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Lauer Offers Ways to Manage Scholarship Disputes

Acknowledging that the agency receives a dozen authorship dispute complaints a year, Mike Lauer, NIH deputy director for extramural research, recently offered “informal advice for researchers and institutions to consider.” NIH officials “generally do not handle authorship disputes as possible research misconduct violations,” nor does ORI the HHS Office of Research Integrity. “Rather, authorship disputes among research collaborators must be addressed internally at their institution and/or lab,” he wrote on his *Open Mike* blog.

Lauer offered a host of recommendations to address such disputes, including using a publications committee to establish authorship in advance and to manage “issues that come up due to changing circumstances once a project is under way (e.g., one of the project members drops out).” Labs could “write and disseminate their own authorship policies and procedures. You could consider also including these in a lab manual,” Lauer added. “Most journals already require that the corresponding author attest that the other authors are in agreement with the entire content of the paper. A manuscript should only be submitted if everybody agrees. Institutions could set up policies and procedures to assure that all researchers understand and abide by this requirement.” He said, “being proactive can help mitigate the risk of possible authorship disputes” and noted that “how we manage these conflicts and frustrations in a civil professional way...is key for maintaining safe and respectful workplaces, conducive to high quality research.”

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