University Policy 318, Authorship Dispute Resolution Policy

I.   Policy Statement and Purpose

Research contributes to the public fund of knowledge when the results are published or otherwise disseminated. With that step, researchers take public responsibility for the work. This responsibility includes both credit and accountability, and is typically conveyed by being named an author.

However, the role authorship plays in careers, awards, grants, and the like means that the stakes are high, and authorship decisions can evoke tension and conflict among collaborators. This conflict may in turn negatively affect relationships between faculty and students or between collaborators within the institution, across the country, or internationally. Vulnerable groups, such as graduate students, post-doctoral students, junior faculty, or those underrepresented in the academy can be most at risk in such conflicts. In the worst cases, these disputes can end projects or lead to publication retractions. Although many disciplines and journals articulate authorship standards, collaborators may not be aware of them and may even disagree about them (for example, due to different disciplinary authorship practices), leaving authorship assumptions among collaborators largely unstated.

Because institutions have an interest in and are sometimes responsible for resolving authorship disputes, it is important to establish policy to support good authorship processes and address potential disputes. This Policy is part of UNC Charlotte's commitment to fostering a culture of transparency, openness, and research integrity. The Policy is intended to help reinforce healthy, transparent authorship practices that can prevent disputes, and to offer clear processes to resolve them if they occur. It includes productive and historically successful approaches to co-authorship and mediating authorship disputes.

II.   Definitions

  A. Corresponding Author: In cases in which a manuscript has been submitted for publication consideration, the Corresponding Author is the person who identified themselves as responsible for communicating between the publisher and collaborators on the project.

  B. Lead Author: Generally, the designation of an individual as Lead Author refers to an individual who has taken a prominent role in the generation of ideas for and conduct of the research, as well as in drafting the manuscript in question, but the criteria for designation of Lead Author may vary by discipline.

  C. Principal Investigator (PI): In sponsored research, the Principal Investigator is the individual usually identified as such on the grant proposal of which the research is a part. However, an individual who leads a research project may occasionally

be identified as a Principal Investigator even if the research project is not sponsored by external funding.

III. Scope and Applicability

This Policy applies to UNC Charlotte faculty (as defined in [University Policy 102.13, Tenure Policies, Regulations, and Procedures](#)), staff, and students conducting research, scholarship, or other creative academic activity as part of their employment or enrollment at UNC Charlotte, as well as potential disputes between individuals in these categories. Authorship disputes covered by this Policy include disputes that occur pre- and post-publication.

This Policy is distinct from [University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship](#). Prior to initiating an authorship dispute process under this Policy in which research integrity might be implicated, the Research Integrity Officer and the Dean of the Graduate School should discuss the case to make a determination about the appropriate process to be applied.

This Policy is also distinct from [University Policy 407, Code of Student Academic Integrity](#). Prior to initiating an authorship dispute process under this Policy in which student academic integrity is an issue, the Dean of the Graduate School should discuss the case with the Director of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity and to make a determination about the appropriate process to be applied.

IV. Policy

This Policy recognizes the wide variety of authorship practices across disciplines and publications, so it is not the intent of this Policy to set a single set of authorship standards. However, as summarized by the [Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE)](#), "The minimum requirements for authorship, common to all definitions, are 1) substantial contribution to the work and 2) accountability for the work that was done and its presentation in a publication."

The following principles and practices are recommended for helping to prevent disputes and promoting constructive and transparent authorship practices.

A. Authorship Principles

1. It is the responsibility of the Lead Author, Corresponding Author, or Principal Investigator (these may all be the same person) to lead conversations among contributors regarding authorship, ensure that contributors are appropriately recognized, and ensure fairness in the authorship process. Ideally these conversations occur at the beginning of projects, throughout the project duration, and at the conclusion of the project.

2. Being named an author is an indication that one has made a substantial intellectual contribution to the project and is willing to be held accountable for their contribution to the work. A substantial intellectual contribution may vary by discipline, and therefore the Lead Author, Corresponding Author, or Principal Investigator should consult the guidance that applies to their discipline to make authorship determinations.

3. All individuals who have made a substantial intellectual contribution to a project should be named as authors; others who have contributed may be more appropriately recognized in the acknowledgements, footnotes, or other areas of the work as appropriate and subject to the individuals' consent.

4. All authors on a publication should have a reasonable opportunity to review and approve the final product. Approval shall not be unreasonably withheld.

5. Honorary, guest, gift, or ghost authorship is not acceptable. Honorary, guest, or gift authorship occurs when individuals who have not made a substantial contribution are named as authors. Ghost authorship occurs when someone who has made a substantial contribution is not named, usually to conceal their relationship to the product.

6. Authorship ordering conventions vary by discipline and publication format; it is not within the scope of this Policy to specify ordering practices. However, ordering decisions should be made in the context of healthy authorship conversations.

7. Authorship practices regarding theses or dissertations may vary by discipline. However, it is generally expected that publications resulting from a thesis or dissertation represent the graduate student's original work, and that the student should have discretion to determine whether to extend authorship credit for others' contributions to their dissertations, theses, and resulting publications.

B. Authorship Best Practices
The following are examples of best practices of authorship by UNC Charlotte faculty, staff, and students:

1. As soon as possible in a research collaboration, conversations among the authors about authorship should be initiated by the PI or intended Lead/Corresponding Author. This should include a discussion of general expectations for various roles even if the exact authorship order is not yet clear or may change.

2. Agreements about authorship order should be transparent, and ideally, a written authorship agreement should be developed and shared with all collaborators. (An example can be found at [insert UNCC web address]; creating a project on the Open Science Framework may also provide an opportunity to initiate authorship discussions as collaborators are named and listed in an initial order.) Important elements of such an agreement include proposed authorship order, authorship

standards collaborators agree to follow, and indications regarding when authorship changes should be discussed. This Policy, including reference to the dispute resolution process below, should also be included as an appendix to the agreement.

3. Because research roles can change throughout the lifecycle of a collaboration, it is important to revisit authorship agreements as circumstances warrant.

4. University departments and research units should include reference to this Policy in their orientation materials for new students and faculty. If such units require particular approaches to authorship, those should also be communicated to new students and faculty, in conjunction with other unit policies and guidance.

5. Collaborations with researchers at institutions other than UNC Charlotte should follow the recommendations in this Policy, including a written agreement explicitly establishing authorship order, authorship standards collaborators agree to follow, indications regarding when authorship changes should be discussed, and dispute resolution methods. Such authorship dispute resolution processes may be distinct from those at UNC Charlotte. For example, on larger collaborations (particularly when they may lead to multiple publications), establishing an authorship dispute committee with members from each institution may be appropriate.

V. Dispute Resolution Procedures

Although following the principles and practices outlined above will help significantly to prevent authorship disputes, such disputes may still arise. Informal steps should be taken to resolve the dispute first, but if informal resolution fails, the dispute may be submitted to the Authorship Dispute Panel for formal resolution.

A. Informal Dispute Resolution

If an authorship dispute arises, the collaborators should initially attempt resolving it informally. Collaborators should consult any written authorship agreement to inform such resolution. If there is no such agreement or if the terms of the agreement do not sufficiently resolve the matter, the collaborators might involve a neutral third party, such as an Ombudsperson. UNC Charlotte has separate Ombuds offices for faculty (https://ombuds.uncc.edu), graduate students (https://graduateschool.uncc.edu/current-students/ombudsman), and undergraduate students (https://sass.uncc.edu/students).

If the dispute remains unresolved, the collaborators may also contact the Chair (or the Dean of the Graduate School if the dispute involves a Chair, members of multiple departments, or members of multiple colleges) for informal help.

B. Formal Dispute Resolution: Authorship Dispute Panel

1. **Initiation of a Formal Dispute Resolution**: If an authorship dispute cannot be resolved with the informal steps suggested above, a disputant may initiate a formal dispute resolution process by contacting the Dean of the Graduate School in writing with a summary of the dispute and any supporting documents. The Dean will review the dispute and any supporting documents to determine whether a formal resolution is appropriate. If the Dean determines that formal resolution is appropriate, the Dean will appoint an Authorship Dispute Panel to consider and make recommendations in the matter.

2. **Authorship Dispute Panel**: From a standing pool of seven members appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School (including faculty members and at least two graduate students), the Dean will charge a three-person Panel to hear the dispute. If the dispute involves a graduate student, the Panel must include at least one graduate student. The Dean will ensure that there is appropriate expertise to carry out a thorough and authoritative evaluation of the dispute, and will require that the Panel maintain confidentiality of all documentation. The Panel may also consult other members of the University community for required expertise without disclosing any identifying information about the disputant, but those consulted will not participate in adjudicating the dispute.

   The disputant is responsible for presenting the authorship dispute in good faith, for maintaining confidentiality of the parties to the dispute and of all documentation, and for cooperating with the Panel's deliberative process. The disputant will have an opportunity to be interviewed by and present documentation to the Panel, and to review the draft report.

   The Panel will notify the respondent(s) of the dispute when the Dean appoints the Panel. The respondent(s) are responsible for making their case in good faith, for maintaining the confidentiality of the parties to the dispute and of all documentation, and for cooperating with the Panel's deliberative process. The respondent(s) will have the opportunity to be interviewed by and present documentation to the Panel, and to review the draft report.

   UNC Charlotte will protect the confidentiality of the parties to the dispute and any related documents to the extent permitted under law.

3. **Resolution**: The Panel will make a written recommendation to the Dean summarizing the dispute, documentation considered, and recommended resolution, along with its rationale. The Dean will notify the disputant and respondent(s) of the Panel's recommendation.

   The Panel's recommendation is not binding on the parties to the dispute but may be considered as presumptive evidence of the appropriate authorship designation if either the disputant or respondent fails to implement the recommendation. The Dean may notify the non-complying party's supervisor or other appropriate administrator if the Dean determines that the party's failure to

implement the recommendation warrants consideration of disciplinary or other appropriate action.

VI.   Responsible University Administrator

The Dean of the Graduate School shall be responsible for implementing this Policy.

Initially Approved: [DATE]

Authority: Chancellor

Responsible Office: Academic Affairs

Related Resources:

- [Supplemental Guidelines]
- [University Policy 309, Responding to Allegations of Misconduct in Research and Scholarship](#)
- [University Policy 407, Code of Student Academic Integrity](#)
- [University Policy 803, Reporting and Investigation of Suspected Improper Activities and Whistleblower Protection](#)
- American Psychological Association (APA) (undated), "[Publication Practices & Responsible Authorship](#)"
- American Psychological Association (APA) (undated), "[Tips for Determining Authorship Credit](#)"
- Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (2019), "[Discussion Document: Authorship](#)."
- International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) (undated). "[Recommendations for the Conduct, Reporting, Editing, and Publication of Scholarly Work in Medical Journals](#)"
- Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) (undated), "[Ethical Requirements](#)"
- Stocks, Angel; Donna Simcoe, Dikran Toroser & Lisa DeTora (2018). "[Substantial contribution and accountability: best authorship practices for medical writers in biomedical publications](#)," *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, 34:6, 1163-1168, DOI: 10.1080/03007995.2018.1451832.