author's home institution may be notified. Notification of the home institution will be informational only, so that the home institution is free to consider an independent investigation.

- F. Once a decision is made, the author will be notified in writing of the decision and of any action that will be taken by the Society. In the event of an adverse decision, the author may appeal to the Executive Committee. Such an appeal must be filed within 14 days of receipt of the decision. The procedures for the appeal shall be determined by the Executive Committee.

All information relating to allegations and subsequent inquiries will be kept confidential by the Review Committee, any other Society members, and staff working on the matter and will not be disclosed to any third parties, unless considered necessary according to section E. All actions, including telephone calls, must

be documented for all situations, even those resolved immediately. Copies of correspondence should be sent to the Editor-in-Chief, the chair of the Publications Committee, and the Director of Publications. A summary of alleged scientific misconduct or ethical violations, but with no names and other identifiers, should be part of the journal staff report that is delivered to the Publications Committee and the Executive Committee. 