

a resource guide for
collaborative
academic

authorship

image credit: Ron Dyar via Unsplash.

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1 DISCUSS

Discuss authorship at the beginning of a project or as early as possible.

Identify who will lead various parts/products of the research at the outset of projects

Communicate about authorship & contributorship status at the beginning of the process

Differentiate between authorship and contributorship as soon as possible

CREATE

Create an open dialogue with all collaborators.

Open, transparent, and frequent conversation can **defuse** stress and anger, and help to avoid problems later.

Practices to avoid

Ghost authorship: The act of making a meaningful intellectual contribution to a project or paper without receiving authorship credit (i.e., “ghost writing” for someone else)

3 RECOGNIZE

Recognize that roles, responsibilities, & contributions sometimes **change**, resulting in the need to change who will be an author and in what order.

Describe at what project stages any agreement will be discussed again and what process will be used to make authorship changes.

Communicate that any agreement is meant to be a “living agreement”—one that can be revisited and changed as circumstances evolve.

COMMUNICATE

4

Communicate the overall **goals** of the project.

Identify the objectives of the research as well as when and where a project might be submitted to a conference, a journal, grant program, or other outlet.

Identify publication expectations of all parties for student-led work such as theses or dissertations; typically, the student should be first author of any resulting publications from these projects (unless they explicitly state that they are not interested).

Practices to avoid

Guest/honorary authorship: The act of including someone who has not made a meaningful contribution to a project as an author.

University Policy #318

Section I. Policy Statement & Purpose

Research contributes to the public fund of knowledge when the results are published, presented, or otherwise disseminated. With that step, researchers take public responsibility for the work. This responsibility includes both credit and accountability, and is typically conveyed by being named an author.

However, the role authorship plays in careers, awards, grants, and the like means that the stakes are high, and authorship decisions can evoke tension and conflict among collaborators. This conflict may in turn negatively affect relationships between faculty and students or between collaborators within the institution, across the country, or internationally. Vulnerable groups, such as graduate students, post-doctoral students, junior faculty, or those underrepresented in the academy can be most at risk in such conflicts. In the worst cases, these disputes can end projects or lead to publication retractions. Although many disciplines and journals articulate authorship standards, collaborators may not be aware of them and may even disagree about them (for example, due to different disciplinary authorship practices), leaving authorship assumptions among collaborators largely unstated.

Because institutions have an interest in and are sometimes responsible for resolving authorship disputes, it is important to establish policy to support good authorship processes and address potential disputes. This Policy is part of UNC Charlotte's commitment to fostering a culture of transparency, openness, and research integrity. The Policy is intended to help reinforce healthy, transparent authorship practices that can prevent disputes, and to offer clear processes to resolve them if they occur. It includes productive and historically successful approaches to co-authorship and mediating authorship disputes.

Section II. Definitions

In cases in which a manuscript has been submitted for publication consideration, the Corresponding Author is the person who identified themselves as responsible for communicating between the publisher and collaborators on the project.

Generally, the designation of an individual as Lead Author refers to an individual who has taken a prominent role in the generation of ideas for and conduct of the research, as well as in drafting the manuscript in question, but the criteria for designation of Lead Author may vary by discipline.

In sponsored research, the Principal Investigator is the individual usually identified as such on the grant proposal of which the research is a part. However, an individual who leads a research project may occasionally be identified as a Principal Investigator even if the research project is not sponsored by external funding.

Section III. Scope & Applicability

This Policy applies to UNC Charlotte faculty (as defined in University Policy 102.13, Tenure Policies, Regulations, and Procedures), staff, and students conducting research, scholarship, or other creative academic activity as part of their employment or enrollment at UNC Charlotte, as well as potential disputes between individuals in these categories (e.g., faculty/student or faculty/faculty collaborations). Authorship disputes covered by this Policy include disputes that occur pre- and post-publication.

This Policy is distinct from University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship. Prior to initiating an authorship dispute process under this Policy in which research integrity might be implicated, the Research Integrity Officer and the Dean of the Graduate School should discuss the case to make a determination about the appropriate process to be applied.

This Policy is also distinct from University Policy 407, Code of Student Academic Integrity. Prior to initiating an authorship dispute process under this Policy in which student academic integrity is an issue, the Dean of the Graduate School should discuss the case with the Director of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity to make a determination about the appropriate process to be applied.

Section IV. Policy

This Policy recognizes the wide variety of authorship practices across disciplines and publications, so it is not the intent of this Policy to establish a single set of authorship standards. However, as summarized by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), “The minimum requirements for authorship, common to all definitions, are 1) substantial contribution to the work and 2) accountability for the work that was done and its presentation in a publication.”

The following principles and practices are recommended for helping to prevent disputes and promoting constructive and transparent authorship practices.

a. authorship principles—

1. It is the responsibility of the Lead Author, Corresponding Author, or Principal Investigator (these may or may not be the same person), as appropriate, to lead conversations among contributors regarding authorship, ensure that contributors are appropriately recognized, and ensure fairness in the authorship process. Ideally these conversations occur at the beginning of projects, throughout the project duration, and at the conclusion of the project.
2. Being named an author is an indication that one has made a substantial contribution to the project and is willing to be held accountable for their contribution to the work. “Substantial contribution” may vary by discipline, and therefore the Lead Author, Corresponding Author, or Principal Investigator should consult the guidance that applies to their discipline to make authorship determinations.
3. All individuals who have made a substantial contribution to a project should be named as authors; others who have contributed may be more appropriately recognized in the acknowledgements, footnotes, or other areas of the work as appropriate and subject to the individuals’ consent.
4. All authors on a publication should have a reasonable opportunity to review and approve the final product. However, approval shall not be unreasonably withheld.
5. Honorary, guest, gift, or ghost authorship is not acceptable. Honorary, guest, or gift authorship occurs when individuals who have not made a substantial contribution are named as authors. Ghost authorship occurs when someone who has made a substantial contribution is not named, usually to conceal their relationship to the product.
6. Authorship ordering conventions vary by discipline and publication format; it is not within the scope of this Policy to specify ordering practices. However, ordering decisions should be made in the context of healthy authorship conversations.
7. Authorship practices regarding theses or dissertations may vary by discipline. However, it is generally expected that in publications resulting from a thesis, dissertation, or capstone, the student will be the first author. Faculty members and others on thesis and dissertation committees may be included as authors when they meet typical authorship criteria, but mere membership on these committees may not suffice for authorship. Student work should be protected from expectations that violate Section IV.A.5 above.

The following are examples of constructive authorship practices by UNC Charlotte faculty, staff, and students:

b. constructive authorship practices—

1. As soon as possible in a research collaboration, conversations among the collaborators about authorship should be initiated by the PI or intended Lead/Corresponding Author, as appropriate. This should include a discussion of general expectations for various roles even if the exact authorship order is not yet clear or may change. In cases of theses and dissertations, the Chair of the Committee should facilitate authorship discussions with the student, starting during the proposal stage and continuing, as appropriate, throughout the process.
2. Agreements about authorship order should be transparent, and ideally, a written authorship agreement should be developed and shared with all collaborators. (Creating a project on the Open Science Framework may also provide an opportunity to initiate authorship discussions as collaborators are named and listed in an initial order.) Important elements of such an agreement include proposed authorship order, authorship standards collaborators agree to follow, and indications regarding when authorship changes should be discussed. This Policy, including reference to the dispute resolution process below, should also be included as an appendix to the agreement.
3. Because research roles can change throughout the lifecycle of a collaboration, it is important to revisit authorship agreements as circumstances warrant. For example, authors may want to agree that after a specified period of time, a subset of collaborators may proceed with dissemination of results even if one or more collaborators fails to respond to a request for approval as to relevant elements of the dissemination (authorship order, manuscript text, publication selection, etc.).
4. University departments and research units should include reference to this Policy in their orientation materials for new students and faculty. If such units require particular approaches to authorship, those should also be communicated to new students and faculty, in conjunction with other unit policies and guidance.
5. Collaborations with researchers at institutions other than UNC Charlotte should follow the recommendations in this Policy, including a written agreement explicitly establishing authorship order, authorship standards collaborators agree to follow, indications regarding when authorship changes should be discussed, and dispute resolution methods. Such authorship dispute resolution processes may be distinct from those at UNC Charlotte. For example, on larger collaborations (particularly when they may lead to multiple publications), establishing an authorship dispute committee with members from each institution may be appropriate.

Although following the principles and practices outlined above will help significantly to prevent authorship disputes, such disputes may still arise. Informal steps should be taken to resolve the dispute first, but if informal resolution fails, the dispute may be submitted to the Authorship Dispute Panel for formal resolution.

a. informal dispute resolution—

If an authorship dispute arises, the collaborators should initially attempt resolving it informally. Collaborators should consult any written authorship agreement to inform such resolution. If there is no such agreement or if the terms of the agreement do not sufficiently resolve the matter, the collaborators might involve a neutral third party, such as an informal mediator or an Ombuds, who may facilitate discussions but whose role is not to render a decision. UNC Charlotte has separate Ombuds offices for faculty (<https://ombuds.uncc.edu>), graduate students (<https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/ombudsman>), and undergraduate students (<https://sass.uncc.edu/students>).

Section V. Dispute Resolution Procedures

continued

If the dispute remains unresolved, the collaborators may also contact the Chair, a Graduate Program Director, the Dean of the relevant College, or the Dean of the Graduate School if the dispute involves a Chair, members of multiple departments, or members of multiple colleges) for informal assistance.

b. formal dispute resolution: authorship dispute panel—

1.

Initiation of a Formal Dispute Resolution: If an authorship dispute cannot be resolved with the informal steps suggested above, a disputant may initiate a formal dispute resolution process by contacting the Dean of the Graduate School in writing with a summary of the dispute and any supporting documents. The Dean will review the dispute and any supporting documents to determine whether a formal resolution is appropriate. If the Dean determines that formal resolution is appropriate, the Dean will appoint an Authorship Dispute Panel to consider the matter and make recommendations.

2.

Authorship Dispute Panel: From a standing pool of seven members appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School (including faculty members and at least two graduate students), the Dean will charge a three-person Panel to hear the dispute. If the dispute involves a graduate student, the Panel must include at least one graduate student. If the dispute involves only faculty, the Panel must include only tenured faculty. The Dean will ensure that there is appropriate expertise to carry out a thorough and authoritative evaluation of the dispute, and will require that the Panel maintain confidentiality of all parties, deliberations, and documentation. The Panel may also consult other members of the University community for required expertise without disclosing any identifying information about the disputant, but those consulted will not participate in adjudicating the dispute.

The disputant is responsible for presenting the authorship dispute in good faith, for maintaining confidentiality of the parties to the dispute and of all documentation, and for cooperating with the Panel's deliberative process. The disputant will have an opportunity to be interviewed by and present documentation to the Panel, and to review the draft report.

The Panel will notify the respondent(s) of the dispute when the Dean appoints the Panel. The respondent(s) are responsible for making their case in good faith, for maintaining the confidentiality of the parties to the dispute and of all documentation, and for cooperating with the Panel's deliberative process. The respondent(s) will have the opportunity to be interviewed by and present documentation to the Panel, and to review the draft report.

UNC Charlotte will protect the confidentiality of the parties to the dispute, any deliberations, and any related documents to the extent permitted under law. Retaliation against individuals for raising authorship dispute claims in good faith or for cooperating in good faith in the University's review of any such claims is strictly prohibited and subject to disciplinary action in accordance with applicable policies.

3.

Resolution: The Panel will make a written recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School summarizing the dispute, documentation considered, and recommended resolution, along with its rationale. The Dean will notify the disputant and respondent(s) of the Panel's recommendation.

The Panel's recommendation is not binding on the parties to the dispute but may be considered as presumptive evidence of the appropriate authorship designation if either the disputant or respondent fails to implement the recommendation. The Dean may notify the non-complying party's supervisor or other appropriate administrator if the Dean determines that the party's failure to implement the recommendation warrants consideration of disciplinary or other appropriate action.

Section VI. Responsible University Administrator

The Dean of the Graduate School shall be responsible for implementing this Policy.

Link to policy: <https://legal.charlotte.edu/policies/up-318>

Authorship Agreement

Authorship on a paper, presentation, or other scholarly work indicates a substantial contribution to a project and accountability for the results. Authorship decisions often affect reputations and careers, and they can be a source of tension, even within healthy collaborations. This tool may help to facilitate open, transparent communication about authorship decisions among collaborators.

Authorship is often best discussed as early as possible in a project. Research projects can be long and involved, and parts of a project may be disseminated at different times. As a result, authorship on each part or product may vary; for example, if a project has two main parts, a different person may lead each section and become first author on a publication.

Even if roles have not yet become clear, early conversations about authorship help to set expectations and to clarify the importance of open and honest discussion throughout the process. This agreement is meant to be a "living document"—one that can be revisited and changed as circumstances evolve over the course of a project.

Instructions.

The prompts and questions provided are designed to foster transparent conversations among collaborators in order to reach a shared set of expectations. All fields are required; however, acceptable answers include "not applicable" and "undetermined" if those responses best reflect the circumstances of your collaboration. A copy of this form should be distributed to all collaborators and/or stored in a shared location. If you plan multiple outputs (e.g., multiple publications; conference proceedings and articles, etc.) from one project, use a different form for each intended output. Please refer to [University Policy #318: Authorship Policy and Resolution Procedures](#) for additional information and resources.

Section 1.

Declaration of student project

Is this a thesis, dissertation, or other student-driven project? Yes
No

For works derived substantially from student theses, dissertations, and other student-driven projects, a typical expectation is that the student should be listed as first author.

Is the student interested in pursuing dissemination of this project as an author? Yes
No
Unsure

Section 2.

Project background & publication goals

Working project title and description.

Possible conferences/publication venues for submission.

Authorship guidelines to be used (e.g., American Psychological Association).*

Approximate timeline for/date of submission.

*See the [CRediT Contributor Role Taxonomy](#) form as a widely adopted example. Some publication venues may have specific authorship guidelines or requirements.

Section 3.

Tentative author positions & tasks

Corresponding author:

Position	Name	Tasks/roles

[Add additional authors and contributors as needed. A supplementary page (page 4) with additional space is available.]

Section 4.

Acknowledgment of non-author contributors

Sometimes, contributions may warrant acknowledgment rather than authorship. Having conversations with contributors about acknowledging their contributions in final products is typically good practice.

Name & contribution	Has contributor agreed to acknowledgment?
	Yes
	No
	Yes
	No
	Yes
	No

Section 5.

Non-responsive co-authors

Occasionally, someone initially involved in a project may cease to respond to communication about dissemination of results, despite interest in this pursuit amongst remaining collaborators. In such cases, collaborators may find it useful to set a timeframe within which they may hold each other accountable for communication.

If a co-author ceases to participate in discussions about dissemination within

months*

of completion of a project, collaborators mutually agree that that person will not be included as a co-author.

*In most cases, twelve months is a reasonable expectation, but some cases may warrant more condensed timeframes.

Disputes.

Despite best efforts, authorship disputes may sometimes arise. This document may be helpful in resolving such disputes, but if not, additional suggestions may be found in [University Policy #318: Authorship Policy and Resolution Procedures](#). The policy offers suggestions for informal resolution of disputes and outlines official steps for a more formal resolution.

Section 6.

Changes to current agreement

Sometimes roles, responsibilities, and contributions change, resulting in the need to change who will be an author and in what order.

Describe at what project stages this agreement will be discussed again (e.g., at midpoint of data collection, after an initial draft is written, prior to first submission, after any revisions to a manuscript under review at a journal).

Describe what process will be used to make authorship changes (e.g., decision by first author after consultation with others; majority vote; etc.).

Section 7.

Other items discussed by the team

Addenda.

Space for additional authors and addenda to this document is available on the supplementary page (page 4) provided at the end of this file.

Section 8.

Acknowledgment of discussion

Space for collaborators' signatures and two contact email addresses is provided below. Collecting second/backup email addresses is important as projects sometimes last longer than anticipated, even after some collaborators have left the institution or graduated.

By signing, you acknowledge that you have received and agree with the authorship plan as outlined in this document. As noted, this document is not binding and is subject to change with the evolution of the collaborative project.

Signature _____ Date _____

e-mail 1: _____ e-mail 2: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

e-mail 1: _____ e-mail 2: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

e-mail 1: _____ e-mail 2: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

e-mail 1: _____ e-mail 2: _____

Additional authors

Tentative author positions & tasks

Position	Name	Tasks/roles

Additional contributors

Acknowledgment of non-author contributors

Name & contribution	Has contributor agreed to acknowledgment?	Name & contribution	Has contributor agreed to acknowledgment?
	Yes No		Yes No

Signatures of additional authors

Acknowledgment of discussion

Signature _____	Date _____
e-mail 1: _____	e-mail 2: _____
Signature _____	Date _____
e-mail 1: _____	e-mail 2: _____
Signature _____	Date _____
e-mail 1: _____	e-mail 2: _____
Signature _____	Date _____
e-mail 1: _____	e-mail 2: _____

authorship scenarios

Consider each of the examples below. Do you agree with the authorship decisions made in each case? Why or why not?

Appropriate answers to each case will vary depending on circumstances. These examples are intentionally vague and meant to be used as a foundation for discussion and learning.

A student assists a professor in conducting interviews and then transcribing those interviews. The student is not granted authorship.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

Two collaborators work together on a project. One author writes the whole first draft of the paper. The other analyzes the data and drafts the table. Their names are listed alphabetically with a notation that they contributed equally.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

Two students, a 4th year and a 5th year, collaborate on a project with a professor. The 5th year student is originally 1st author. After graduation, the professor and the other student continue to collaborate. The professor ultimately makes the other student first author.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

A professor asks a student to format a few tables and then adds them to the journal submission as an author.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

At the start of a project 3 collaborators determined authorship order. After a year of work the paper is submitted for review. The reviewers request a great deal of additional analysis which was conducted by the 3rd author. This collaborator becomes 2nd author given the amount of work that was involved.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

A student works on a project as a part of their Graduate Assistantship position. Upon completion of the semester the student stops working on the project. The professor does not include them as an author.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

A professor conducts a meta-analysis. A student assists in retrieving and coding articles. The professor does not include the student as an author upon submission of the study for publication.

YES

NO

UNCERTAIN

resources

Links to several helpful resources for navigating authorship decisions, including professional authorship standards and sample case studies, are provided below. These resources are also listed on the [Graduate School website](#).

authorship standards

[Association for Computing Machinery](#)

[IEEE](#)

[American Chemical Society](#)

[American Institute of Physics](#)

[American Psychological Association](#)

[American Sociological Association](#)

[COPE](#)

[ICMJE](#)

video case studies/external resources

[When Authorship Gets Personal](#)

Summary: This video illustrates issues that arise when people in a later career stage (who didn't sign an authorship agreement in their previous collaborations) must figure out whether to add a previous collaborator.

[The Left-Out Author](#)

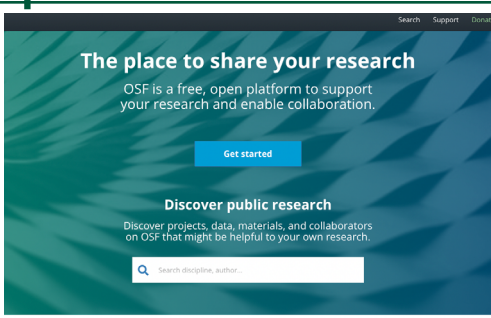
Summary: This video illustrates the complexity of resolving issues arising when changes are made to authorship order and authors are left out.

center for open science

resources

Center for Open Science Homepage

Open Science Framework



How OSF supports your research



About the Center for Open Science



Research Software Tools
We maintain the Open Science Framework (OSF) to help researchers conduct research more rigorously, and manage and share their work more openly.



Community Action and Culture Change
From individuals to institutions, we educate, train, and support research communities and their affiliates toward greater adoption of open and reproducible practices.



Metascience and Research
We conduct research on research practices to understand areas of inefficiency, and to evaluate interventions to improve.

[Learn more](#)

Overview of the Open Research Life Cycle



Open Scholarship Knowledge Base & Open Education Resource Training

Open Scholarship Knowledge Base

suggested reading

- Brand, A., Allen, L., Altman, M., Hlava, M. & Scott, J. (2015). **Beyond authorship: attribution, contribution, collaboration, and credit.** *Learned Publishing*, 28(2), 151-155. DOI: [10.1087/20150211](https://doi.org/10.1087/20150211).
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