

RCR Casebook: Authorship and Publication

<p>This is a 3-person role play involving an Assistant Professor who believes a Principal Investigator s/he is collaborating with is going to deny authorship and access to the project's data when the Principal Investigator notifies you that s/he is leaving the university. The role play contains the option of an additional preparatory role play involving consultation with a trusted colleague.</p> <p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assistant Professor• Principal Investigator• Trusted Colleague <p>Scenarios</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scenario One: Assistant Professor has discussion with Principal Investigator• Scenario Two: The Assistant Professor discussion with Trusted Colleague	<p>Role Play Tips</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed role descriptions and prompts are provided to guide the role play. This is not a strict script. Encourage role players to familiarize themselves with their characters and get creative!• Encourage role players to use their actual names in place of character names.• Experiment with changing the prompts to inject some variability in role play dynamics (e.g., have a character offer a conciliatory opening line or a belligerent opening line to see how that changes the course of the role play).• Run a role play more than once, changing role players.
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Role Play: Assistant Professor Role Guide

Character Description: The Assistant Professor

You are an assistant professor coming up for promotion next year. You do not have a grant of your own and were invited to work on a major funded project that is of great professional interest to you and relevant to your career trajectory. You carved out an important piece of work and spent two years designing your studies and gathering the data which are eminently publishable and which you expect will ensure your promotion. However, the Principal Investigator who invited you to work with her has turned out to be a dishonest bully. She was enraged at you when, at a research meeting, you pointed out that some of her untrained and unqualified research assistants were fudging data to agree with the hypotheses stated in her research proposal. You did not realize what you were getting into when you agreed to work with her, and were simply attracted to the importance of the project.

You conducted qualitative research and supervised interviews, ensuring that they were accurate and consistent, and took responsibility for the analysis. In addition to supervising the qualitative data collection and analysis, you developed a typology of workplaces which functioned as a major basis for the interventions.

Just as you complete a manuscript to be sent off for publication based on the data analysis you've completed, the Principal Investigator asks for a copy of the manuscript and the final version of the data.

She then informs you that she is leaving, effective the next week, for a new job at another university. A colleague of yours warns you that you'd better do something immediately to be sure that the Principal Investigator doesn't try to steal your publication, change the study's data or control access to the data.

Role Play: Principal Investigator Role Guide

Character Description: Principal Investigator

You are an extremely ambitious associate professor who has been struggling to create a research program that you hope will ensure a successful academic career. The purpose of your current \$1,000,000-funded project is to develop a workplace intervention. To your dismay, you have found that your students do not seem to key in on critical information you are seeking, so you have had to tell them how to direct the interviews to get the kinds of data you need. You also warn them that if they can't get the kind of information you seek in the interviews, then you will not be able to use them or pay them to help you do the research.

In addition, you have hired a young assistant professor as a research associate whose role is to conduct qualitative research on the project. S/he has just completed those interviews and cleaned the data. You and she have not had a satisfactory relationship. At a recent retreat, s/he had the audacity to accuse you of urging some of your undergraduate research assistants to fudge data to agree with the hypotheses stated in your research proposal.

Largely on the basis of your current research grant and presentations you have made about how your findings can improve lives, you have landed a new appointment as a full professor at a well-known university. Much of your future hangs in the balance as you seek to complete and publish your project. Obviously, you cannot trust your research colleague to support the kinds of arguments you wish to make based on your data. Even though s/he has just finished cleaning the data and has even written the project's first manuscript for publication, you plan to take the project with you to your new university and analyze and publish it yourself. The research colleague gets word of your plans to leave your current university and confronts you about the manuscript, plans for publication, and project ownership.

Role Play: Trusted Colleague Role Guide

Character Description: Trusted Colleague

You are the assistant professor's former mentor. You have been contacted by the assistant professor who believes that s/he will be denied authorship on a paper s/he wrote when the project's Principal Investigator (PI) leaves for a new job. The assistant professor has also indicated concerns that the PI may have fabricated data. You, as a trusted friend and mentor, have to provide advice on how the assistant professor should handle the situation. You have been at the university for a while and know of previous instances where this PI has bullied other researchers, and you believe that the assistant professor needs to act immediately but cautiously to ensure that the work s/he did is not stolen by the PI. You are afraid that once the data leave the university, they could be altered to best fit the PI's hypotheses.

The following are the kinds of questions an insightful "confidant" might ask.

- What do you know about this PI for a fact?
- What would be the pros and cons of going straight to an authority figure about this?
 - What kinds of help do you think your department chair could give you?
 - If you go to the funder, how do you think the funder would feel about getting in the middle of an authorship dispute?
 - Are there other authorities you might consult?
- What are the pitfalls of failing to speak to the PI first?
- When you speak to the PI, what are you planning to propose?
- What if the PI makes promises to you that you doubt she will keep?
- What are the risks of agreeing to co-authorship with this particular individual?

Scenario One

The assistant professor has arranged, through email, a time to meet with the Principal Investigator.

Prompt

Assistant Professor: “Thanks for agreeing to meet with me. I was a little surprised to hear that you have taken a new job at another university and will be taking my data with you.”

Principal Investigator: “Yes. I have accepted a position at a neighboring institution and will begin working over there in the next two weeks. Because I will be departing soon, I asked you to send me a final version of the data, which you just finished cleaning and organizing from the project. I plan to move this forward and disseminate the research findings.”

Assistant Professor: How do you respond?

Alternative Prompt

Assistant Professor: “Thanks for agreeing to meet with me. I just wanted to let you know that I have contacted the university’s grant officer to inform him of your departure and to determine how the project’s data should be handled. I mean, if the entire project and data should move with the principal investigator.”

Principal Investigator: “Really. Why would you go behind my back and contact this office before allowing me to do so?”

Assistant Professor: How do you respond?

Scenario Two

The assistant professor approaches a colleague from his/her department to discuss how to move forward with a project when the principal investigator is leaving the university.

Prompt

Assistant Professor: “Oh my god, I can’t believe I just spent the last two years working on this project and will have nothing to show for it! What should I do? I feel like the Principal Investigator I collaborated with is trying to leave the university and taking all of my data and potential publication with her. I just don’t know what to do next.”

Trusted Colleague: How do you respond?

Take Away Points

- In most cases, academic institutions own the rights to the data, considering that researchers are employees of the institution. At the very least, researchers should not take data with them when they leave an institution without first contacting the institution and other involved parties to make appropriate arrangements and receive approval.

References

DuBois, J., Sieber, J., Bante, H., & Partin, K. (n.d.). RCR Casebook: Stories about Researchers Worth Discussing. Retrieved November 7, 2019, from <https://ori.hhs.gov/rcr-casebook-stories-about-researchers-worth-discussing>.