

**Wayne State University  
Academic Senate  
Minutes of Research Committee Meeting  
October 21, 2010**

Present: Cinabro, Avrutsky, Biswas, Ferreira, Mordukhovich, Stemmler, Thomas, Tse, Wang, Arking, Shamoun

Guests: Karen Feathers, Alvin Saperstein Mary Cay Sengstock, Mary Cooney, Patricia Jarosz, David Kessel, Stephen Calkins, Cathy Jen, Dorothy Nelson, Mark Wardell, John Rothchild.

The meeting was devoted to discussing student republication of their thesis motivated by the recent case in Nutrition and Food Science.

We opened with some discussion with John Rothchild, professor in the Law School who has some knowledge of copyright law. The writer automatically owns the copyright of their own work. This gives them the right to republish. Exceptions are few including employees making works within the scope of their employment. Students do not fall under this. The copyright can be assigned to someone else, but this has to be done positively by the author signing a form, for example. Change to the acknowledgment of the thesis has nothing to do with copyright, but may lead to mis-attribution. The data in a thesis is owned by the University, and that does not change due to publication and perhaps later republication of a thesis.

Dorothy Nelson called the Office of Research Integrity, which is the branch of the DHHS that oversees the federal regulations on Research Misconduct. She asked what their position would be on a hypothetical situation in which a master's student published his/her own thesis as the sole author. The answer is that this is not considered research misconduct.

Common practice at other universities is that students own the copyright of their thesis. By default our theses are available publicly. They can be embargoed for some time.

Dean Wardell suggests that the Academic Standards Committee of the Graduate School write some guidelines that will go in the graduate bulletin. Departments would then communicate these to faculty and students. The committee will study what is done at other institutions, make it clear that theses should be primarily the work of the student author, and try to formulate guidelines that all can agree on. The draft of these guidelines would come back to the Academic Senate for review. The assembled approved of this course of action.

Subsequent discussions make it clear that it will be difficult to find guidelines on which all agree. There was a wide range of opinion on what could and should be done with thesis work ranging from it is completely the work of the student to it is wholly open to use by the adviser. Maria Ferreira pointed out that her adviser had almost no input into her thesis, and she wrote five papers with no co-authors using the data of her thesis.

Many noted that it is not uncommon for advisers to write papers based on student work after students complete and turn in their thesis usually with the student as a co-author, but sometimes

without. There was general consensus that data that appears in a thesis, even if republished, could easily be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

Mary Cay thought there should be sanctions for students who do not fully acknowledge others contributions to their thesis, but Cinabro pointed out how difficult this will be as often a student no longer has any sort of relationship with the University after their thesis is accepted. She did point out that real harm was done in this specific case as the student did not acknowledge the contributions of others to her thesis when it was republished as a book. Suggestions were made that something special be done with theses that do have substantial collaborative input, but it is not clear what since the student will still hold the copyright of the thesis that presumably properly references the collaborative input. There is clear tension between our desire that theses be publicly available and concern that they appear in book form which obscures their original source as a thesis.

The Dean noted that at his previous institution students and advisers signed a compact that covered publications based on thesis work. We will get a look at this along with suggestions from the Academic Standards Committee.

We really did try to avoid discussion of the specific case in Nutrition and Food Science. The student is not present to explain her actions, and the Union has hired a lawyer to review the facts to see if action is warranted. While we can advise on policy, we cannot and should not pass any judgment on the case although Boris did note that he thought some action should be taken. Others clearly agreed.