GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORSHIP AND AVOIDING AUTHORSHIP DISPUTES

Background

UVA and its faculty, staff, students, and trainees are committed to advancing knowledge, art, and academic values, and to upholding the highest ethical standards.

To contribute to the advancement of knowledge, scholarly activities must be published.

Authorship of published work is central to the academic structure. It confers credit and responsibility and has important implications to the individuals involved, the reputation of the institution, and to public trust in and benefit from academic work.

Therefore, scholarly or scientific publications produced under the auspices of UVA should reflect the actual author contributions to the final published product.

Overview

This document serves as a broad guide for determining authorship and avoiding authorship disputes at the University of Virginia (UVA). This guideline supplements the university's 'Research Misconduct' RES-004 policy.

Applicability

Principles outlined in this document apply to all scholarly activities at the University regardless of form (e.g., journal manuscripts, books, book chapters, presentations, posters, reports, guidance documents, software, web media, art, and design work), or discipline, and are not limited to original scientific research.

Authorship criteria listed in this guidance are based on the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) recommendations, but apply to other publishers.

Principles for Determining Authorship

UVA researchers should follow the joint authorship traditions accepted within their discipline, and should comply with the journal-specific requirements for authorship and all other aspects relevant to the publication.

Authorship refers to the listing of contributors to a scholarly article, and applies to any individual who substantially contributed to the scholarly activity as defined below.

The principles listed on the next pages serve as a guide for important issues surrounding authorship across the University.

- Authorship at UVA should be based on the following four criteria: (1) significant contribution to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; (2) drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; (3) final approval of the version to be published; and (4) agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated.

- Any authors should meet all four criteria and all those who meet the four criteria should be listed as authors, regardless of rank or affiliation.

- All individuals who fulfill the first criterion should be given the opportunity to participate in drafting, reviewing, and approving the manuscript.

- Individuals who contributed to the work but do not fulfill all four criteria should be listed in the acknowledgements section with a description of their role.

- Authorship inclusion and order should be a joint decision of all co-authors. This decision should be made early on while planning the work and should allow for appropriate adjustments as the work evolves.

- A primary author role should be assigned to the individual who has the greatest understanding of the project, did most of the work, and takes responsibility for the integrity of the work as a whole. The primary author often serves as the corresponding author.

- Equal contributorship may be noted in a footnote when applicable.

- A record of how the order of authorship was decided should be maintained by the senior author. This is especially important for multidisciplinary projects.

- It is the responsibility of the primary author to prepare a written description of the contributions of each author and provide an explanation of how the order of authorship was determined.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Who should be listed as the first author?

A: Joint authorship traditions differ between disciplines. You should follow the traditions accepted in your field and comply with the journal-specific requirements for authorship. Typically, in science the first author is the individual that did most of the work, and the last author is the most senior researcher who lead the efforts for the research described in the manuscript. The remaining authors are in order of their contributions and the last author is the team leader.

Q: My department head and/or supervisor insists on being included as an author on all my manuscripts. His/her only contribution was obtaining financial support. Is that fair?

A: Authorship applies to any individual who meets the criteria listed in this guide. Financial support alone may be worthy of acknowledgment but does not qualify for authorship. Listing individuals that do not meet the four criteria is inconsistent with this guide.

Q: I am part of a big team working on a project. The authorship order was decided and recorded at the project initiation. One of the team members moved to a different unit should we change the authorship order?

A: Changes in the order of authorship should reflect changes in the author's level of contribution and are not necessarily linked to status changes. Proposed changes to the authorship listing should be discussed with all authors.

Additional Frequently Asked Questions

Q: I recently arrived at a lab as a research fellow and got permission to use an existing dataset. I am unsure whether the PI should be a co-author.

A: It depends. If you were hired by the PI to conduct a secondary analysis and the PI meets all four criteria then he/she should be listed as an author.

But, if this was completely your own idea and apart from giving you permission to use the data the PI does not meet all four criteria, then you should discuss with him/her being listed in the acknowledgement along with all the provided resources.

Q: English is my second language and I need help with scientific writing, so I asked my colleagues to review and help edit my writings. Should I list them as authors if that was their only contribution?

A: No. Assisting with manuscript preparation alone does not qualify for authorship credit. You can recognize their assistance in the acknowledgements section.

Questions?

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- Each author should be prepared to take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the publication.

- Contributions such as acquisition of funding, supervising study personnel, routine data collection, enrolling patients, or assisting with manuscript preparation alone do not qualify individuals for authorship credit.

- Courtesy, gift, or ghost authorships are inconsistent with the principles of this guideline and, as such, are unacceptable.

Ownership of the Research Data

Research data that are generated and/or collected under the auspices of UVA are owned by the Rectors & Visitors of the University of Virginia and not by a particular Principal Investigator (PI) or unit. As custodians of research data, PIs are responsible for ensuring proper data management, retention, security, and use in accordance with UVA policies, federal regulations, sponsor agreements, and best practices. Published data must be made available upon request.

Communicating Expectations

When a new member joins a lab or a research group the PI or the senior researcher in the group is responsible for initiating conversations on responsible authorship and matters of authorship credit. Such discussions should also occur at the initiation of new projects and when roles change during the course of the project.

Principles for Resolving Authorship Disputes

If a conflict over authorship arises, every attempt should be made to find a resolution at the local level by the authors themselves. If the immediate group fails to find a satisfactory resolution, the concerned party may seek guidance from a third party that is acceptable to all authors. This may be a department associate chair, chair, research associate dean, dean, or the university ombudsperson. The Research Integrity Officer (RIO) in the UVA Office of Research may facilitate resolutions for inter-departmental disputes. This document should be used as a guide and any resolution to an authorship dispute must be consistent with the policy described in RES-001. Disputes should be resolved before work is presented or submitted for publication.

References and Additional Resources

(1) Education and Evaluation in Responsible Research and Scholarship (PEERRS), Authorship Course

(2) International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors. Accessible here.

(3) Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). What Constitutes Authorship? Cope Discussion Document. COPE Council, June 9 2014. Accessible here.

(4) Council of Science Editors (CSE). Authorship and Authorship Responsibilities. Accessible here.

(5) Flanagin, Fontanarosa, DeAngelis. Authorship for Research Groups. JAMA, December 25, 2002, 288(24), p.3166-8. Accessible here.

(6) Albert, Wager. How to Handle Authorship Disputes: A Guide for New Researchers. The COPE Report 2003. Accessible here.

(7) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) Resources on Data Sharing. Accessible here.

(8) Preempting Discord: Prenuptial Agreements for Scientists. Howard Gadlin, and Kevin Jessar. Accessible here.

(9) Best Practices for Designating Authorship. Scientific Integrity, US Environmental Protection Agency. Accessible here.

In addition to incorporating authorship principles developed by ICMJE, COPE, EPA, and the additional references listed above, this guidance is indebted in part to authorship policies from the following institutions: Harvard University, Washington University- St. Louis, Yale, Duke, University of Michigan, and Michigan State University.

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