![Gmail logo]

Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>

Re: Academic freedom for staff and postdocs to engage in independent research

6 messages

K███████████████r@stanford.edu>   Mon, Sep 7, 2020 at 11:28 AM
To: Jesus Gerardo Galaz Montoya <jgalaz@stanford.edu>
Cc: S█████████████████r@stanford.edu>

Hello, Jesus,

I'm adding S████████, Director of the Office of███████████████, who may have encountered this question over the years and can also give you a 2nd opinion. To answer your second question first, we don't have a central program to pay publication fees specifically – usually the costs of doing research begins at the program level, then the department, then the school.

In my experience, most groups are supportive of students, postdocs, and staff scientists working independently for part of their work if things are going well on their funded projects that have deliverables, and in some cases the grant funding even allows for it. There's certainly no policy barrier to independent publications. I've known a number of people who have written them, and I would definitely discuss it with your PI.

Best,

K██████

From: Jesus Gerardo Galaz Montoya <jgalaz@stanford.edu>
Date: Sunday, September 6, 2020 at 11:11 PM
To: █████████@stanford.edu>
Subject: Academic freedom for staff and postdocs to engage in independent research

Dear ██████████

I have been at Stanford for more than 3 years now: 1.5 years as a Research Scientist after 1.7 years as a Postdoc (I was previously a Postdoc for 3.3-year elsewhere).

I read parts of the research policy handbook which was very insightful and provided your name and e-mail to reach out if questions remained about policy:

1) Does Stanford approve of independent research by scientific staff, culminating in the publication of articles without supervision or approval by their supervisor(s)?

I'm referring to initial research that can be conducted without grant funding, exclusively in the postdoc's/staff's "free time", after appropriate fulfillment of their program/employment duties, and specifically in the domain of computational simulations and/or analysis of publicly-available data, in areas that may not be of focus or a priority for the faculty supervisors (i.e., there should be no contention as to authorship or proprietary experimental data).

2) If Stanford approves of and encourages independent publications by its staff who do not have grants, is there a mechanism for the institution to cover the fees to publish in reputable peer-reviewed journals, should a study be accepted?

I've asked senior peers throughout the years about publishing independently since my time as a student in other institutions but

have felt an air of "taboo" around the topic, making it a bit intimidating to raise this question directly to supervisors who might take it the wrong way, with a potential to sour an otherwise productive conversation or the entire relationship unnecessarily.

Acceptance of a study for publication in reputable peer-reviewed journals seems like a good discrimination criterion as to whether the research was worth pursuing, as opposed to being bound exclusively by the opinions, interests, and availability of supervisors. Unfortunately, most reputable journals charge fees that are unaffordable for low-income postdocs and staff, imposing a stringent barrier to research dissemination.
Support from the University for staff, postdocs, and students to publish independently could boost the productivity, growth, and diversification of scientists and trainees while increasing the publication output of the University and promoting the <<democratization>> of publishing.

Thank you for your kind attention and help; I hope that you and your loved ones are well during these trying times of pandemic and forest fires.

Jesus G. Galaz-Montoya, Ph.D.

jgalaz@stanford.edu, jgalaz@gmail.com

███████████

Department of Bioengineering

SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory

https://sites.slac.stanford.edu/cryo-em/

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Stanford, CA 94305, USA

Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>   Tue, Sep 8, 2020 at 2:38 PM
To: K███████████er@stanford.edu>
Cc: S███████████r@stanford.edu>

Hi ██████████

Thank you for the prompt response. I'm glad to hear that there are no policy barriers to independent publication :-)
I'm looking forward to Sofie's insight as well.

I have a few more questions about policy on the related matter of collaborative publications.

For context, it is not unseen for supervisors who manage myriads of grants, junior scientists, collaborations and projects to delay the publication of some individual research papers for years if they do not consider them a priority, much to the frustration of the first author(s) and collaborators who wrote the manuscript and to the detriment of often publicly-funded science.
In some cases, conversations seem to go the same way regarding a paper, even years apart (literally), with the supervisor giving the same reasons for delays: "your paper is not at risk of being scooped; I don't have time to read it; I need to deal with other crises and deadlines".

1) I would like to know whether Stanford has a mechanism to prevent such situations from becoming chronic or remedy them once they have?
2) Is there any training for senior supervisors to encourage them to delegate if there's too much on their plate as to revise some of the research papers of their junior group members causing delays in the order of years?

This could include:
A) The supervisor letting someone else in the collaborative group be the corresponding author, or even encourage this.
B) Renouncing co-authorship if they cannot trust someone else in the team to be the corresponding author (any appropriate grants should still be acknowledged, of course).

These ideas may have been presented to supervisor(s) already multiple times, and met with stark rejection.
To minimize subjectivity and prevent contention, perhaps the University could consider implementing policy stipulations around this, in addition to a training course for supervisors.

Just as a brainstorming idea: perhaps the University could create an institutional preprint database where staff, postocs, and students could submit their collaborative first-author papers when they consider them ready for submission, with some level of basic quality-control, much like that of online preprint repositories arXiv, bioRxiv, medRxiv, etc. This would be simply an independent record to promote accountability and kickstart a timeline for submission to a journal. Whether an internal preprint would be made accessible to the Stanford community at large before publication could remain a purview of the supervisor.
From the day of submission to "suRxiv" (Stanford University Archive), the supervisor would have a finite timeline (3, 6, 9 months?), agreed upon ahead of time, to submit a complete revision, or provide final approval, or delegate the position as corresponding author, or renounce co-authorship. Perhaps a one-time extension could be

allowed to the supervisor if needed (1, 2, 3 months?), after which further extensions would be approved at the discretion of the first author.

Any institutional support and training mechanisms to redistribute power a bit from supervisors to first authors (often junior scientists) as to having a voice in deciding whether and when a study could be submitted for publication might help to increase Stanford's publication output while minimizing disagreement and tension between junior scientists and their senior supervisors.

An increase in publication delays seems to be a wide-spread problem in Academia, with many underlying causes (https://www.pnas.org/content/112/44/13439), the trend being particularly strong in the biological sciences. Abundant anecdotal evidence from junior scientists also supports the phenomenon being discussed (the negative consequences of PIs being overleveraged is often dismissed as "PIs just being PIs").
I wonder whether implementing support mechanisms to preclude the internal barriers to publication outlined above could position Stanford as a pioneer in furthering the democratization of science with wide positive impacts on many fronts.

Thank you for your attention and have a great day!

Jesús

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Jesus G. Galaz-Montoya, Ph.D.
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Department of Bioengineering
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K█████████████r@stanford.edu>   Tue, Sep 8, 2020 at 8:45 PM
To: Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>
Cc: S█████████████r@stanford.edu>

Hello Jesus,

It may be appropriate to involve the ombuds or a senior colleague to help with discussion. It may be appropriate to involve student services postdoc affairs, or HR where one collaborator is a staff member. We could talk about whether we should have policies, programs and resources specific for more independent publications as you suggest, but right now we don't.

We also have general resources to help collaborators (including PIs and trainees) have productive relationships. Since the expectations are very field-specific, it's often best to start at the department or school. The School of Engineering has some really good people in the dean's office who may be helpful to you.

K██████████████

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S█████████████r@stanford.edu>   Tue, Sep 8, 2020 at 9:54 PM
To: Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>
Cc: K█████████████r@stanford.edu>

Hello Jesus,

You raise an issue that deserves more consideration, although there is not an easy response. I agree with ███'s analysis, and strongly encourage you to contact Brenda Berlin, the University ombuds, to talk through your specific situation. You might also consider discussing this with a trusted collaborator.

As Kam says, support in the form of policies and programs for independent publications does not exist as such right now, but there is certainly support for setting expectations and for negotiating outcomes. The Faculty Staff Help Center is an excellent resource for developing an approach to conflict resolution. They have experience working with postdocs, and understand the unique pressures and power imbalances that impact this group. The career centers on campus also hold negotiation workshops from time to time that can help develop skills.

I understand that you are looking for an institutional remedy, and I agree with ███ that it is something we could discuss. However, if you have an immediate need, I encourage you to work to that end now, and use your experience to effect institutional change in the future.

All best,

Associate Dean for

| Stanford University

.edu/
du/opa-covid-19-updates

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Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>   Wed, Sep 9, 2020 at 9:24 PM
To: S⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛er@stanford.edu>
Cc: K⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛⬛er@stanford.edu>

Hi S⬛⬛ and K⬛⬛

Thank you for the thoughtful responses and for suggesting resources.
The issue is really not one of communication or counseling, nor exclusive to me.
I've met many students and postdocs through the years who have faced similar issues without them stemming from suboptimal communication.
Rather, the problem is one of differential priorities and power to pursue them, as well as a matter of personality traits and available time (PIs being over-leveraged, unnecessarily/excessively apprehensive, etc.).

My advisor and I get along well and have a productive relationship. I understand how overwhelmed he is.
He's aware of the delays, which I bring up regularly, and he just openly says "I still don't have time for X paper, I'm sorry".
I've proposed alternatives and the answer in regards to a particular paper is always "no".
The pile of other priorities may not clear up any time soon (it hasn't in the last ~2 years), unless there's a 3rd party agent or system in place (institutional) that can exert more pressure than me.
On the other hand, I would hate to sour our relationship over a paper or for my contacting you to inquire about general policy to be misinterpreted and taken the wrong way (some people are unpredictably sensitive).

A former coworker (now a Professor in Korea) deleted our advisor from a paper he wrote right before leaving our group and submitted with the collaborator PI alone, without telling our advisor, precisely because of the chronic, recurrent issue I'm describing, and blamed the collaborator. I would prefer not to do that. I'm also not intending to single out my advisor, since the problem seems to be widespread, in a sense.
While it's unfortunate that Stanford doesn't have objective, standardized and effective institution-wide mechanisms to train PIs about this and to prevent, resolve and minimize the specific internal barriers to independent and collaborative publication I've described, I am hopeful that there is opportunity for improvement by developing systems that preclude unnecessary frustration, tensions, politics, and delays in research dissemination.

I understand that responsible development can take time.
How could an initiative to systematically prevent and solve the problems I've described at a wide-scale (as opposed to seeing them as a matter of individual conflict resolution) gain official institutional support and be implemented in the short or intermediate-term future?
What would be the next steps and/or ways to follow up on this?

For now, I will contact Brenda Berlin and will use the other resources you shared :-)

Thank you very much for your help and have a great evening,

Jesús

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⬛⬛⬛⬛r@standardized>   Sun, Sep 13, 2020 at 12:44 PM
To: Jesus Galaz-Montoya <jgalaz@gmail.com>, Sofie R Kleppner PhD <kleppner@stanford.edu>

Hello Jesús,

The School of Medicine Deans office and the Vice Provost for Faculty Development manage faculty training and evaluation. Given the sensitivity you've expressed I won't forward your message but I really encourage you to get in touch and share your ideas.

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