



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

When May a Student Publish?

Author(s)

Albert R. Meyer

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2000

Description

A scenario meant to stimulate discussion about the ethical issues that arise when students need advisor approval in order to submit papers for conferences or publishing.

Body

Version for Theoretical Work

On the basis of outstanding undergraduate performance, Terry landed a first-year Research Assistantship in Professor Grimm's group within the Large Laboratory for Better Theory. Terry has not yet felt ready to say much to Professor Grimm or the other group members, but has thoroughly studied Grimm's recent CACM paper on parametric cache management and absorbed all the discussions at group meetings. Near the end of the year, Terry discovers a connection between the Algebraic Geometry he has been taking as a minor subject and parametric cache management. Terry quickly writes up a short paper on "Geometrically Parameterized Cache Management" to make the deadline for the annual ACM/IEEE Cache Management Symposium.

In the paper, Terry cites Professor Grimm's published work and several publicly available technical reports of other group members, and carefully acknowledges the contributions from group presentations by Grimm and two other group members. Since the basic idea of his paper comes from the algebraic geometric connection which no one else in the group is aware of, Terry feels it is appropriate to be the sole author.

Rushing to the group printer to get the final draft of his paper, Terry meets Pat, one of Grimm's senior students. Pat tells Terry that she noticed that Terry's paper is to be submitted to the ACM/IEEE Symposium and thinks Terry should clear the submission with Professor Grimm. The problem is, Grimm is out of town for the rest of the week, and the Symposium deadline is tomorrow.

- What should Terry do?
 - What are the risks to Terry or to others in this situation?
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Version for Bench Science

On the basis of outstanding undergraduate performance, Terry landed a first-year Research Assistantship in Professor Grimm's lab. Terry has not yet felt ready to say much to Professor Grimm other than report results and implement any modifications that Grimm wants, but has thoroughly studied Grimm's publications and listens very carefully to all the instructions that Grimm has given. Terry's roommate, Buddy, who is working in a related field and is a doctoral student in another department, has been the person that Terry feels most able to speculate more freely about the implications of the research. From these discussions, Terry gets the idea for another variable that may be affecting the data that Terry has been getting. Together they think of a way of controlling for the variable that will be consistent with Grimm's instructions for carrying out the experiment, and decide to try it out before discussing it with others.

At the point at which they become confident of their hypothesis about the intervening variable, Professor Grimm goes out of the country for several weeks. The data continues to strongly confirm their hypothesis and Terry decides it would be a good idea to submit a short paper for the upcoming meeting of Disciplinary Society Meetings for which submissions by student members are accepted. Terry

writes up the draft and carefully cites Professor Grimm's published work and some relevant conference papers given by other groups members. Since the idea and experimental modification are entirely Terry's and Buddy's idea, the two of them are the only authors. Buddy makes a few suggestions for the write-up, and agrees completely with the final version, but has some misgivings, since Buddy's own supervisor always want to see any submissions that go out of her lab. Terry does not want to wait for Grimm's return, since that will mean missing the conference deadline.

- What should Terry do?
- What are the risks to Terry or to others in this situation?

Notes

Caroline Whitbeck introduced methods and modules for discussing numerous issues in responsible conduct of research at a Sigma Xi Forum in 2000. Partial funding for the development of this material came from an NIH grant.

You can find the entire sequence on the OEC at [Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research](#). Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item. If you have suggestions for updates, please contact the OEC.

Author(s): by Albert R. Meyer based on a suggestion of David K. Gifford.

Contributor(s)

Caroline Whitbeck

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