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Year

1999

Description

This case discusses issues of data ownership, post-doc authorship, research in a lab and lab relationships as it relates to collaboration and authorship.

Body

Beverly has been a member of a synthetic research lab at A-1 University. Beverly has enjoyed a lot of freedom in her research. Her adviser and chair of the department, Dr. Jacobs, has provided casual suggestions but has left a lot of the details to personal initiative. The group also has relied heavily on the advice of post-doc, Swen, for research direction. He and Beverly have developed a close professional relationship through working on related projects.

During her third year of research, Beverly independently discovers a very desirable *whatsitdoozl*-complex. Beverly feels that if she continues her work and makes the succeeding derivatives of *whatsitdoozl*, she will soon complete her Ph.D. requirements. Shortly after the discovery, Jacobs instructs Swen to help a new graduate student, Jeremy, get started in the lab. Swen considers several possible projects for Jeremy and decides that he should assist Beverly by synthesizing a new derivative of the *whatsitdoozl*-complex.

Should Swen

1. Ask Jacobs for official permission to assign research?

2. Consult with Beverly to see if she thinks it's a good idea?
3. Instruct Jeremy to proceed but make a point to inform Beverly of his decision?
4. Simply tell Jeremy to go ahead?

Swen assigns Jeremy to work on making a derivative of the *whatsitdoozl*-complex. After several months of effort, Jeremy succeeds and excitedly reports his findings to the group at the weekly group meeting. In the hallway after the meeting, Beverly confronts Swen. "I have been working on that project for months," she states. "You had no right to assign any part of it to Jeremy without my consent. Because you detached part of my project, I'll be in grad school for another six months!"

Surprised, Swen replies, "If we don't publish our results soon other groups may catch on and beat us to it. I'm not going to be here forever either, and I need Jacobs to publish a major paper on this in order for me to get a job. Don't worry, Bev, you will have plenty of results to put into your thesis."

Just then, Jeremy emerges from the doorway grinning. "Professor Jacobs says that we should be able to publish this in *The Journal for Research Career Advancement* if I can make *whatsitdoozl*-complex C. Isn't that great?"

Discussion Questions

1. Beverly is angry. Would it have mattered if she were clear about who is responsible for assigning research *before* she began her project? Is it important to include in any official laboratory policy *reasons* for any particular assignment?
2. How far along on a project must one be to have a any say in how it is handled? Is there (or should there be) an agreement between the adviser and the graduate student regarding this point?
3. Post-docs have different research motives than grad students. How does this difference affect what Swen may consider "reasonable" assignments?

Notes

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