



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Fostering a Culture of Openness and Transparency with Institutional Authorship Policies

Year

2022

Body

The OEC Project Pages are intended to cultivate a community of practice and allow ethics researchers, educators, and practitioners to more effectively disseminate their work. This Project Page provides a detailed overview and relevant resources for an on-going science or engineering ethics project. Once you've explored this project, visit the "Projects" section under "Resources" to see more ethics projects.

Description

Academic authorship refers to the naming and ordering of authors on published research. It is the primary means by which academics receive credit for their work and has become an important metric in evaluations of performance. Despite the importance of authorship for faculty and student outcomes, training and education on authorship decisions is often informal, irregular, or even nonexistent. Thus, faculty and students often lack the necessary resources and support to make ethical choices regarding authorship naming and ordering.

This lack motivated us to carry out a series of research projects at our large, public university. Our goal was to test if institutional policies can promote ethical authorship practices and improve research climate perceptions in different disciplines across the university. We first developed an institutional authorship policy based on a systematic review of existing policies across research-intensive universities in the United States (Rasmussen et al., 2020). We then developed an authorship agreement form that can be used by research collaborators to facilitate discussion and make key decisions about a project's authorship.

With these resources in hand, we conducted a survey assessing graduate students' and faculty members' perceptions of the authorship climate at our university. We then implemented an intervention with the goal of testing if such an intervention could measurably improve people's perceptions of the research and authorship climate at our university. The intervention provided instruction on authorship ethics and good practices for graduate students and their faculty mentors. The intervention did not seek to instill a particular viewpoint nor provide "correct" answers; rather, it was designed to help participants think through authorship issues and consider how they might handle them in their careers. The intervention had two arms: one in which participants completed an all-online course via Canvas and one in which participants completed the same online course but also attended a synchronous session led by two of the study PIs. This was designed to test whether synchronous sessions yielded improved outcomes or if an all-online course was equally effective. The intervention should conclude in Summer 2023, when data analysis will begin. Subsequently, we plan to launch a website to share resources, but links to existing resources can be found below.

Leadership

Dr. Lisa Rasmussen

Dr. George Banks

Dr. Elise Demeter

Dr. Katherine Hall-Hertel

Dr. Tom Reynolds

Holly Holladay-Sandidge (PhD student)

Andrew McBride (PhD student)

All are currently at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Recipient Organization

University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Start and End Date

9/1/2020 - 8/31/2025

Contact Information

Lrasmuss [at] uncc.edu

Project Website

AuthorshipProject.org, coming in spring 2023

Key Findings

Our main findings will be available after the intervention concludes in Summer of 2023. These findings will address our core question: Can institutional policies promote more ethical authorship practices and improve research climate perceptions across our university? We do, however, have findings from the initial survey we sent to faculty and graduate students across our university.

This survey (Smith & Master, 2017) yielded a few key findings regarding differences between faculty and graduate students. Specifically, we found that faculty members, when compared to students, reported being more comfortable discussing authorship openly with their collaborators. We also found differences in terms of how important different types of contributions were considered. For instance, graduate students rated “technical work” on a project as more important when making authorship

decisions than faculty members did.

Publications, Presentations, and Other Products

“The Development and Features of an Institutional Authorship Policy,” World Congress on Research Integrity, Cape Town, South Africa. May 30, 2022 (virtual presentation).

“Authorship Agreements: A Tool for Opening the Black Box of Authorship Conversations,” World Congress on Research Integrity, Cape Town, South Africa. (Virtual, pre-recorded poster presentation).

“Authorship Agreements: A Tool for Opening the Black Box of Authorship Conversations,” Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, Cincinnati, Ohio, pre-conference workshop, February 25, 2022. (Flash presentation.)

[Authorship Policy](#)

[Authorship Agreement Form](#)

Attached Resources

1. [Fostering a Culture of Openness and Transparency with an Institutional Authorship Policy](#)

Contributor(s)

Lisa Rasmussen

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Resource Type

Projects

Parent Collection

STEM Ethics Projects (2017-Present)

Topics

Collaboration

Interdisciplinary Research

International Collaboration

Mentors and Trainees

Publication Ethics

Authorship

Discipline(s)

Research Ethics

Publisher

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