

AY19-1-F

Faculty Senate Issue Log Form

Date-Submitted: August 25, 2019

Title-of-Issue: Need clarification regarding guidelines for co-authorship, including influence on faculty evaluation and impact on reportable conflicts of interest.

Description: Lack of clarity in guidelines for co-authorship, including how co-authorship should influence evaluation of faculty publications, as well as when co-authorship might constitute a conflict of interest.

Rationale: Ethical guidelines for co-authorship vary considerably across disciplines. In some disciplines, particularly in the sciences, when multiple faculty members participate in externally-funded labs, any faculty member engaged in research involving the lab is listed as a co-author, no matter how minor their involvement in the research report itself. In the absence of any additional information, this practice makes it very difficult to evaluate the credit a faculty member should receive for such co-authorship.

In addition, in such instances, if one were to follow the Handbook guidelines, which recommend that to avoid conflicts of interest, one should generally not engage co-authors in external review for awards or promotion, then some faculty members would have very few nationally/internationally recognized faculty in their areas of expertise to provide an external review. This places an undue burden on that faculty member, as well as those attempting to generate an acceptable list of external reviewers.

In addition, there are instances in which faculty members are granted access to secondary data sets in exchange for co-authorship, including cases in which the faculty member providing the data set has no further engagement with the conduct of the research or reporting of the results. Would it be appropriate to claim co-authorship in that instance? If so, how should that impact how the publication is evaluate in terms of the faculty member's effort?

Another matter involves disciplines or situations in which guidelines regarding co-authorship and/or redress for inappropriate claims of co-authorship are not clear. Unfortunately, in some instances, faculty members (typically junior faculty) may feel subject to pressure from more senior faculty members to include the more senior faculty member as an author on a publication for which it may not be clear that the senior faculty member invested the appropriate amount of time and energy to have earned co-authorship.

It has also been reported that some graduate students feel subject to the same kinds of pressure, with even less standing than a junior faculty member to resist.

According to the Handbook, during the review process, the chair is responsible for evaluating the level of authorship (e.g., sole versus multiple, first vs. second vs. third) of publications. Given claims of co-authorship are increasingly complicated, it seems only prudent that our Handbook should offer some guidance to faculty and those who review faculty publications about how to determine the appropriateness of co-authorship, as well as how co-authorship should impact evaluations, as well as real or potential conflicts of interest.

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