

This material is part of a collection that documents the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation perpetrated against Alaska's women research scientists by their supervisor, with full knowledge (and arguably, "tacit approval") of their federal employer, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)



United States Department of Agriculture

Research, Education and Economics
Agricultural Research Service

December 8, 2009

SUBJECT: Clarification on PWA Authorship Policy

TO: Cynthia Bower
Research Food Technologist
Subarctic Agricultural Research Unit

FROM: Maureen C. Whalen
Assistant Area Director

In this memo, Maureen Whalen appears to take a stand against technician authorship. She offered as "guidance" a 1999 memo from a past ARS administrator, which states that technician authorship should be rare.

Times have changed since the ARS administrators were active as scientists. Now technicians employed by the agency are often scientists with Master's degrees. My tech was a published author before she accepted the position in my lab and she continued to be sought out by past employers for her writing abilities because of her expertise.

It is unreasonable for agency research scientists to hire highly qualified people and then instruct them to purposely work at a level significantly beneath their abilities.

This acknowledges receipt of your email correspondence from December 4, 2009 addressed to me regarding PWA's policies on authorship.

Peer-reviewed journals require that authorship credit be given to scientists who participated in the research

Regarding authorship, I have attached P&P 152.2. All authors have to fulfill the three authorship criteria in section 1, page 3.

Do you think Maureen Whalen acted ethically when she took this stance against technician authorship?

Anyone who fulfills the authorship criteria (P&P 152.2 section 1) must be offered authorship.

For management approval of authorship (see P&P 152.2, section 3, page 4), the AD has delegated the approval to the RL WITH GUIDANCE. The guidance that is in effect is described in the attached memo from May 17, 1999.

Co-authoring papers is not in the position description of technicians. Because it is not in their position descriptions, technicians should not be routinely co-authoring papers. A supervisor is responsible for ensuring the employee is performing the work described in the position description (PD). The supervisor's signature on the PD cover sheet attests to the accuracy of the document and that the employee is performing the work. The supervisor should not be assigning work outside of the PD.

P&P 152.2 recognizes technical help by technicians and acknowledges their assistance as described in P&P 152.2 section 2 Acknowledgement of Contributions.



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In the rare instances where a support scientist is to serve as a co-author, as it says in the PWA guidance, “the role must be established...as soon in the research process as possible, ideally prior to the conduct of the research.” The example, used by the PWA office, is it would be appropriate if a technician were specifically assigned the development of a method and then fulfilled the three authorship criteria. The RL would have to give prior approval to the role.

According to P&P 152.2, section 3, the RL as AD/AD designee “may require authors to justify the assignment of authorship, by explaining how each individual participated in the activities described by the guidelines for authorship...” The system for justification for authorship is up to the RL as AD designee. The RL signs the ARIS 115s according to the P&P 152.2, the PWA guidance and position descriptions.

Please let me know if you have any additional questions regarding PWA authorship policy.

Enclosure

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May 17, 1999

This is a 1999 memo from a past ARS administrator, (not previously issued during my five years of employment with the USDA Agricultural Research Service).

SUBJECT: Delegation of Authority to Approve Authorship

TO: PWA Center Directors, Laboratory Directors, Research Leaders

FROM: Antoinette A. Betschart /s/
Area Director

It was offered to me as an excuse for denying tech authorship, in direct violation of peer-reviewed journal guidelines, which require contributing scientists to be given authorship

Except for manuscripts containing sensitive information, P&P 152.1-ARS dated March 10, 1998 establishes that Research Leaders are responsible for approving manuscripts and abstracts and for ensuring that the approval is entered into RMIS. Exercise of this responsibility is the last step in assuring that ARS publications are of the highest quality. Authority to approve authorship by employees who do not occupy research or service scientist positions (Category 1, 2 and 4) currently resides with the Area Director (P&P 152.2-ARS, May 12, 1997). I hereby delegate this authority to approve authorship by support scientists (Category 3) and technicians to Research Leaders in the Pacific West Area with the following guidelines:

For support scientists, all criteria in the guidelines on authorship (see P&P 152.2-ARS) must have been met. Support scientists should rarely be the principal author by virtue of their assignment (i.e., support). If a support scientist is to serve as principal author, the role must be established prior to the production of the first draft of the manuscript and as soon in the research process as possible, ideally prior to the conduct of the research. An exception may be publication of thesis or dissertation research.

For technicians, the level of contribution to a publication is appropriately recognized by an acknowledgment in the paper. By virtue of typical assigned responsibilities of a technician, authorship on even abstracts should be rare. As with support scientists, an exception may be publication of thesis or dissertation research. In any case involving authorship by a technician, approval shall be established as soon in the research process as possible, ideally prior to the conduct of the research. In addition, there shall be written justification explaining how the technician met all the guidelines for authorship set out in P&P 152.2-ARS.

Authorship by employees from any other classification series will continue to require approval by the Area Director. If you have any questions, please call Dr. Andrew Hammond at 510.559.6063.