

Publication

Writers Blocked: On the Wrongs of Research Co-authorship and Some Possible Strategies for Improvement

JournalArticle (Originalarbeit in einer wissenschaftlichen Zeitschrift)

ID 3401520

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Year 2015

Title Writers Blocked: On the Wrongs of Research Co-authorship and Some Possible Strategies for Improvement

Journal Science and Engineering Ethics

Volume 21

Number 5

Pages / Article-Number 1315-29

Keywords Research integrity; ethics;

Mesh terms Authorship; Editorial Policies; Employment; Ethics, Research; Financial Support; Humans; Publications; Publishing, ethics; Research; Research Personnel, ethics

The various problems associated with co-authorship of research articles have attracted much attention in recent years. We believe that this (hopefully) growing awareness is a very welcome development. However, we will argue that the particular and increasing importance of authorship and the harmful implications of current practices of research authorship for junior researchers have not been emphasised enough. We will use the case of our own research area (bioethics) to illustrate some of the pitfalls of current publishing practices-in particular, the impact on the evaluation of one's work in the area of employment or funding. Even where there are explicit guidelines, they are often disregarded. This disregard, which is often exemplified through the inflation of co-authorship in some research areas, may seem benign to some of us; but it is not. Attribution of co-authorship for reasons other than merit in relation to the publication misrepresents the work towards that publication, and generates unfair competition. We make a case for increasing awareness, for transparency and for more explicit guidelines and regulation of research co-authorship within and across research areas. We examine some of the most sensitive areas of concern and their implications for researchers, particularly junior ones, and we suggest several strategies for future action.

Publisher SPRINGER

edoc-URL <http://edoc.unibas.ch/41695/>

Full Text on edoc No;

Digital Object Identifier DOI 10.1007/s11948-014-9606-0

PubMed ID <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25348894>

ISI-Number 000361456000013

Document type (ISI) Journal Article