January 10, 2012

RE: MSU Guidelines on Authorship

Dear UCFA members,

On October 10, 2011 the Personnel Policy Subcommittee discussed the newly revised ‘MSU Guidelines on Authorship’ document. The general impression was that the document broadly defined authorship, but that later sections narrowly focused on publication of manuscripts. It was unclear whether the scope of the document was sufficient to address ‘authorship’ issues that might arise with creative endeavors outside of traditional manuscripts. Hence, the Subcommittee decided to have UCFA members discuss with the College FACs from Music, Arts & Letters, Social Sciences, Communication Arts & Science, Lyman Briggs, Engineering, and Libraries whether the document’s language was sufficient for their needs and, if not, what would they recommend.

Based on faculty feedback, the Subcommittee recommends to the UCFA that the ‘MSU Guidelines on Authorship’ document be returned to the Office of Research Integrity (Dr. James Pivarnik) so that the following issues can be addressed.

- Early sections of the new guidelines are written to be more inclusive of contributors to creative works, which is deemed appropriate. Later sections, however, presuppose an older model of scholarship with an emphasis on manuscripts. For example, under ‘Accountability’ a publication is equated to a manuscript and there is an emphasis placed on research/scholarly work with no mention of creative works. The scope of the later sections should be increased to be more inclusive.
- Non-manuscript forms of professional productivity like video games, websites, musical performances, and so forth, typically do not have a final form that can be approved by co-authors as is done for a manuscript prior to publication. Since these types of creative work often evolve over time, it is difficult for co-authors to give final approval. This is an issue for both the ‘authorship’ and ‘accountability’ sections.
- For non-manuscript forms of creative work there are often important intellectual property or ownership considerations. Should the authorship policy for creative works be more specific on ownership issues?
- ‘Authorship’ should be a defined term. The statement “A person claiming authorship or being designated as an author of a creative endeavor should meet all of the following criteria…” is repetitive of the definition of Author and too restrictive. This could be reworded to “A person shall qualify as an Author provided the following conditions are satisfied…”. It is understood that journals have their own definitions for authorship.
- Under the ‘authorship’ section, it would be appropriate to include reviews as an additional example. In many disciplines such as history and sociology reviews are considered original contributions to scholarship.
• Under the ‘head author and order of authors’, lead author and head author is used interchangeably. One descriptor should be used, preferably “lead Author”.
• Many disciplines have specific traditions about authorship order e.g. first author versus last author versus alphabetical. Should the policy acknowledge these differences in some manner?
• The last part of the guidelines appears to apply to manuscripts. Perhaps a new section heading should be created for handling manuscripts.
• Under ‘disputes over authorship’ the sentence “At MSU, this can be served by the Research Integrity Officer (RIO)” makes no sense. This could be reworded as “At MSU, this can be resolved by the Research Integrity Officer (RIO)”. In addition, it might be appropriate to involve the Faculty Mediation Service prior to the RIO.
• It is recommended that the document open with a section labeled ‘Purpose’. This is important because the word “Guidelines” (as used in the title) can mean ‘recommendations’ or ‘suggestions’, but can also mean ‘rules’ or ‘regulations’. Because of this some faculty were concerned that the document might supersede or influence existing university, college, or unit policies and procedures including RT&P.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Personnel Policy Subcommittee Chair