Guidelines for Authorship, Awarding Credit, and Intellectual Property Rights*

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The number of multi-person research projects is growing rapidly in political science but are still more common in other disciplines. We lack established disciplinary norms for awarding credit in multi-person research activities.

This document lays out guidelines for collaborative arrangements. These guidelines are meant to be just that — guidelines. There will inevitably be situations that do not fit, or do not fit comfortably, into standard parameters, for which different arrangements will be made by those involved. And there will be other cases where participants mutually agree to use alternate arrangements. There is no reason not to do that, assuming the alternate arrangements are fair, especially to graduate students and junior faculty, and do not compromise scientific integrity.

To think through the relevant issues, I reviewed literature from a variety of disciplines. It shows there are clear and long-standing guidelines about the meaning of authorship, although less guidance about the ordering of names, norms for which differ across disciplines.¹

In reviewing the literature, I have found the document “Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors,” by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) particularly helpful. The four criteria laid out below are taken from that source. The same four criteria appear in numerous other sources, including Washington University’s “Policy for Authorship on Scientific and Scholarly Publications” (effective date December 15, 2009) and Yale University’s “Guidance on Authorship in Scholarly or Scientific Publications.” Many professional societies have similar guidelines.

The standard criteria for authorship that is laid out in numerous professional guidelines going back nearly fifty years are:

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¹Established norms about who is included as an author on a project are often not observed, however.
1. participating in at least some aspect of the research process (research design, data collection, data analysis) and
2. writing or revising all or part of the paper and contributing significant intellectual content and
3. critically reviewing the entire paper prior to submission and publication and
4. publicly accepting responsibility for the paper and the results.

Note that *all* of these must obtain for an individual to receive designation as an author, and all persons who meet these criteria must receive recognition as authors. Persons involved in a research project who do not meet all four criteria should receive recognition in the acknowledgements. For instance, an individual who raises funds for a project but does not participate in all the above activities should receive acknowledgement but not authorship; likewise, an individual who assists in data collection but does not participate in the write-up nor review the paper prior to submission should receive acknowledgement but not authorship.

The above guidelines are meant to ensure that individuals involved in a project who receive authorship designation take responsibility for final paper — and hence can be charged with academic dishonesty should it turn out that something serious is found to be amiss in the research process. They are also meant to protect students from having to list their supervisor as co-author on projects on which the supervisor necessarily serves as P.I. (due to the requirements of the funding agency) but whose intellectual content and execution are undertaken by the student. In other words, these guidelines are meant to protect all participants as well as the public interest.

1. The following additional guidelines are useful for arrangements among **Ph.D.-level collaborators**, including post-docs:

   (a) Authorship is alphabetically ordered and exceptions receive prior written agreement.

   (b) Individuals who receive authorship must be involved in all four activities laid out above.

   (c) This does not preclude division of labor among authors, where one may be responsible for e.g. field activities and another for data analysis. Sufficient discussion among collaborators should ensure that all are able to accept intellectual responsibility for the research.

   (d) When participants are not able to assume full intellectual responsibility for all portions of the research, it may be advisable to enumerate the nature of the contribution made by each author in an opening footnote. Some journals require this; in other cases, a research team may deem it desirable.

   (e) Individuals who do not participate in all four activities listed above receive acknowledgement, not authorship. The main aim of this is to prevent P.I.s who raise funds from being included automatically as authors on projects.
(f) Trickier situations arise in lab-type arrangements, where a P.I. (or group of P.I.s) raise funds and commission research projects by teams of peer researchers under the lab’s supervision. In these cases, if the P.I.s supply significant intellectual content, track and monitor the research process, critically review and comment on the papers, and accept responsibility for the final results, they should receive authorship. If they instead only fund projects, they should receive acknowledgement. For instance, the EGAP Metaketa meet the first set of criteria, thereby justifying the inclusion of EGAP’s Executive Director and the Steering Committee on each Metaketa as authors. Conversely, the Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA)-administered Economic Development and Institutions (EDI) projects appear to fall into the second category.

(g) Collaborators with authorship status on a project may freely discuss the project in the public domain (blogs, interviews, homepage, newspaper articles, professional presentations, etc).

(h) Public discussion of a project should acknowledge the project, all other authors (as feasible), and funding sources, and should promptly (within 48 hours of posting, publication, or execution) be made available to all authors.

(i) Written policy briefs reporting research results must be approved in advance by all authors on the project.

(j) Subsequent or auxiliary projects by all or any of the project authors that re-use data or main ideas are embargoed from publication until acceptance for publication in a peer-reviewed journal of the core project paper(-s), as defined by written agreement.

(k) Subsequent or auxiliary projects by all or any of the project authors that re-use data or main ideas will acknowledge the original project and its authors.

(l) Collaborators on one project may (or may not) be invited to participate on subsequent or auxiliary projects that re-use data or main ideas. This is at the discretion of each individual participant.

(m) Data collected for a project is the collective property of the team of authors until its release into the public domain. It will be shared with others only with the agreement of all authors, and sharing normally entails a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA).

(n) Anyone with authorship status on a project that includes original data collection is expected to participate actively in the preparation of the dataset and codebook for public release (or to supply funding to cover this, should that be necessary).

(o) Data should be released into the public domain within a specified period of time after the end of data collection (typically one to three years), or with publication.
of the core research results, whichever occurs first.

2. The following guidelines pertain to **Principal Investigator** status:

   (a) P.I. status derives from direct involvement in successful fund-raising, usually for data collection and analysis.

   (b) P.I. status for U.S.-government funding (e.g. NSF, USAID) is available only to persons who have received a Ph.D. (this is a government regulation and not at the discretion of the participants).

   (c) On other types of funding, non-Ph.D.s (e.g. graduate students) may serve as P.I.s. Students who serve as P.I.s on projects automatically enjoy author status.

   (d) Some projects have mixed (U.S. government and other) funding; in these cases, some individuals may be P.I.s on only some grants but not others and to protect themselves, should so indicate specifically on their c.v.s and other written materials. Students in particular should take care not to claim P.I. status on grants unless they actually enjoy that role.

   (e) Anyone with P.I. status on a project is expected to be involved in all four activities laid out above.

   (f) P.I.s not involved in all four activities receive written acknowledgement but not authorship.

      - For instance, if a faculty member serves as P.I. on a grant and a student plans and executes the research, analyzes the data, and writes up the results with only supervisory input, the faculty member receives acknowledgement but not authorship. This is the case for NSF Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grants, for instance.

   (g) Data must be posted in the public domain following the guidelines of the funding agency (for U.S. government funding, this means within a year of close of funding) even if research results have not yet been published.

   (h) Graduate students and faculty peers may be authors on a project without being P.I.s. (i.e. without being involved in the fund-raising process).

3. I observe the following guidelines in work with **graduate students** at my or other universities:

   (a) Assisting with power calculations, data collection, analysis, and write-up under my direct or indirect supervision does not entitle a student to authorship status.

   (b) Whether a student receives authorship on a project is at the discretion of the team of faculty researchers.
(c) Authorship status will be granted in writing and cannot be revoked absent mutual agreement or outside review (e.g. from a departmental ombudsperson or similar).

(d) Graduate students who receive authorship must be involved in all four activities laid out above.

(e) Graduate students who are involved in all four activities must receive authorship status.

(f) Authorship is alphabetically ordered and exceptions should receive prior written agreement.

(g) Graduate students with authorship status on a project may freely discuss the project in the public domain (blogs, interviews, homepage, newspaper articles, professional presentations, etc) whereas those without must request my written permission to do so. Students should be mindful not to release into the public domain data or intellectual content that is not theirs, or for which prior authorization by all authors is required.

(h) Public discussion should acknowledge the project, all other authors (as feasible), and funding sources, and should promptly (within 48 hours of posting, publication, or execution) be made available to all authors.

(i) Paid graduate student assistants not involved in all four activities listed above receive acknowledgement.

(j) Graduate students who receive authorship status should expect to perform a great deal of unpaid labor on the project.

(k) Authorship status is normally awarded only after a period of trial work on a project that allows a graduate student to demonstrate interest and the ability to provide significant intellectual input. This may entail a modest amount of unpaid labor (e.g. in the initial data collection or fund-raising for a project).

(l) Graduate students who contribute substantial intellectual content to a project (designing the research, writing the pre-analysis plan, writing analytical content) will be offered the opportunity to participate as authors on a project. Acceptance of authorship status requires that they follow through and perform the activities listed in items #3 and #4, above.

(m) Graduate students who fail to follow through may, in rare cases, receive a modification of status (e.g. non-alphabetical author listing, with their names at the end). Any such modification requires consultation with a neutral, outside person approved by both parties (e.g. a departmental ombudsperson or similar).

(n) Graduate students who perform replication activities receive acknowledgement but not authorship.
(o) Students with authorship status on a project that includes original data collection are expected to participate actively in the preparation of the dataset and codebook for public release.

(p) I assume mentorship responsibility for keeping in mind the professional interests of any graduate student with whom I work, regardless of whether I am officially their committee chair, and for advising students of what I believe these interests to be. Where the professional interests of the student are different from my professional interests, I am obliged to disclose this to the student.

4. As the above items indicate, I adhere to the following norms governing intellectual property rights of data and ideas:

(a) Data and ideas that are generated during the course of a research project are the collective property of the team of persons who have authorship or P.I. status on the project;

(b) Until release into the public domain, data will be shared with others only with the agreement of all authors, and sharing normally entails a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA).

(c) Any member of a research team may decide independently to undertake research that builds on or extends ideas from a project. There is no obligation to include all original team members in subsequent projects. Original project authors and P.I.s should be informed in a timely fashion of related work that will re-use intellectual property. Publication of work that re-uses data or main ideas are embargoed from publication until acceptance for publication in a peer-reviewed journal of the core paper from the original project, unless otherwise agreed in writing.