Who Controls Where Information Will Be Published?

Year

2000

Description

This case discusses the question of how should student-mentor conflicts be resolved and who has ownership rights to publication within this relationship?

Body

Part 1 -- Introduction

Mark Crowfoot, a graduate student, is beginning his master's project in Major University's program in biological taxonomy. Mark is excited about the project. His major adviser, Dr. Shin Lee, is highly respected in his field and prominently involved in the creation of an important national plant database on the web. In spite of his enthusiasm, Mark feels lost the first month of his graduate study. Lee is temporarily preoccupied and doesn't have time to orient Mark to the department. However, Mark is finally able to figure out most things on his own or by asking other students. It doesn't occur to him, however, to ask about official departmental policies concerning research or rules governing publishing, and he receives no official orientation from the department or university.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the department or adviser have an obligation to discuss publication policies with incoming students? Should the department provide a formal orientation? Failing that, does the student have the responsibility to find out?

2. Is Lee's conduct appropriate? Should he have provided information or asked another person to orient Mark to the program?

Part 2 -- Conflict

Mark is in a somewhat different position than many of the other students. He is not just a graduate student, but also a staff member. His salary comes from a part-time position in the museum, under Lee's direction. He has many duties that do not pertain to his research, and so his thesis project proceeds slowly. It takes six years for him to complete his research, a taxonomic key and guide to the fungi and lichens of the Southeastern United States. He collects, keys, catalogues and permanently stores more than 2,000 specimens in the university's natural resources museum.

Lee takes a particular interest in Mark's project and spends many hours with him in the field, training him for his museum position, and guiding his research. Mark becomes an authority in the subject. When his thesis is finally finished, Lee feels that Mark should publish his work. He also wants to make Mark's dissertation available for immediate feedback from the scientific community by posting it on the now well-established national web database.

Mark is shocked. He had always planned to publish a book for both the scientific and lay communities. He feels publication of a book would be an asset to his career, further identify him in his field, and perhaps generate some income as well. He does *not* want to publish it on the internet, for fear that no-cost access to the information would reduce the significance of his book. He does not believe his professor has the right to tell him how the information will be made available.

Discussion Questions

3. Who should decide where to publish Mark's dissertation?

4. When Mark becomes aware of the conflict, what should he do? Should he ask advice from another professor within the department? Should he try to find out how

others have handled similar situations?

Part 3 -- Results

Mark maintains that the decision about publication is his alone to make, and a long battle with Lee ensues. Their relationship, once cordial, becomes severely strained. Although Mark wins in the end, and the material is not posted on the internet, he ends by permanently alienating his adviser, and possibly damaging his career.

Discussion Questions

5. What is the appropriate venue for disseminating research information?

6. How might Mark have handled this situation better? Did he win the battle only to lose the war?

Notes

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Contributor(s)

Brian Schrag

Editor(s)

Brian Schrag

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Case Study / Scenario

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