

# Student/Faculty Co-Authorship

## IN MY OPINION

Anonymous

I have no desire to tarnish my university's reputation, so please forgive my request to remain anonymous. After successful completion of my PhD in Nursing, I have been reflecting on my experiences as a student and a faculty member and those of my peers and have spent many hours reviewing the literature on student-faculty mentoring. As more nurse practitioners advance their education to the doctoral level, one concern that needs to be addressed is student-faculty joint authorship. There are abuses in doctoral education, documented in all fields of study, and nurses are not excluded from unprofessional behavior.

Students hold the copyright to their completed doctoral dissertations, which states that the work was independently created and that he or she is granted the degree based on this academic requirement. As such, it does not make sense that the student who was declared the sole author of a work is made to add one or more coauthors on subsequent publications stemming from the dissertation. Faculty coercion to become joint author on derivative publications from the dissertation is questionable behavior at best and is viewed as scientific misconduct and illegal behavior at the other extreme.

Faculty members serve as mentors for doctoral students as part of their teaching responsibilities. They may spend an enormous amount of time with their doctoral students to ensure students produce quality research, which cuts into their own time spent on research and professional publications. Obviously the amount of faculty input required by students varies and should be included in student acknowledgments. I believe that this tremendous investment of time and

effort is part of the faculty role. Critical review of the document and research supervision as part of a dissertation committee, however, do not justify joint authorship as compensation.

The doctoral student is not in a position to refuse a demand or strong suggestion for coauthorship from supervisory faculty, raising concerns about the imbalance of power in this relationship. Formal discussion and/or signing a contract between faculty and doctoral students prior to the dissertation writing phase is one option some programs use. It could be argued that this decision is not truly voluntary if students are concerned about staying in the program and successfully defending their dissertation.

Students often feel a strong obligation to faculty and want to compensate them for their mentoring and guidance. They may hope for a better review of their work by a publisher with the addition of their faculty mentor's name (despite the fact that reviewers are blinded to the author's name). They may also feel joint authorship will improve their chances of passing their dissertation defense. The reality is that authorship is diluted when additional authors are added. When the student's work has multiple authors, future employers may wonder what part the student played and if he or she is capable of independent research. Conversely, there is benefit in joint authorship when both parties share a more equal power relationship, thereby enhancing learning, promoting collegiality, and dividing labor into manageable parts to produce quality research.

Authorship conflicts between student and faculty may damage the mentoring relationship, risk embarrassment for faculty and universities, and lead to legal liability from copyright violation. As many students never attempt to publish their own work, some institutions have imposed deadlines for publication of articles, based on their students' doctoral research. If students do not publish derivative work by the deadline, faculty members may take it upon themselves to pub-

lish the students' work with or without their permission, listing themselves as first or second author. This is in direct violation of copyright laws, with possible statutory damages ranging from \$500 to \$100,000 (Copyright Act, 1976, US Code Sec. 501c).

Students should have control over dissemination of their doctoral research findings and whom they add as authors to their derivative publications. It is not fair to imply that all nursing professors participate in this type of behavior, but the questions

remain: Why are faculty members making strong suggestions or demands to be included as coauthors of their students' work? Is the need to publish so dire that faculty must take advantage of their powerful authority over students?

*The author's name has been withheld by request.*

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