A Student-Faculty Research Agreement

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Abstract

Research collaborations between students and faculty are increasingly taking place in the natural and social sciences. Unfortunately, such collaborations can become dysfunctional or break down altogether leading to disputes about important matters, such as data ownership and authorship rights. To minimize the conflicts that such disputes can raise, I have created a Student-Faculty Research Agreement that can also be used for instructional purposes in research integrity and research ethics training.

Introduction

Multiple authorship of research and scholarly papers has increased significantly not only in psychology (e.g., Mendenhall, & Higbee, 1982; Roig, Speranza, & Greco, 1999), but also in other sciences and scholarly disciplines (Holaday & Yost 1994; Macrina, 2000). Among the benefits of such collaborations, is the ability to tackle more complex research questions and to use limited resources in a more efficient manner. Though uncommon by most measures, one of the disadvantages of collaborative arrangements is the emergence of situations, whether personal or work-related, that can lead to the dysfunction and eventual break-up of a research group. For example, according to Bennett and Kidwell (2001) who have studied the dynamics of work collaborations, a member of a team may fail to meet her responsibilities by withholding effort towards the completion of the project. Restoring the balance of a working group by scaling back the dysfunctional member's responsibilities or outright ejecting that member can raise fundamental ethical dilemmas of important issues, such as authorship and ownership of ideas and research data.

In recent years, the number of research collaborations between faculty and students, particularly undergraduates, has increased. Unfortunately, as with any relationship, such associations have the potential of running into a number of difficulties, particularly when students approach involvement in research not as a goal in itself, but as a means of deriving other benefits, such as obtaining an advantage in applying to graduate school. The latter scenario is complicated by evidence indicating that sometimes faculty may be inadvertently aiding students obtain such advantages even when the students do not clearly merit them. For example, Sandler and Russell (2005) have found that up to 27% of members of the American Psychological Association (APA) have been involved in ethically questionable authorship assignments. These findings are alarming, given that the APA has prominently disseminated guidelines in the area of authorship and their interpretation as they apply to students (see Fine & Kurdek, 1993). Other forms of dysfunction in student-faculty research collaborations occur for other reasons, including faulty faculty mentoring, students' lack of experience with the norms of scientific research and similar lack of experience with working with groups or independently. Based on personal experience and that of other colleagues, I believe that some of the ethical dilemmas that can arise between students and faculty can be avoided if they discuss potential areas of disagreement ahead of time.

To facilitate such a dialogue, I have put together a document that represents a formal agreement between a faculty mentor and students who are interested in carrying out a research project under the supervision of the faculty mentor. The Agreement is based on a generic form that had been in use at my college with students from a variety of disciplines. The form was much simpler than the current version and consisted of the first introductory part and Items 1 and 2. It is no longer in use at the institution. The present version has been substantially modified and expanded to better clarify the roles and expectations of psychology students who collaborate with a faculty member in a research project. The new document points students to a number of relevant resources, such as the APA's Ethics Code (American Psychological Association, 2002) and provides the faculty member with criteria with which to evaluate the student's level of involvement. By reviewing the agreement and its associated materials, students receive important instruction in various facets of the research process. The agreement also imparts to students a faculty member's expectations about the students' commitment toward the project. Finally, the process of negotiating this agreement raises other significant elements regarding the responsible conduct of research, such as the importance of data accuracy and ownership of such data and associated research materials.

References

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STUDENT-FACULTY RESEARCH AGREEMENT

The purpose of this document is to formalize the terms of research collaborations between students and their mentor for the project described below. The **Student-Faculty Research Agreement** addresses some of the specific tasks, responsibilities, and other relevant issues associated with the conduct of scientific research (e.g., research ethics, data ownership, authorship, etc.). Please read and complete this form.

Title of Proposed Study: _____

Name of Faculty Member or Project Supervisor: _____

Name of Student Investigator: _____

Names of other students involved in project (each student will complete a separate Student-Faculty Agreement): _____:_____

_____

1. Detailed description of research project (to be completed by the student):

2. Indicate in detail how the semester is to be divided by student tasks and by deadline dates. (e.g. first two weeks will be devoted to reading and discussing secondary sources; next three weeks will be devoted to primary source research at the library; submission of an outline in the sixth week, etc.)

1st week_____

2nd week_____

3rd week_____

4th week_____

5th week_____

6th week_____

7th week_____

8th week_____

9th week_____

10th week_____

11th week_____

12th week_____

13th week_____

14th week_____

Agreement Statement

I, _____ recognize that scientific research is a labor-intensive enterprise that demands a high level of personal commitment, time, and effort. This is particularly true when the research project is being undertaken for academic credit (e.g., independent research, senior seminar) and the project must be completed within the temporal limitations of a semester-long course. By signing this document, I promise to dedicate the necessary time and effort to complete this project in accordance to the schedule drawn above. I will also uphold the principles of scientific integrity as exemplified by the APA code of ethics (http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html), particularly Principle C and Standard 8, Research & Publication, which I have read and understood. I have also reviewed our institution's academic integrity policies and I am fully aware of the seriousness of these issues and of the consequences of violating such policies. Based on the APA ethical principles and our own institution's academic integrity policies, I recognize that any form of data falsification, data fabrication, or plagiarism in the conduct of research is not only an academically dishonest act, but also a most severe form of scientific misconduct.

If this research project involves the recruitment and testing of human subjects, I agree to take a tutorial on the protection of human subjects (e.g., http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp) before commencing work on the project. Similarly, if the project involves using animals as subjects, I agree to take a tutorial on the use of animals as research subjects (e.g., http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/tutorial/).

I shall also abide by the stipulation that all research data (e.g., questionnaires, data files, records, observations) from this project become the property of the institution and will be retained by the faculty member who will determine who and under what circumstances others may have access to such data. I also understand that authorship of any resulting conference presentation or journal article will depend on the extent of my contributions to this project as stipulated in Standard 8.12 of the APA Ethics Code.

Student's signature_____date_____

Faculty member's or supervising investigator's signature _____date_____

Chairperson's signature_____date_____

PROJECT GRADE AND AUTHORSHIP DETERMINATION RATING GUIDE

Extent of Student Contribution to the Project (to be completed by faculty mentor)

Please circle the item that best describes the extent to which each of the following statements describes the student's performance in the project. Leave blank if not applicable.

Introduction

- Conceptualized the study/origin of idea/hypothesis/variables

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Carried out the literature search (identified relevant literature, retrieved articles, summarized articles)

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Method

- Made contributions to the research design

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Constructed stimulus materials/Set up-calibrated study equipment/Carried out ratings

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Data collection

- Recruited and consented subjects

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Ran subjects/Recorded observations

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Debriefed subjects

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Data analyses

- Entered data in database

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Checked data for accuracy

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Contributed to data analysis decisions

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Carried out data analyses

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Writing

- Wrote Introduction and literature review

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Wrote Methods section

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Wrote Results section

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Wrote Discussion section

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Presentation

- Constructed Poster

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Made presentation

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

Other contributions:

- Identified potential confounds

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Identified possible directions for future research

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	To a little extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	To a very great extent

- Organizational Skills

1	2	3	4	5
Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good

- Dedication to the project

1	2	3	4	5
Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good

- Other 1:_____

1	2	3	4	5
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

- Other 2:_____

1	2	3	4	5
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Additional Notes:

_____

_____

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