



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Fair Credit for Inventors

Author(s)

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Year

2000

Description

A scenario that covers ethical issues that arise when more than one person contributes directly to an invention.

Body

You are a junior faculty member at Great Lab having coffee with two of your more senior colleagues. The three of you begin brainstorming about a possible application of some nanoscience work that the three of you have been doing. You initiate the topic and both of your colleagues join in, although you find one's ideas more helpful than the other's. You are quite taken with the idea of developing a breakthrough widget that embodies the nanotechnology you have discussed.

Over the next few months you put considerable time and effort into developing the device, occasionally going to the more helpful colleague to discuss your progress. Now you are ready to consider taking out a patent on your nano-widget. The lab's policies are clear about property issues, such as assignment of copyright. What is less clear is who deserves the credit of being listed as an inventor. Since by convention, the order of inventors is not significant in the way that the order of authors on an article often is, there is no easy way to indicate degrees of contribution, requiring a "yes" or "no" decision.

What do you decide and how do you go about making your decision?

Notes

Caroline Whitbeck introduced methods and modules for discussing numerous issues in responsible conduct of research at a Sigma Xi Forum in 2000. Partial funding for the development of this material came from an NIH grant.

You can find the entire sequence on the OEC at [Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research](#). Some information in these historical modules may be out-of-date; for instance, there may be a new edition of the professional society's code that is referred to in an item. If you have suggestions for updates, please contact the OEC.

Contributor(s)

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Use of Materials on the OEC

Resource Type

Open-ended scenario

Parent Collection

Scenarios for Ethics Modules in the Responsible Conduct of Research

Topics

Collaboration

Data Management

Intellectual Property and Patents

Research and Practice

Discipline(s)

Computer, Math, and Physical Sciences

Nanoscience and Nanotechnology

Research Ethics

Publisher

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