



## Authorship

An assistant professor in the genetics department, Thomas, is working on a project looking at colon cancer tissue specimens. After five years at the university, he is hoping to be promoted to associate professor in the next two years.

One afternoon, Thomas approaches Dev, a senior colleague, and asks if Dev has some time to advise him on one of his research projects. Eager to help a very promising young faculty member, Dev chats with Thomas about his project and encourages him. He also provides Thomas with a polymerase reagent for genetic analysis that has been on backorder at the vendor for quite some time. Thomas is delighted at the way professors in the genetics department at his university collaborate and share lab supplies and equipment, no questions asked. Dev thinks nothing of it; he is glad to help out and wants to do what he can to help with the progress of Thomas' research program.

A year later, Dev is on his department's Tenure Committee and sees that Thomas is up for promotion to associate professor. As Dev looks through his young colleague's dossier, he sees that Thomas has published a number of articles on his genetic analysis of colon cancer. However, one of the articles that was recently submitted to an eminent journal in his field has listed Dev as a co-author. Dev is astounded. He knew nothing of the specific study or the publication, and certainly did not review and approve the final manuscript with his name on it. He closes Thomas's file, perturbed by what he has seen.

### Questions for consideration

1. Do you think Dev qualifies for authorship on this paper? If you are unsure, where can you find some direction?
2. Would you feel comfortable being listed as a co-author in Dev's situation? Why or why not?
3. A reader suspected that a research breach had occurred in some way in the publication (for example, through plagiarized material or an inappropriately manipulated image) and filed a complaint against all of the authors on the paper. What are some implications of this for Thomas and the other authors?
4. Has Thomas done something unethical? What might be his possible motives? What in the culture of the institution might have contributed to his decision to name Dev as a co-author?

Adapted from The Office of Research Integrity [RCR Casebook](#).

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*We thank our colleagues at UBC and beyond who provided perspectives and feedback that greatly improved the relevance of these case studies to members of our research community. Their contribution and support are central to our efforts to promote education on, and raise awareness of, the importance of the responsible conduct of research.*

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1. Do you think Dev qualifies for authorship on this paper? If you are unsure, where can you find some direction?

This is an example of gift authorship. Dev did not review the final manuscript and cannot take responsibility for the work. Furthermore, he did not consent to being included as a co-author. While Dev may have mentored and supported Thomas over the years, he was not actively involved in this research, and did not make a material intellectual contribution to the work.

Some resources include:

- [Authorship & Publishing](#), Scholarly Integrity Initiative
- [Scholarly Integrity Policy](#) (section 2.1.6) and
- [How to handle authorship disputes](#), COPE Guidelines.

2. Would you feel comfortable being listed as a co-author in Dev's situation? Why or why not?
3. A reader suspected that a research breach had occurred in some way in the publication (for example, through plagiarized material or an inappropriately manipulated image) and filed a complaint against all of the authors on the paper. What are some implications of this for Thomas and the other authors?

Thomas will have to respond to both the alleged breach and the fact that he inappropriately included co-authors without their consent or knowledge. If the paper needs to be retracted or if the journal issues any type of alert or caution about it, the reputation of all of the authors could be affected.

4. Has Thomas done something unethical? What might be his possible motives? What in the culture of the institution might have contributed to his decision to name Dev as a co-author?

Some possible explanation may include:

- Lack of understanding about the type of contribution that is necessary for someone to be included as an author
- false belief that inclusion of a senior researcher may increase the chance of publication's acceptance.
- assumption that the senior researcher would appreciate the gesture.

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