

COPE Forum Discussion Highlights Challenges and Urges Clarity in Institutional Authorship Standards

Author

Riya Thomas

Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/cope-forum-authorship-standards/>



The COPE forum discussion held in December 2023 initiated with a fundamental question — is there a universally accepted definition of institutional affiliation or institutional authorship on a publication? As the discussion unfolded, it became apparent that this concept is far from straightforward. Authors, motivated by various factors, may claim affiliations based on current employment, the primary location of research, or the funding source. The lack of a standardized definition raises concerns about the integrity of the research record and its implications for stakeholders.

Merit of Institutional Support

The conversation then turned to when institutional support merits inclusion as an author affiliation on a publication. The consensus highlighted the importance of including only those organizations that make a substantial contribution to the research. Referencing

the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, participants underscored the need for clarity in delineating the roles of different institutions in the research process. This ensures that affiliations accurately reflect the collaborative and supportive aspects of the work.

Standards on Affiliation Numbers

The absence of accepted standards regarding the number of reported institutional affiliations per author emerged as another key point of contention. While some journals restrict authors to a single affiliation, others do not specify any limitations. The forum discussion delved into the strain on the system caused by authors utilizing multiple affiliations to claim eligibility for Open Access funding. This prompted a critical question – should publishers explore alternative criteria for determining funding eligibility instead of relying solely on institutional affiliations?

Role of Stakeholders and Additional Insights From the Forum

As the forum progressed, stakeholders debated the responsibility for defining standards in institutional authorship. Suggestions favored a more active role for journals in clarifying institutional affiliations, and publishers were urged to specify corresponding or billing affiliations for funding eligibility. Emphasis was placed on transparent data registration, particularly in distinguishing author affiliations from funding organizations.

Forum insights revealed that the prestige associated with the first and last authorship positions might incentivize authors to include affiliations from multiple institutions. Questions arose about the relevance of affiliations in non-research content, raising concerns about their impact on institutional rankings and productivity indicators, including potential inaccuracies and gift authorship.

The discussion also acknowledged challenges faced by early-career researchers with multiple affiliations due to institutional mobility. Proposals were made to consider “current affiliation” for a more informative declaration. Additionally, the forum recognized the unique struggles of retired or independent scholars who may feel marginalized due to the emphasis on affiliation.

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