

(Approved by BOT on June 14, 2013)

Policy for Arbitration of Authorship Disputes

Authorship Disputes

At times when collaborative and interdisciplinary work is becoming more of a norm in academia and when the number of researchers in some teams is large, conflicts regarding authorship assignment can arise. Authorship issues are best dealt with locally between the members of the team and arbitrated by the PI. The decision of the listing of authors and their order on a manuscript is made by the PI upon consultation with collaborators. It is advised that such discussion takes place as early as possible while the research is progressing. Because the authorship of a piece of work will vary as the work progresses, communications regarding authorship assignment can be revisited at any time while the work is underway.

Authorship Definition

The authorship of a manuscript constitutes an assignment of credit for intellectual work done, as well as an assignment of responsibility for this work. Authorship definitions and the order of authors on a manuscript differ amongst various disciplines. Faculty members should adhere to the accepted academic practice within their specific discipline and the specific guidelines of journals where the work is published. Some Faculties at AUB have established policies for authorship, and researchers in these fields should follow these Faculty specific guidelines when present.

In general, an author is a researcher (faculty, student, postdoc, research assistant, etc.) who has made a significant intellectual contribution to the research work. Other technical contributions should appear in the acknowledgement section of manuscripts. Published work must not have as an author any individual who has not made significant contribution to the work (guest author) and should list as authors all persons who have made significant contribution to the work (no ghost author). These practices are considered as an inaccurate assignment of credit and responsibility, can affect promotion or tenure decisions, and can in some cases hide conflict of interest.

After submission of a manuscript with an initial list of authors, removing an author's name must be justified and normally must have the written consent of the author whose name was removed. Addition of an author after initial submission must also be justified but can take place if a significant contribution is made to the revised manuscript.

Procedure for Arbitration of Authorship Disputes

1. Raising a Formal Authorship Dispute Claim:

Faculty members and researchers at the University are advised to make every reasonable attempt to resolve authorship issues internally by communication within the research team. If this attempt fails, the complainant will seek to resolve the dispute through his/her department Chair and/or his/her Dean. When a reasonable attempt to resolve the issue internally does not lead to resolution in a way satisfactory to all, the case can be raised to the provost in writing and must be substantiated with supporting evidence. The complaint can be made by any researcher working at AUB, or any researcher outside AUB working in collaboration with an AUB faculty member. Faculty members, students, and any other research personnel involved in the dispute must not raise their complaint against another AUB researcher directly to journal editors or publishers or to colleagues outside the University before an internal process is completed by the University to rule on the case. Doing so can jeopardize the credibility and academic reputation of colleagues and the University. Appropriate disciplinary action will be taken by the University against anyone who is found in the progress of the investigation to have made deliberate false claims or has falsified evidence, and against those who retaliate in any form against anyone who has been involved in the investigation.

2. Convening an Authorship Dispute Committee:

After initial review of the case, and if sufficient evidence is presented to support the claim and warrant an investigation, a fact-finding committee is convened by the provost (henceforth the Committee). The provost forms a Committee of at least three faculty members from the current serving members of URB, or from outside URB if a specific expertise is deemed needed. The URB Chair normally chairs the Committee. The members are chosen based on their expertise, and must not have any prior involvement in the case. Any member who has any prior involvement in the case or who suspects a conflict of interest will recuse himself/herself if asked to serve on the Committee. Faculty members serving on the Committee must be of equal or higher professorial rank than all parties involved in the dispute. If the case involves a student, a Ph.D. student may be invited to serve as an additional non-voting member of the committee.

3. The Committee Conducts an Inquiry:

The Chair of the Committee informs the parties involved of the formation of a fact-finding Committee to investigate the case. If the manuscript under dispute has not been published yet, the Committee advises the PI(s) not to submit the manuscript until the investigation is completed.

The Committee studies the case, gathers evidence, and interviews both complainant and respondent and can interview any member of the team involved in the research. The Chair of the Committee can communicate with journals to obtain information or evidence relevant to the case

after informing them that an internal process is underway related specifically to an authorship dispute and not to a research misconduct investigation. All evidence and deliberations are kept confidential and interviewees are instructed to maintain the confidentiality of the discussion. Minutes of meetings and records of interviews are taken. All persons interviewed in relation to the case have the right to view the transcript of their interview and to make corrections to the text subject to the approval of the Committee. In dealing with authorship disputes the Committee studies each case referred to it within the accepted practice or guidelines of the specific discipline. The Committee makes every possible attempt to find substantial evidence about the researchers' specific intellectual contributions to the conducted work and may request review by an external expert to determine if a particular intellectual contribution was essential to reach the conclusions of the work.

The Committee makes every effort to complete its investigation within 6 weeks. If more time is needed, the parties are informed.

4. The Committee Raises a Fact-Finding Report to the Provost:

The Committee raises a final case-finding report to the Provost. The report includes the minutes of meetings, transcripts of interviews, and supporting evidence. The deliberations, evidence, and the Committee's report remain confidential and will not be discussed at a full URB meeting.

5. Decision and Action are Taken Regarding the Case:

After reviewing the Committee's report, the provost makes a decision regarding the dispute. The provost communicates to the complainant, respondent, and the deans of the faculties of complainant and respondent the findings of the Committee, and his/her decision regarding the case; and may take any other remedial action deemed necessary.

The report and all evidence are kept in the Provost office for at least 7 years, or longer if required by a funding agency, after the conclusion of the investigation.

6. Appeal:

The Provost decision is final unless an appeal is raised to the President. An Appeal can be made on the grounds of procedural irregularity or if new evidence has been found within 30 days of the notification of the parties involved of the findings regarding the case.