

On Co-authorship

More than eighty-seven percent of the 132 technical articles published in this journal from 2010 to 2014 feature two or more authors [1]. Scientific research is a social activity that involves deliberate, sustained, and constructive interactions of individuals who are painstakingly working towards the common objective of generating new scientific knowledge. Success in doing science has become critically dependent on productive collaborations of colleagues from different scientific disciplines or between senior researchers and their junior counterparts especially postdoctoral fellows and graduate students.

Interdisciplinary research collaborations are valuable in the continued advance of the scientific enterprise system since they tend to produce more accurate scientific solutions to the complex multidimensional challenges that the world is confronted with today. Collaborators would learn enormously from each other's unique and often complementary perspectives of the problem at hand. Working with others who think differently is enriching particularly to young researchers who would acquire directly from senior co-investigators not only precious skills and time-tested techniques but also enduring lessons on the right way of doing science.

The publication of scientific findings in a peer-reviewed journal is commonly accepted as a tangible indicator of successful research collaboration. Determining who will be included as co-authors in an article is a delicate matter not just in big science projects that engage many collaborators from different institutions including foreign ones, but also in smaller in-house partnerships where participants have long known each other. There is a general consensus among established professional societies, academic organizations and journal editorial boards that authorship is confined only to those who have made substantial contributions to the conceptualization and design of the research investigation, execution and data acquisition, or data analysis and interpretation [2-8]. Authors are understood to have participated regularly in research meetings that were conducted to assess the progress of the project. They are also expected to partake actively in the preparation and approval of the final version of the manuscript. An increasing number of journals are now requiring disclosure of the specific contributions of the individual authors upon manuscript submission.

Honorary or guest authorship is a questionable research practice that is frowned upon by the scientific community because it dilutes the attribution of due credit and distorts the real capabilities and accomplishments of scientists and researchers. Conscientious administrators and solicitous colleagues who facilitated the approval of the research proposal or helped identify and match the research team members do not automatically qualify to be included as co-authors. Dissertation, thesis or program advisers of students are also excluded if they do not satisfy the aforementioned authorship criteria. However, their valuable contributions should be properly acknowledged in the manuscript.

The practice of self-regulation especially by senior colleagues is critical in ensuring that the rest of the scientific community would adapt faithfully to the authorship criteria. Leadership by example is the most effective means of implementing an idea successfully. Furthermore, all graduate students should be taught early and formally in a required first-year course, about professional behavior and responsible conduct in research including the boundaries of disclosing unpublished research results as well as venting frustrations in the social media. A number of useful resource materials on the subject matter are freely available in the Internet.

On the other hand, excluding as co-authors those who have clearly fulfilled the authorship criteria is a grave violation of trust that constitutes an act of research misconduct. The authors of the article in question are all accountable and they should be probed promptly and properly to establish their individual roles in the transgression. Carrying out earnestly such an investigation is extremely difficult for a small and fledgling scientific community like the one we have in the Philippines but it is a self-regulation function that is existential for a community striving for constant growth and measurable development. Fruitful scientific collaborations are founded on mutual trust among the participating researchers who are expected to go beyond their own individual goals and promote the common interest.

NOTE AND REFERENCES

1. Eighty-two (or 62.1%) of the 132 articles have three or more authors.
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