



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Group Policies

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Description

An exercise around group policies in teaching responsible conduct of research, part of the [Instructor's Guide to Prepare Research Group Leaders as RCR Mentors](#).

Body

NOTES TO THE INSTRUCTOR:

- While policies potentially incorporate many of the elements considered as part of Checklists or Individual Development Plans (IDPs), they are distinctive in that they set general guidelines or expectations defining how researchers should act in a given group or setting. Especially if a workshop includes Checklists, IDPs, and Policies, it is important to have a discussion at some point to define similarities and differences among the three approaches.

Misunderstandings and disputes among researchers are much more frequent than actual Research Misconduct (Martinson et al., 2005; Martinson et al., 2010). While some of these challenges may be unavoidable, many could be mitigated simply by clear and early communication. One way to meet this goal is by developing policy documents covering such issues as authorship or data management.

Sample Policy

Authorship Policy

Criteria for authorship:

To be included as an author on a paper, it is necessary to have made a substantial and new contribution essential to publication of the paper, to provide a good faith contribution to writing and/or editing of the manuscript, and to approve the content of the version submitted for publication.

Criteria for acknowledgement:

Contributions to the publication of a manuscript that do not meet the criteria for authorship should be recognized in the acknowledgements section of the paper.

Order of authorship:

If a paper has more than one author, and assuming all authors meet the "Criteria for authorship," then the first author will typically be the person who wrote the first draft of the manuscript, the last author will be the head of the research group, and authors listed in between will be listed in order of decreasing contributions to the project.

Disputes about authorship:

If anyone believes that someone proposed to be an author, or someone left off of the list of authors, has been not been given credit appropriate to their contributions, then they should raise their concerns with the head of the research group, who has ultimate responsibility within the group for decisions about allocation of credit.

Appeals to decisions about authorship:

In the event that the above guidance is insufficient to resolve a dispute about authorship, then the interested parties should each draft an anonymized version of their perspective on the issues at stake. These summaries will then be submitted to a mutually agreeable third party for a decision based on binding arbitration. If no clear decision is rendered, then a final decision will be made by a flip of a coin (or the equivalent if multiple competing options are proposed).

Examples of Possible Topics for Policies

- Dealing with particular human or animal subjects
- Recordkeeping
- Data management, including discussions of statistical methods, and registering research questions and data analysis plans before a project begins
- Data Sharing
- Contacts with media

Questions for Discussion

1. What topics might be appropriate for a group policy in your area of research?
2. Is it possible to have a policy that would be meaningful and not counterproductive?

Exercise

1. Identify a topic for a policy of common interest to all participants in the workshop.
2. Propose possible elements to be covered in the policy.
3. Select those elements for which there is agreement, and draft wording for the proposed policy.
4. Design an implementation plan for this policy.

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Resource Type

Instructor Materials