

# University of Southern California

## Guidelines for Assigning Authorship and for Attributing Contributions to Research Products and Creative Works

Drafted by the Joint Provost-Academic Senate University Research Committee  
and Approved by the Academic Senate on 20 April and 19 October 2011

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The University encourages its faculty, students and staff to engage in scholarship and research, and to widely and openly disseminate the products of their research and creative works for the public benefit, through: peer reviewed journal and book publications; conference presentations; transfer of intellectual property into commercial markets; music, public and performing arts, cinema, and various forms of digital and interactive media. In all of these forms, collaboration is either already widely practiced or has the potential to enhance the quality and impact of research and creative work of all kinds. Toward these ends, the University is committed to the principles of:

- Fair and honest attribution of the contributions of each person in the creation of research products and creative works.
- Allowance for diversity in the attribution of contributions, which vary across disciplines and dissemination outlets.
- Making our research products and creative works readily available to others, so that they may be further developed or implemented.
- Avoidance of disputes over attribution and ownership that may create impediments to the creation and dissemination of significant and impactful research, scholarship, and creative works.

Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to apply these principles to all media in which research, scholarship, and creative works are disseminated. The following guidelines provide a code of conduct for attribution that reflects these principles. *These guidelines are not an official policy of the university, but are instead advisory to the faculty, students and staff as to appropriate conduct. Issues of Scientific Misconduct, Academic Honesty, and Conflict of Interest, while related to these principles, are addressed separately by university policy.*

### **I. Attribution of Research and Scholarship Contributions**

1. Everyone who is listed as a creator or author should have made a substantial, direct, intellectual contribution to the work. For example they should have contributed to the conceptualization of the research or creative program, the creation, design, analysis, interpretation of data, and/or the writing of the published results, and/or the final creative product.

2. Dissertation committee chairs, advisers, heads of labs or research teams, should not insist on being listed as an author of a publication or research product or creative product of any kind, based solely on their provision of support or by virtue of their position as adviser. If they are listed as an author or co-creator, their status as authors must be justified by the same standards as all other authors: having made a substantial intellectual contribution to the work (not merely the indirect contribution of advising the author or authors).
3. Acquisition of funding and provision of technical services, patients, or materials, if these actions were not accompanied by creative intellectual contributions, are not in themselves sufficient contributions to justify identification as a creator or author. This is so even if these actions may be essential to the work. However, a lab director or Principal Investigator who wrote the successful funding application may be entitled to authorship status if s/he created the overall study design and conceptualization of research questions that guide the work of the research or creative team as a whole, even if such person does not thereafter conduct the actual experiments, or produce the final product directly.
4. Two types of mis-attribution must be avoided: a) receiving undeserved credit for authoring or creating; and b) failure to grant authorship or creator status to persons who did make substantial, intellectual contributions.
5. All individuals attributed as authors or creators, having made a substantial intellectual contribution, but who did not actually write the principal draft, or the principal creative work, should also, at a minimum, review draft materials and approve the final version. Again, however, merely reviewing or approving drafts does not in itself justify naming a person an author or creator.
6. Translation of a work from one language to another is a special form of authorship, considered in many fields—principally among the arts and humanities—as a creative achievement resulting in a newly unique work. In those fields “Translated by...” should appear alongside the author/s of the original work, both on the work itself and in bibliographic references. In other fields—principally the sciences—translation of a work into a new language is considered to be more of a service. In such fields translators may be credited among the acknowledgments, per the guidelines in Section II, but should be, at a minimum, acknowledged with the phrase “Translated by...”

## II. Acknowledgments

1. All those who made substantial contributions other than a substantial, direct, intellectual contribution to the work should be acknowledged. In cases where acknowledgement might constitute unwelcome disclosure, violate privacy or Institutional Review Board protocols, or compromise trust or a legitimate status of voluntary anonymity, care should be taken to consider whether it is appropriate to acknowledge by name or whether to

obtain prior consent from a person who is to be acknowledged. In most cases, however, prior consent for expressions of gratitude should not require the step of prior notification. Common courtesy would recommend sending, where practicable, final copies of the work to all those being publicly acknowledged.

2. Acknowledgements of persons who made some contribution to the work which does not rise to the level of naming that person an “author,” are to be made in a publicly salient and obvious part of the work: either in footnotes or endnotes, or anywhere obviously visible, such as the title page, home page of a website, or in some prominent space prior to the citations. If the work is digital, and does not have these specific components, the same standard of salience or obviousness should apply.
3. When research is conducted by teams whose members are highly specialized, individuals’ contributions and responsibility may be limited to specific aspects of the work. It is the responsibility of the team as a whole to determine which contributors merit listing as authors/creators, and which merit acknowledgements.

### **III. Situations Involving Financial or Other Interests**

1. Financial and material support for the publication or research or creative products should be disclosed.
2. “Ghost-writing,” a practice whereby any author or creator, including commercial entities or affiliates, or non-commercial entities, writes an article or manuscript anonymously, and subsequently a scientist or other likely creator, who did not conduct the research nor write the initial draft, is listed as an author, is not permissible. Neither is any comparable scenario in the creative arts permissible. Making minor revisions to an article or manuscript or creative work that is ghost-written does not justify authorship. This practice is inherently dishonest and deceptive, and obstructs the basic principle of transparent responsibility for research and creative work.
3. Authorship of research products or creative works in which authors have a financial stake or interest in the outcomes reported in those works must conform to the policies contained in USC’s “Conflict Of Interest” Policy governing these situations.

### **IV. Sharing and Revising Datasets or Other Research Products**

1. Attribution by the rules above shall apply also to all sharing of data or research products. It is permissible and encouraged to make research products available to others for further modification and development. When this occurs, the creators/authors should follow accepted practices for attribution, such as those promoted by Creative Commons.
2. Sharing data of any kind carries an implied responsibility on the part of the contributor to ensure the integrity of those data, including an assurance

- that they were honestly produced (not fabricated). It is therefore incumbent upon collaborating researchers and authors to assure one another that the data they bring to the collaboration conform to all existing policies and standards of academic conduct.
3. Once the decision has been made to create shared data and shared data sets, the rules governing the ownership, use, distribution, and publication from those data should be established as a collectively-deliberated decision recognized by the research team as a whole. These rules should be documented and visibly maintained to accompany the data sets, as “metadata” so that all subsequent users are aware of them.
  4. If data sets are prepared for unrestricted public use, as for example under a Creative Commons license, the original source and required citation information of such data sets should always accompany the distribution of such data sets.
  5. When no such governing document exists, such as are recommend in (IV 3) and (IV 4) above, mere possession of a data set does not carry any automatic right to use, distribute, or publish results based on that data set. Appropriate permissions must be obtained.

## **V. Ordering Contributions**

1. Many different ways of determining order of authorship or creation exist across disciplines, research groups, and nations. Such conventions as “first author” or “senior author,” while highly standardized in some disciplines have no universally recognized meaning across all disciplines. Therefore, the significance of a particular order must be understood within each given professional context that recognizes the significance of such orderings.
2. The authors should decide the order of their contributions together, and consider the most relevant professional standards pertaining to the fields and disciplines involved in the research products.
3. Contributors are encouraged to specify the contributions of each person and how they have assigned the order in which they are listed so that others can interpret their roles correctly.

## **VI. Implementation**

1. Early in the course of their work together research teams should develop a formal publication policy and procedural document in order to maintain transparency and fairness.
2. Disputes over attribution are best settled at the local level by the creators and authors themselves. If these efforts fail, the appropriate committee of the Academic Senate may be consulted.

## VII. Relevant USC Policies

“Policy Regarding Relationships With Industry” 1 September 2009:  
<http://policies.usc.edu/policies/IndustryRelations090109.pdf>.

“Conflict of Interest in Research: Policy and Procedure” 1 November 2007  
[http://policies.usc.edu/faculty\\_teaching\\_research.html](http://policies.usc.edu/faculty_teaching_research.html)

## VIII. Comparable policy statements, some of which provided source material for the present document:

The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences  
<http://www.pnas.org/content/101/29/10495.full>

NIH “Guidelines for the Conduct of Research –Intramural Research,” pp. 10-11  
[sourcebook.od.nih.gov/ethic-conduct/Conduct%20Research%206-11-07.pdf](http://sourcebook.od.nih.gov/ethic-conduct/Conduct%20Research%206-11-07.pdf)

Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, “Rules and Guidelines for Responsible Conduct of Research”  
[http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/som/faculty/policies/facultypolicies/responsible\\_conduct.html#IV](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/som/faculty/policies/facultypolicies/responsible_conduct.html#IV)

Harvard Faculty Authorship Guidelines  
<https://research.bidmc.harvard.edu/Policies/Authorship.asp>