

Process to Resolve Authorship Disputes¹

Recommended for adoption into the Faculty Handbook by the Faculty Board on 6 May 2019

The faculty and students of the California Institute of Technology are committed to disseminating the results of their research. Therefore, it is common practice to publish the results in professional journals, conference proceedings, and monographs. The authorship of these publications reflects the contributions of all participants in the research, following the accepted practices of the field of study and the Caltech honor code. Authorship requires a significant contribution to the conceptualization, design, execution, evaluation of the data and/or interpretation of the research and a willingness to assume responsibility for one's specific contributions to the research. In addition to authors, it is normal to acknowledge the contributions of people who assisted in the research but did not significantly contribute to the research reported in the publication.

While the broad principles regarding who is listed as an author are universal across fields, practices including the order of authors in multi-authored publications vary by discipline. It is long-standing practice at Caltech that the supervising member of the professorial faculty (the lead member of the professorial faculty in the case of collaborative research) makes the final decisions regarding the authorship of publications because the principal investigator is in the best position to understand the practices of the field and relative contributions of all authors.

On rare occasions, there are disputes regarding authorship. These may result from, but are not limited to, co-authors believing that their place in the list of authors does not fairly reflect their contributions, acknowledged individuals believing that their contributions are significant enough to merit authorship, and collaborative projects across different fields of study that have different practices. It is the policy of Caltech that authorship disputes do not constitute research misconduct.

Avoiding authorship disputes

Many of these disputes arise from mismatched expectations. Therefore, early, ongoing and open dialog is the most effective means of avoiding an authorship dispute. It is recommended that

1. members of the faculty have ongoing conversations with their students, postdoctoral scholars, and collaborators about their authorship expectations and practices;
2. authorship be discussed at the beginning of any collaboration and the discussion continue on an ongoing basis as the research evolves; and
3. authorship be discussed as soon as a publication is conceived and that discussion continue through the preparation and finalization of the publication;
4. members of the faculty consult authorship guidelines provided by agencies such as the National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health as well as various technical journals and professional societies in framing their decisions about authorship issues.

¹ This document does not concern patents.

Resolving authorship disputes

- A. If the publication is a result of *research in a single research group*, any disputant who wishes to dispute a decision by the professorial faculty member should follow the following process:
1. Work with the faculty member to try to resolve the dispute;
 2. If this does not lead to a resolution, appeal to the division chair. The division chair will work informally with the faculty member and the disputant to try to resolve the dispute;
 3. If this fails, the disputant asks the division chair to launch a formal authorship dispute process. The division chair, either in person or with the assistance of another uninvolved member of the professorial faculty, will study the matter in detail and make a recommendation in writing to the faculty member. The faculty member may either accept the recommendation or reject it. The rejection has to be in writing, and must explain in the detail the rationale for the rejection of the recommendation. The decision of the supervising faculty member stands. The division chair will inform the office of the provost of the outcome of the process. The report made to the provost will include the parties involved, the process followed, the written recommendation and professorial response. This ends the process.
- B. If the publication is the *result of a collaboration between two research groups* at Caltech, any disputant who wishes to dispute a decision by any of the collaborating professorial faculty members should follow the following process:
1. Work with the collaborating faculty members to try to resolve the dispute;
 2. If this does not lead to a resolution, appeal to the division chair (or division chairs if people from more than one division are involved). The division chair(s) will work with the collaborating faculty members and the disputant to try to resolve the dispute;
 3. If this fails, the disputant asks the division chair to launch a formal authorship dispute process.
 - a. If all the collaborating faculty members are in agreement on the course of action, the division chair(s) will follow the process described in A3 above.
 - b. If the collaborating faculty members are not in agreement on the course of action, the division chair(s) will appoint a three-member committee of uninvolved members of the professorial faculty to study the matter in detail and make a recommendation in writing. The collaborating faculty members may either accept the recommendation or reject it. The rejection has to be in writing, and must explain in the detail the rationale for the rejection of the recommendation. If all collaborating faculty reject the recommendation, their decision is final and the division chair(s) will follow the process described in A3 above. If one collaborating faculty member accepts while another rejects this recommendation, the division chair(s) will inform the office of the provost of the outcome of the process. The report will include the parties involved, the process, the written recommendation and response. The provost will convey the fact that there is an authorship dispute and the recommendation of the faculty committee to the publisher of the publication. This ends the process.