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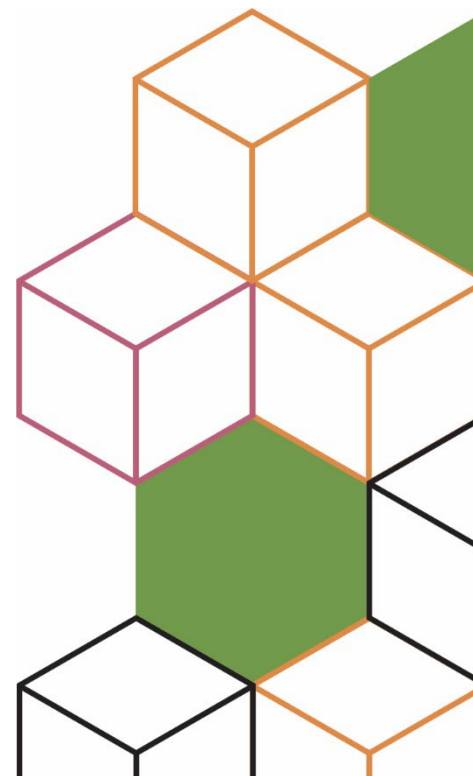graduate student
association

November

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Graduate Student Association

Submission to the University of Melbourne Authorship Policy Consultation

Introduction

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) is the independent representative organisation for all graduate coursework and research students at the University of Melbourne. We are led by 8 GSA Board members and 10 Representative Council members who are all elected University of Melbourne graduate students. On behalf of over 36,000 constituents, we represent graduate student interests to the University and wider community, provide student engagement events, activities, and information to the graduate student community, and support 150 affiliated graduate student groups.

GSA's vision is for a unified and supported community that actively empowers graduate student excellence and experience. Our objectives are to achieve and support representation, academic support, transition to work, engaged and healthy communities, and organisational sustainability.

GSA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the University of Melbourne's new proposed changes to the Authorship Policy. We are of the view that this policy requires further work to be accessible for all graduate students. GSA hopes that once our feedback is integrated, there will be another opportunity to review the proposed policy.

For this submission, GSA widely consulted graduate students using our representative networks, social media channels, and website. Drawing on the feedback received, GSA found that the proposed policy has the potential to create administrative burdens for students, which can be mitigated through the development of supporting resources and templates.

Key findings

1. Administrative burdens

Most of the feedback we received from students focused on the administrative burden created by the policy. GSA recommends that the University reduce this administrative burden by combining the release of the policy with the release of supporting templates. Specifically:

- A template for recording authorship discussions. (5.11)
- Authorship agreements templates.
- A step-by-step guide on how coordinating authors are to keep records. Referring people to two other policies as per 5.15 is not adequately supported.
- How to record authorship dispute discussions.

Producing these resources centrally can also reduce the administrative burden on Faculties. Some of these directives may be covered in the Related Documents section. However, GSA receives a 400 error when we click the link and can't access it. GSA also recommends hyperlinking the document into the relevant sections.

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2. The need for a decision map

A decision map will go a long way in making the document clearer and more accessible. The flowchart referred to in the related documents section could clarify who researchers are meant to speak to at every stage where there is a risk of disagreement. GSA recommends it include the steps authors and coordinating authors need to complete to be compliant with the policy. These can include identifying potential authors, author selection, recordkeeping, managing and recording COI and what needs to be recorded in writing. GSA also recommends including the flowchart in the policy itself, as well as linking to it once it is available.

3. Coordinating authors

How are coordinating authors selected? Please provide advice/criteria for selecting this.

4. Implementation challenges

What happens when the policy is not adhered to? What can people do if they feel the coordinating authors are not fulfilling their role? This is particularly relevant to the recordkeeping requirements. Researchers leave the University over a five-year period. Isn't it more reasonable for these to be kept in a central location that can also ensure the policy is being adequately complied with?

Specific clausal feedback

5.6c

Is it required that this is documented separately? If so, it is not clear. Many would assume that by documenting that they agree to be an author they also agree to be accountable for the research output.

5.9

Replace the word intention with the word purpose.

It is unclear by what mechanism potential co-authors are determined. This same issue is present at 5.13d. The list of non-authors can be very long without more direction about who needs to be included here. This can be addressed with the template to give people a sense of what sort of people include the potential authors you want to be listed as non-authors. GSA recommends including several examples.

5.10

Stating the coordinating author's role is "normally" to oversee the research doesn't provide clarity on this matter. This also contradicts the roles and responsibilities table where this is explicitly identified as a part of their role.

5.6 indicated authors are responsible for the integrity of their contribution and 5.10 coordinating authors are responsible for the integrity of the research as a whole. It is unclear to what extent coordinating authors are to check on the work of the other authors to ensure its integrity. Please remove both of these ambiguities.

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5.11

GSA believes this section is inadequately detailed. Some graduate researchers may not know, based on this section, how much detail to include in their notes.

5.12

"Final Authorship must be agreed to by all authors." GSA sees two challenges with using this as a prerequisite for publication:

1. It allows one author to prevent all other authors from publishing their research by disagreeing in bad faith on authorship. This may occur for a variety of reasons including disagreements with the conclusions or methodology of the research, personal animosity among authors, or individual authors having a personal interest in the research being published later so they can use the research elsewhere prior.
2. The statement risks leaving researchers unclear on who must agree on final authorship. This is because in order to know if one has an agreement on final authorship one needs to know who the authors are, which is the very matter in question. It is circular in a similar way to that the statement "the tall people list must be agreed upon by all tall people."

5.13b

Please provide more detail on what kind of affiliations need to be recorded.

If the policy intends to require all affiliations, this risks pressuring individuals to provide information on affiliations they are not comfortable providing. Affiliations have the potential to be private and may include affiliations that inadvertently disclose information on a person's religious beliefs, ethnicity or address.

5.17

Please include information on how to access a Research Integrity Advisor. Ideally in the form of a hyperlink.

5.20

Please indicate who is responsible for making those referrals.

5.22

It is unclear who determines when it is applicable for a third party to keep records of the agreement.

5.23

Please indicate how such an impasse can be overcome where one party is not engaging in good faith.

5.27

Why not? If one party is less articulate than another, a legal representative can help them. This can be especially relevant for graduate researchers who are in a dispute with their supervisor.

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