

## **Publication & Authorship: A discussion in the mailing list ECOLOG-L**

Date: Fri, 7 Nov 2003 09:54:26 -0700  
From: {Vanessa Beauchamp} <[Vanessa.Beauchamp@ASU.EDU](mailto:Vanessa.Beauchamp@ASU.EDU)>  
Subject: authorship

I am in the process of writing my dissertation and am having a debate with fellow graduate students and my advisor over the value of single-author papers. Are single-author papers valued differently than co-authored papers for hiring and tenure? Is it to my benefit to have at least one single-author paper come from my dissertation?

-Vanessa

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 15:32:18 +0100  
From: Tim Nuttle <[Tim.Nuttle@UNI-JENA.DE](mailto:Tim.Nuttle@UNI-JENA.DE)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

A paper in TREE examined a closely related issue: T. Trengenza (2002) Gender bias in the refereeing process? Trends in Ecol. Evol 17(8): 349-350.

In addition to finding no difference in citation or acceptance rates based on gender of the first author, the paper addressed the relationship between number of authors and citation/acceptance rates. Regarding acceptance rates, papers with 4+ authors were significantly more likely to be accepted. Papers with one author were most likely to be rejected for publication. Regarding citation rates (germane to your question of impact), papers with two authors are cited most frequently, followed by 3-, 1-, and 4+-author papers.

Not related to your question, though very interesting, is that although 4+-author papers are most likely to be accepted, they are least likely to be cited!

So, if citation rates are correlated to "looking good on a CV", then it appears that you should put your advisor (assuming that is the person in question) on the paper. However, it seems to me (and I am by no means an expert!) that a mixture would look best, including some papers for which you are not first author. That would show not only your individual brilliance, but also your ability to work collaboratively with others. (Of course, in order to have a mixture of papers, you need at least several of them, which conventional wisdom says is better than fewer.)

Tim Nuttle  
Research Fellow  
Institute of Ecology  
Friedrich Schiller University



acknowledgements are for?

I think we should always apply the rule that the reason that a person is included as an author of a paper is that the person contributed in a material way to the work.

Cheers

Craig Turner

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 12:18:47 -0500  
From: Clinton Jenkins <[Jenkins@MSU.EDU](mailto:Jenkins@MSU.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

I heartily concur with Dave. Authorship should reflect contribution to the science in the paper. The practice of adding 'courtesy' authors to improve the palatability of a paper or increase its likelihood of acceptance is worrying. Science's reputation thrives on integrity and honesty in research, as well as reporting of research results.

In some cases, including the head of a lab is warranted, if the work would not have been possible without them. This is probably the case with most graduate students and their advisors. In other cases it may not be warranted. For instance, commenting on a manuscript throughout the writing process might warrant authorship. On the other hand, just commenting on the last draft of a manuscript would not warrant authorship in my mind.

If you can imagine having written the paper without any assistance, then single authorship may be appropriate. However, guessing the perceived value of a paper should not be a criterion for deciding authorship. It degrades the value of scientific reporting in general.

Clinton Jenkins

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 11:42:59 -0600  
From: "David B. Czarnecki" <[David.Czarnecki@LORAS.EDU](mailto:David.Czarnecki@LORAS.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

I heartily concur with Dave McNeely's comments. The alternative rationales frighten me.

David B. Czarnecki, PhD

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 14:18:31 -0600  
From: "Jeffrey J. Lusk" <[luskj@OKSTATE.EDU](mailto:luskj@OKSTATE.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Are there any opinions out there about including as author someone from a funding agency or source?

Thanks

Jeff

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 12:24:10 -0800  
From: "C. Jones" <[ccjones@U.WASHINGTON.EDU](mailto:ccjones@U.WASHINGTON.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

I certainly agree that only those who have contributed should be included as authors, but I think that there is still reason for discussion about whether it is better to have single author papers or multiple author publications. Prior to conducting an experiment or writing a paper we often have the opportunity to decide if we want to collaborate with others on the project or not. The value of single vs. multiple authored publications can potentially play a part in this decision.

So even though I agree that post-hoc decisions of who to include as authors are problematic, I think that it is valuable for young scientists like me to know if a single author paper is considered more valuable than a multiple author paper.

Chad

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 15:33:27 -0500  
From: Kerry Woods <[kwoods@BENNINGTON.EDU](mailto:kwoods@BENNINGTON.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

This is by way of agreeing with the several voices that have agreed with Dave McNeely's comments, AND to add some 'institutional' support:

ESA has a Code of Professional Ethics (that was thoroughly revised and re-adopted a couple of years ago), and the Code addresses this issue rather directly.

Here is the relevant passage from the "Publications" section:

1. Researchers will claim authorship of a paper only if they have made a substantial contribution. Authorship may legitimately be claimed if researchers
  - a. conceived the ideas or experimental design;
  - b. participated actively in execution of the study;
  - c. analyzed and interpreted the data; or
  - d. wrote the manuscript.

This was intended primarily to address situations where someone might use

position to claim right of authorship inappropriately -- somewhat different than the situation that started this whole thread (where the primary writer is considering whether it's in their best interests to invite further authors). But I think it's still appropriate. To \*offer\* authorship to people who don't meet this criterion is, at best, questionable in terms of accurate representation of things (which ought to be central to the enterprise?). Of course, if they \*do\* meet the criterion, it's up to those potential authors, jointly, what they want to do...

Best,

Kerry Woods

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 12:36:16 -0800  
From: Renata <[platenberg@YAHOO.COM](mailto:platenberg@YAHOO.COM)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

How do junior scientists, postdocs, etc. then approach a situation in which it is political to include an author who contributed little if at all to the research? I'm not talking about PhD supervisors, who probably contributed throughout by directing research goals, but more, say, department heads whose name and reputation expedited funding, but were not involved directly in the project.

Dr. Renata Platenberg

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 16:13:32 -0500  
From: Kerry Woods <[kwoods@BENNINGTON.EDU](mailto:kwoods@BENNINGTON.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship; dealing with imposition from rank...

This is obviously tricky. Claiming authorship \*solely\* by virtue of position/rank is clearly inconsistent with ESA's code of ethics. BUT, the Code is mostly a moral authority and has little enforcement clout, and even if it did, it wouldn't change the political realities and risks for junior people. (I do point out, though, that anybody who submits a manuscript to ESA's journals is implicitly agreeing to abide by the Code of Ethics as it applies to publication.)

Kerry Woods

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 15:30:34 -0600  
From: Jason West <[westx062@TC.UMN.EDU](mailto:westx062@TC.UMN.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Ecologists may be interested in a policy from the journal Nature (from 1999):

([http://www.nature.com/cgi-taf/DynaPage.taf?file=/nature/journal/v399/n6735/full/399393b0\\_fs.html](http://www.nature.com/cgi-taf/DynaPage.taf?file=/nature/journal/v399/n6735/full/399393b0_fs.html))

If authors request it they allow a statement in the Acknowledgements on what each author's contribution to the work was.

-Jason West

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 16:22:29 -0500  
From: Joe Poston <[JPPOSTON@CATAWBA.EDU](mailto:JPPOSTON@CATAWBA.EDU)>  
Subject: authorship

In a sense, this thread has drifted somewhat from the original question (although in a productive direction). To return to the original question:

Are single-author papers valued differently than co-authored papers for hiring and tenure? Is it to my benefit to have at least one single-author paper come from my dissertation?

Assuming that authorship issues are determined properly, then I will argue that a single-authored paper is more valuable on a CV than a multiple-authored paper. Search committees and tenure committees ought to value such papers because they demonstrate abilities that are important dimensions of scientific pursuit. The author of a single-authored paper must conceive, execute, analyze, and write about research independently. The only additional dimension addressed by a multiple-authored paper is the ability to work with others. Even though this is a valued trait in a colleague, I argue that multiple-authored papers leave open the possibility that a candidate is untested in one of the other dimensions. Consequently, a strong single-authored paper should demonstrate more about a candidate than an equally strong multiple-authored paper.

I'd like to know if others agree with or disagree with my opinion on this.

Joe Poston

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 13:13:51 -0800  
From: "Baker, Tim" <[Tim-Baker@REDWOODS.EDU](mailto:Tim-Baker@REDWOODS.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Not to throw a large rock in the pond, but what about the other end of the argument; individuals who meet one or more of the standards (particularly the conception and execution) but were left out of authorship of the final paper? This is something that can happen all too often to graduate students and post-docs who are usually the ones most in need of the recognition

-Tim

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 12:20:36 -0500  
From: Steve Friedman <[friedm69@MSU.EDU](mailto:friedm69@MSU.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Not entirely true for all disciplines. Mathematics for instance uses an alphabetic order for all publications regardless of who the Faculty member is and whether journal authors students or other faculty. Geography follows other rules, but not necessarily the primary always in the first position.

Steve Friedman

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Date: Tue, 11 Nov 2003 14:51:44 -0800  
From: Jonathan Greenberg <[greenberg@UCDAVIS.EDU](mailto:greenberg@UCDAVIS.EDU)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Still finishing up my grad career, I can't speak to how people feel single authored papers are more valuable, but to be honest with you, when I come across papers in my field (remote sensing) I tend to be a little more wary of single author papers because of the scope of many projects we perform. The ability to collaborate seems like a precious skill, and I have an inherent distrust of any author who appears to be "operating in a vacuum" unless the project is clearly a single-person job. This varies from field to field, of course, and from question to question. I asked one of my oral examiners this exact question, and he suggested that up until very recently the single author paper was indeed more valuable, but as our realization that most ecological questions are extremely complex, there has been a shift towards preferring multiple authored papers.

On a lighter note, I'd think being 1st of 3 or more is better than being 1st of 2 authors, since your name stands alone in any journal citations (Greenberg et al., 2007) vs. (Greenberg and Smith, 2010). Perhaps the primary on 2-author papers should find any excuse to include a 3rd person...

Back to a related topic -- as an undergrad I was put on papers for being nothing more than a field lackey -- what is the feeling on including field workers on papers as essentially "payment" for their help? Kerry Woods listed these as legitimate claims of authorship, "if researchers

- a. conceived the ideas or experimental design;
- b. participated actively in execution of the study;
- c. analyzed and interpreted the data; or
- d. wrote the manuscript."

Since field lackeys fall under "b", are researchers obligated to put them on as authors? Do they not belong at all? Since field workers are typically undergrads or early grad students, who most need authorships for applying to schools and funding sources, they clearly have an interest in this question.

Jonathan Greenberg

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Date: Wed, 12 Nov 2003 11:43:34 +0100  
From: Tim Nuttle <[Tim.Nuttle@UNI-JENA.DE](mailto:Tim.Nuttle@UNI-JENA.DE)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

Chad's comments are exactly what I meant regarding "strategic authoring". Clearly, when a project begins, the issue of contribution can be discussed and (tentatively) decided. Along the way, people help out who you had not anticipated originally, or someone might not help out as expected. So there is of course some flexibility and ambiguity introduced.

It seems to me to be a truly poor career strategy indeed when someone is never concerned with strategically involving themselves in projects, and claiming credit where it is due. I think we are all aware of the case of the altruistic, helpful researcher who failed to get tenure (or almost) because of limited publications, but who was obviously an asset to the department. In the case of PhD advisors, it seemed from the original post that the advisor was leaving the option open to the student as to whether the advisor would be an author. In that case, it seems reasonably clear that the advisor's input was helpful (thus warranting authorship) but not essential (in the opinion of the advisor, thus making authorship optional). Having a rational discussion about this is clearly preferable to a battle down the road, and it speaks well of the advisor who has the career interests of the student in mind!

-Tim Nuttle

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Date: Fri, 14 Nov 2003 12:10:03 -0700  
From: {Vanessa Beauchamp} <[Vanessa.Beauchamp@ASU.EDU](mailto:Vanessa.Beauchamp@ASU.EDU)>  
Subject: authorship summary

I received quite a few replies to my question about value of single-author publications for hiring and tenure. Several people requested that I pass along what I found out, so the responses are below (names have been removed). I also want to clarify my question and situation. I will have several papers from my dissertation that are co-authored with my advisor. I feel that one aspect of the project is much more "mine" than the others. I came up with the idea, designed the experiment, wrote the proposal, did all the work... but my advisor had input at every step. While her comments didn't substantially change the project, they were helpful and warrant authorship. However, if I am to have a single-author paper come from my dissertation, this is the one. I'm not trying give credit to someone not involved, or minimally involved, after the fact to enhance the prestige of the paper. My advisor is fine with either decision. I guess the dilemma is that my paper is more likely to get noticed with my advisor as a co-author (strategic publishing or not, it's true) but I am worried that a year or two from now I'll regret not having a solo effort.

I'm still on the fence. The discussion isn't written yet and I have some results I'm still puzzling over, so the case for co-authorship might strengthen in the next few weeks. Thanks to the list for all the input.

-Vanessa

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Date: Mon, 17 Nov 2003 12:57:56 -0000  
From: William Silvert <[ciencia@SILVERT.ORG](mailto:ciencia@SILVERT.ORG)>  
Subject: Re: authorship

I've been away from the office for a while and missed the initial discussion of this thread, but some of the postings, including Dave's, I think merit comment.

First of all, science is fluid and it isn't always easy to know in advance who will contribute what. It is also not always clear what level of contribution merits authorship. At times someone who feels that he only made some minor suggestions is included because the other author(s) feel that the suggestions were of crucial value to the paper, which is quite the opposite of someone senior insisting on being a co-author because of his position. This can be particularly relevant when one of the potential authors feels no need to inflate his publication list and is quite comfortable being left off, but the other authors want to include him because they think his contribution was relevant and the paper will have more clout with his name on it.

But the last point of Dave's is one that has recently become a public issue. Are all authors responsible for the full content of the paper? I don't think that this is realistic, given the increased reliance on specialised technology. It is not reasonable to expect an electron microscopist to take responsibility for the sampling protocols that brought the samples to his lab, for example.

Bill Silvert