

Learning objectives

The aim of this game is to provide the players/participants with an opportunity to reflect on issues related to co-authorship, acknowledgement, and credit in research & industry collaborations. After participated in this activity, the participant will:

1. Be able to provide solutions for how to solve disputes concerning co-authorship, acknowledgement, and credit in research & industry collaboration.
2. Be able to recognize the appropriate grounds for giving academic credit to those involved in research.
3. Be able to recognize the importance of defining the various roles of those involved in research & business collaboration in advance in order to avoid potential disputes and disagreements.

Target Audience

Master students, doctoral students, and their supervisors.

The Scenario

You are among the co-authors of a research paper that presents the results from a research & industry collaboration. The paper has already been published online with open access when you receive an email from the journal editor that they have received a complaint from a person who claims to be unfairly excluded from the paper. You have now been called to a meeting together with the co-authors of the paper as well as a research integrity officer at the University of Syldavia who is trying to reconstruct what has happened. Based on your role, discuss what would be the most appropriate way to respond to the journal editor. The person that has made the claims is not invited to the meeting.

Roles

- Juan Lòpez, doctoral student, corresponding author
- Lana Nikolić, Associate professor at the Department of statistics and supervisor of Juan Lòpez
- Elisabeth Hook, Senior researcher at the research division of Biotech Industrials
- Amir Hamid, head of the research division of Biotech Industrials
- Tor Andersen, Research Integrity officer

Game Design / Instructions

This is a role-playing game where each of the participants take on either one of the roles as one of the co-authors of the research paper, or the role of the research integrity officer. The game takes the form of a meeting led by the research integrity officer in which the participants have to address a dispute concerning co-authorship, acknowledgement, and credit for a research contribution.

Number of participants: 5

Estimated time: 1h

- Read your role description and prepare yourself for the meeting by reading the recommendations from the [Committee on Publication Ethics](#) (15 min) and [ICMJE recommendations](#)
- Role-play (25 min)
- Follow-up discussion, including debriefing and - if time allows, and introduction of [CRedit](#) (20 min)



Role-playing game

on co-authorship, acknowledgement, and credit in research & industry collaboration

Further Resources

to learn more about best practices for how to handle credit in research & industry collaboration:

Carfagno ML, Schweers SA, Whann EA, Hodgson MB, Mittleman KD, Nastasee SA, Sorgenfrei T, Kodukulla MI; International Society for Medical Publication Professionals Authorship Task Force. (2022). Building consensus on author selection practices for industry-sponsored research: recommendations from an expert task force of medical publication professionals. *Current Medical Research and Opinion* 38(6): 863-870.

Smith, E., & Master, Z. (2017). Best practices to order authors in multi/interdisciplinary health science research publications. *Accountability in Research: policies and quality assurance*, 24(4), 243–267.

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Role description - Juan Lòpez

You are Juan Lòpez, a third year doctoral student in biomedical statistics. Your PhD is co-sponsored by the University of Syldavia and the company Biotech Industrials. The aim of your PhD is to improve the ways to obtain statistical information at the Biotech Industrials.

One morning, when going through your mailbox, you find a letter from an editor of a scientific journal where you recently have published an article with a cc to all the co-authors of that paper

Dear authors,

I am writing to you as the authors of the paper "Introducing a new method for the measurement of biostatistical information". I am sorry to inform you that we have received a complaint from Maria Nilsson, a former employee of the company Biotech Industrials. Maria Nilsson claims that she should have been included as a co-author of the above-mentioned paper. She writes that she has made an important contribution to the paper and that she recognizes that some of the data and results presented overlap with her own master thesis, written while she was working at the Biotech Industrials a few years ago.

Would you mind responding to this query ASAP and explain whether this requires any further investigation or corrections to your paper? Please observe that you and your co-authors did state upon submitting your paper that the co-authors listed fulfilled the criteria for authorship as explained by the Committee for publication ethics (COPE).

Kind regards,

Sofia Bentivoglio

The letter makes you both surprised and very nervous as you have been planning to include this paper as part of your PhD thesis. You have no idea who this Maria Nilsson is. You assume that there must have been a mistake. As far as you know there are only four people involved as co-authors of this paper. Besides yourself, they include your supervisor, Assistant professor Lana Nikolić, senior researcher at Biotech Industrials Elisabeth Hooks, and Amir Hamid, who is the head of the research division at the Biotech Industrials.

Later this afternoon you are called to a meeting with the co-authors and the research integrity officer Tor Anderson. During this meeting you would very much like to know who Maria Nilsson is, whether she has in fact made a significant contribution to the study, and if so why she has been excluded. However, as a PhD student you are not sure whether you have any right to decide who should be included on research papers and who should not and you don't want to make your supervisor or your colleagues at the Biotech Industrial upset - you need a job after getting a PhD! However, you would like to know what really is required for co-authorship.

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Role description - Lana Nikolić

You are Lana Nikolić, associate professor of biomedical statistics at the University of Syldavia. You love your job and feel very lucky to be able to spend your days doing research and teaching. You are very proud to be the main supervisor of Mr. Juan Lòpez, who is about to start his final year of the PhD Programme. Juan's PhD is co-sponsored by the company Biotech Industrials with whom your department has been collaborating for many years, even before you joined the department five years ago. Being busy with your own teaching and research, you have not been able to spend any substantial time at the Biotech Industrials. Instead, most of the research collaboration in this case is made through Juan.

One morning, when going through your mailbox, you find a letter from an editor of a scientific journal where you recently have published an article with a cc to all the co-authors of that paper.

Dear authors,

I am writing to you as the authors of the paper "Introducing a new method for the measurement of biostatistical information". I am sorry to inform you that we have received a complaint from Maria Nilsson, a former employee of the company Biotech Industrials. Maria Nilsson claims that she should have been included as a co-author of the above-mentioned paper. She writes that she has made an important contribution to the paper and that she recognizes that some of the data and results presented overlap with her own master thesis, written while she was working at the Biotech Industrials a few years ago.

Would you mind responding to this query ASAP and explain whether this requires any further investigation or corrections to your paper? Please observe that you and your co-authors did state upon submitting your paper that the co-authors listed fulfilled the criteria for authorship as explained by the Committee for publication ethics (COPE).

Kind regards,

Sofia Bentivoglio

You feel that this is both suspicious and problematic. You cannot recall anyone mentioning Maria Nilsson or her involvement in this project. You trust Juan and you are certain that he would have informed you if this Maria Nilsson should have been included. Hence, you assume that there must have been a mistake. However, unlike Juan, you do not interact with the people at the Biotech Industrials on a regular basis besides a bi-monthly meeting where you discuss the opportunities for possible collaborations on research and student training. You have mainly been listed as a co-author being a supervisor, but actually, you can't say that your contribution was substantial in any way, you just read the last version and provided a few comments. However, since the plan is to have this paper included in Juan's doctoral thesis, you feel that there is an urgent need to solve this issue right away. Therefore, you decide to alarm the research integrity officer TorAndersen who agrees to host a meeting with you, Juan, as well as Elisabeth Hooks and Amir Hamid, your co-authors from Biotech Industrials. During this meeting you would very much like to know who Maria Nilsson is, whether she has in fact made a significant contribution to the study, and if so why she has been excluded.

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Role description - Elisabeth Hook

You are Elisabeth Hook, a senior researcher at the research division of the Biotech Industrials. You have been with the company and its research division for about five years now. During this time, you have been involved in a number of collaborations with the University of Syldavia, both as a researcher and as a co-supervisor of master students doing their thesis work at the Biotech Industrials.

One morning, when going through your mailbox, you find a letter from an editor of a scientific journal where you recently have published an article with a cc to all the co-authors of that paper.

Dear authors,

I am writing to you as the authors of the paper "Introducing a new method for the measurement of biostatistical information". I am sorry to inform you that we have received a complaint from Maria Nilsson, a former employee of the company Biotech Industrials. Maria Nilsson claims that she should have been included as a co-author of the above-mentioned paper. She writes that she has made an important contribution to the paper and that she recognizes that some of the data and results presented overlap with her own master thesis, written while she was working at the Biotech Industrials a few years ago.

Would you mind responding to this query ASAP and explain whether this requires any further investigation or corrections to your paper? Please observe that you and your co-authors did state upon submitting your paper that the co-authors listed fulfilled the criteria for authorship as explained by the Committee for publication ethics (COPE).

Kind regards,

Sofia Bentivoglio

You find this mail somewhat disturbing, yet you are not that surprised. You remember Maria very well as you were her supervisor during her time at the Biotech Industrials. She was a very ambitious student. However, to your mind she was also a person who thought that her contribution to the lab was invaluable although her work could easily be replaced by any lab assistant. Furthermore, even if Maria indeed did help collect the data she would not be able to do so without your close supervision. From your collaborations with her, you think that it is clear that she would not have been able to contribute intellectually to the paper that you later wrote together with Lana Nikolić and her PhD student Juan. In this sense, your opinion is that she would not be able to qualify as a co-author according to the recommendations of the *Committee of Publication Ethics*.

Another thing that annoys you is that even if the data presented in the paper was to some extent collected by Maria and used in her thesis, the data was also collected on the request of the Biotech Industrials and in relation to one of the products to which you have the property rights. As all Master students sign an agreement, that the data belongs to the Biotech Industrials and free for you to use in future work, so you thought it was clear that you don't have to give any credit to them.

Later this afternoon you are called to a meeting with all the co-authors as well as the research integrity officer Tor Anderson of the University of Syldavia. You suspect that you'll probably have to defend yourself at this meeting. You are prepared, however, to argue that Maria did not fulfill the authorship criteria.

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Role description - Amir Hamid

You are Amir Hamid, the head of the research division of Biotech Industrials, a company doing research and product development in the area of biotechnology. Your company has collaborated with the University of Syldavia for a long time. Besides providing opportunities for master students to do their thesis work at the company and thereby get important training, you also co-fund research projects for doctoral students. One of them is Juan López who is supervised by Associate Professor Lana Nikolić at the University of Syldavia.

One morning, when going through your mailbox, you find a letter from an editor of a scientific journal where you recently have published an article with a cc to all the co-authors of that paper.

Dear authors,

I am writing to you as the authors of the paper "Introducing a new method for the measurement of biostatistical information". I am sorry to inform you that we have received a complaint from Maria Nilsson, a former employee of the company Biotech Industrials. Maria Nilsson claims that she should have been included as a co-author of the above-mentioned paper. She writes that she has made an important contribution to the paper and that she recognizes that some of the data and results presented overlap with her own master thesis, written while she was working at the Biotech Industrials a few years ago.

Would you mind responding to this query ASAP and explain whether this requires any further investigation or corrections to your paper? Please observe that you and your co-authors did state upon submitting your paper that the co-authors listed fulfilled the criteria for authorship as explained by the Committee for publication ethics (COPE).

Kind regards,

Sofia Bentivoglio

You find this mail disturbing. Personally, you are not involved in supervising master students, but somewhere you recall the name of Maria Nilsson. However, given that you have quite a few students working at the company every semester you are not certain who she is. What you do find worrisome, however, is that this is not the first time that students have complained about their work being reused in research. For the most part, your colleagues have told you that the students are exaggerating and you could not help but agree. The tasks that students are handed are rarely of the sort that counts as substantial according to the recommendations from the Committee on Publication Ethics. Yet a few years ago, you had a problem with one of your colleagues plagiarizing a student's work and publishing it under his own name in a scientific journal. This case was exceptional, but it certainly damaged the reputation of the company and your cooperation with the University of Syldavia. You feel strongly that it is very important that this type of thing never happen again, as well as that this current action does not leak out: the preservation of the good name of the company is essential! Any correction of the paper would be bad for the company and for you personally.

Later this afternoon you are called to a meeting with all the co-authors as well as the research integrity officer Tor Anderson of the University of Syldavia. Besides yourself and your close colleague Elisabeth Hooks, PhD student Juan López and Associate Professor Lana Nikolić will be present at the meeting. At the meeting you want to know whether there is any good chance of avoiding an open conflict and yet another scandal, but also to discuss critically how to best prevent this from happening again in the future.

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Role description - Tor Andersen

You are Tor Andersen. You have a background as a researcher in sociology at the University of Syldavia, but for the last eight years, you have been working as a Research Integrity officer at the same university. It is your role to inform researchers about research ethics and how to uphold integrity in their research. This includes giving lectures on research integrity to the university staff, answering direct questions from researchers regarding issues of research ethics, and conducting investigations of suspected research misconduct.

This morning you received an email from Lana Nikolić. You only know Lana by name and that she is a professor at the department of Biomedicine. She writes:

Dear dr Andersen,

I have just received an email from the editor of a journal where my doctoral student Juan López and I have recently published a research article. The mail says that there has been a complaint from a certain Maria Nilsson. As I understand, Nilsson is a former employee of the Biotech Industrials with whom we are collaborating and she claims that she has been unfairly excluded from the paper. I have personally no knowledge about this person, but this López s sound very serious. It is something that we need to sort out immediately, not least since we plan to include this paper as part of Juan's PhD thesis.

Do you have the possibility to meet and discuss this together with myself, Juan and our two co-authors from Biotech Industrials Dr Elisabeth Hooks and Dr Amir Hamid? We would very much appreciate your advice on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Lana

You feel that it is good that Lana takes this seriously and you decide to call the co-authors to a meeting already this afternoon. Disputes concerning co-authorship are very common and from your past experience they are toxic and can cause damage to valuable research collaborations. Hence, you are not only interested in finding out what has happened and who to blame in this case, but more importantly how to avoid this type of behavior in the future. In particular, you want to find answers to the following questions:

1. Was Maria Nilsson unfairly excluded from the paper or not?
2. How can it be that not everyone knows about Maria Nilsson?
3. Looking forward, what can the research group do in order to prevent this type of situation in the future?
4. Is everyone in the group aware of the COPE recommendations? What kind of education can be offered in order to prevent this type of problem in the future?

As always in this type of situation, you will chair the meeting.

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