

GSA Authorship Mini-survey Report

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Introduction

In November 2017, the Graduate Student Association (GSA) sent out a mini-survey to all PhD students enrolled at Karlstad University. The survey asked all doctoral candidates at the university about their experiences regarding authorship of research papers.

The objective of the survey was to assess to what extent assigning authorship to research papers is a challenge for PhD students at the university, if they experienced authorship disputes and whether PhD students feel they have the necessary knowledge to navigate the various demands for co-authorship in their scientific field.

Questions asked

The mini-survey was conducted as an anonymous online survey and asked the following questions (all of which were optional except the first one):

1. Which subject are you in?
2. Are you aware of any rules/guidelines for how to assign authorship to research papers in your subject? Yes/No
3. Which of the following are usually added as co-authors to papers you author? (select all that apply)
 - Supervisors
 - Collaborators
 - Other(s) from the department
 - Other(s) (specify)
4. Have you ever felt that you have been asked to add someone as a co-author without a valid reason? (Yes/No, if yes, add comment)
5. Have you ever experienced a situation where you and your co-authors did not agree on the **order** of authors? (Yes/No, if yes, add comment)
6. Any other comments or issues you feel we should look into, related to research paper authorship?

Conclusions

We received 49 responses, of which 48 answered all the questions (and the last one commented that the survey was not relevant for his or her subject. Our main conclusions drawn from the results (see full results below) are the following:

- Only about half the respondents (54%) are aware of any rules or guidelines concerning authorship assignment.
- About 20% of respondents indicate they have been asked to add someone as a co-author without a valid reason. This is significantly more than we expected before conducting the survey. From the free-text answers accompanying the responses, it seems these incidences fall roughly into two categories, both of which are related to the conduct of doctoral supervisors:
 - Respondents who felt their (co-)supervisors were expecting to be listed as authors without having contributed (sufficiently) to the paper in question.
 - External collaborators of various kinds who were given authorship either as a "thank you gift" for contributions (such as providing a dataset) that would not normally merit status as author, or even in one case co-authors being added by a supervisor with no rationale given.
- There are significant differences in the traditions for assigning authorship between academic disciplines. For instance, all respondents in Computer Science, Environmental and energy systems, and Nursing science indicated that their supervisors were usually co-authors of their papers. Conversely, no respondents in English, Media and communication studies and Pedagogics indicated the same.
- Only a few (3) respondents reported incidents where the order of the authors on a paper were the cause of disagreements.

GSA action items

As a consequence of these results, the GSA plans to take the following actions:

- To address the lack of awareness of guidelines for authorship assignment, we plan to include a reference to the "Vancouver Guidelines"¹ for authorship in the material we distribute to new PhD students.
- Unfortunately, the GSA has only limited capacity to directly address the situations where PhD students feel pressured to add co-authors without a good reason. We believe our most promising course of action is to initiate a discussion of authorship guidelines at the faculty or university level, in an attempt to create a common understanding of the responsibilities of an author. This will help PhD students stand on firmer ground when discussing such authorship issues with their supervisors and other collaborators.

Survey data

The full survey data is included below. Figure 1 shows the data split per subject for those subjects with more than one respondent. The responses for all respondents are included on the next page.

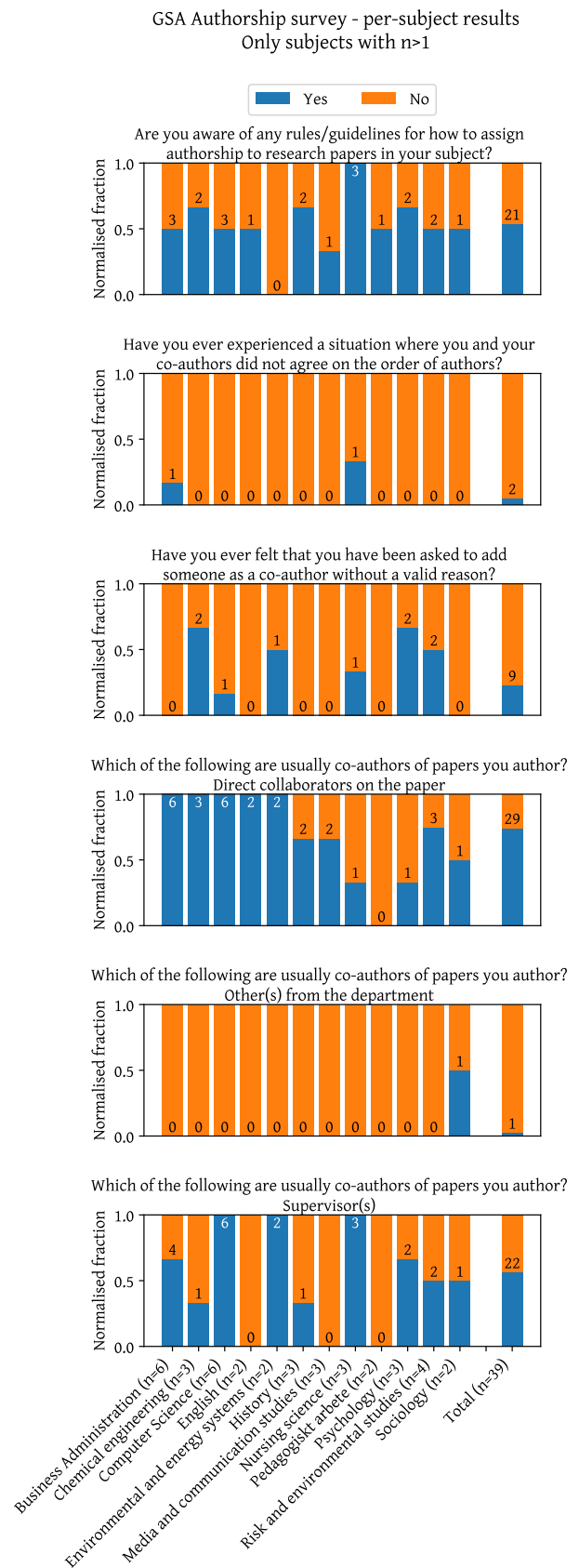
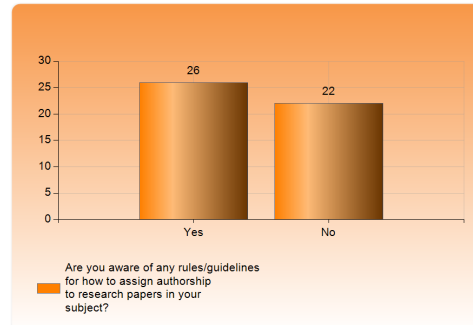


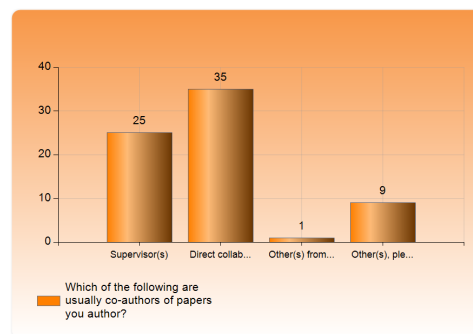
Figure 1: Survey responses split out per subject (for subjects with more than one respondent).

¹<http://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>

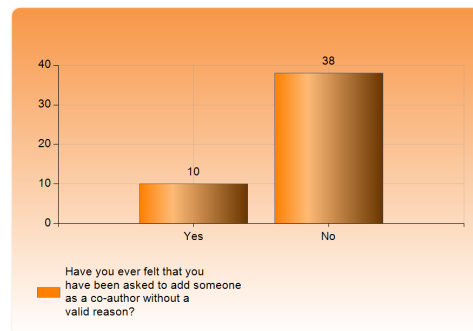
Are you aware of any rules/guidelines for how to assign authorship to research papers in your subject?	Number of Responses
Yes	26 (54.2%)
No	22 (45.8%)
Total	48 (100.0%)



Which of the following are usually co-authors of papers you author?	Number of Responses
Supervisor(s)	25 (53.2%)
Direct collaborators on the paper	35 (74.5%)
Other(s) from the department	1 (2.1%)
Other(s), please specify	9 (19.1%)
Total	70 (148.9%)



Have you ever felt that you have been asked to add someone as a co-author without a valid reason?	Number of Responses
Yes	10 (20.8%)
No	38 (79.2%)
Total	48 (100.0%)



Have you ever experienced a situation where you and your co-authors did not agree on the order of authors?	Number of Responses
Yes	3 (6.3%)
No	45 (93.8%)
Total	48 (100.0%)

