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Academic Integrity - Affiliation Misrepresentation

summary

Author:  [Marta Zizienová](#)

Affiliation:  [Technical University of Liberec](#)

[CRediT](#): Marta Zizienová: Conceptualization, Investigation, Resources,
Writing - Original Draft

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Definition

Affiliation misrepresentation refers to instances where authors inaccurately report their institutional affiliations in academic publications.

It involves incorrect or false reporting of institutional affiliations (adding false or deleting correct affiliation) or non-legitimate multiple affiliations, where at least one affiliation does not reflect a real or substantial contribution by the institution to the study [1]. Missing, misspelt, inconsistent or incomplete affiliation name is common [2].

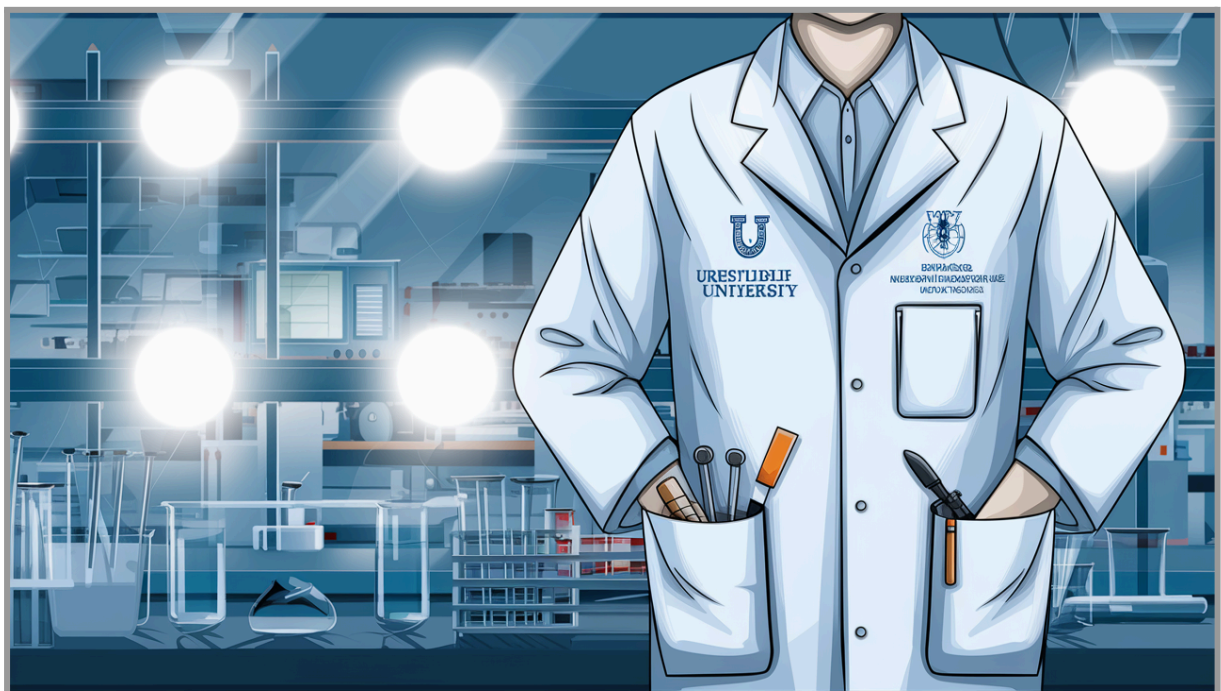


Image 1 Scientist with two affiliations. Image created with AI tool Ideogram, prompt: an illustration of a scientist with two affiliations, 2024-03-10, <https://ideogram.ai/g/-4komWieTD6yCZ9-qedXzw/1>

Snippets to read

“I have published a research 3 years ago with only one affiliation; But I did not put my main affiliation on it.. Now I need to add my main affiliation to the research as it is mandatory for promotion purposes.. Is it possible??”

"I'm seeking information about how to change my author affiliation for an article published in the past."

"I am in the same exact situation."

"You can ask for that from journal editor, then they will add it in separated (erratum) or (CORRIGENDUM) with new date. I saw many cases like that." [3]

Check correction of affiliations on:

- corrigendum: <https://astr.or.kr/DOIx.php?id=10.4174/astr.2017.92.5.388>,
- original paper: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5344805/pdf/astr-92-149.pdf>

Background

'The American Psychological Association (APA) states that "the institutional affiliation identifies the location where the author or authors were when the research was conducted, which is usually an institution". It's the only definition of institutional affiliation [1].

According to Taylor & Francis editorial policies, affiliations must accurately reflect "where the study was approved and/or supported and/or conducted. For non-research articles, the affiliation should be listed where the author(s) was based at the time of submission" [4].

The norm is to list only the institution where the work was done [5], [6].

"Dual affiliation may be included only if two institutions contributed substantial support to the study" [1]. "Some authors now list an astonishing number of institutions, sometimes exceeding 20, 30, or more" [7], that's called octopus affiliation (octaffiliation or octoffiliation) [8]. "This trend raises concerns regarding the genuine scientific contributions these authors make at each institution they claim to be affiliated with" [7].

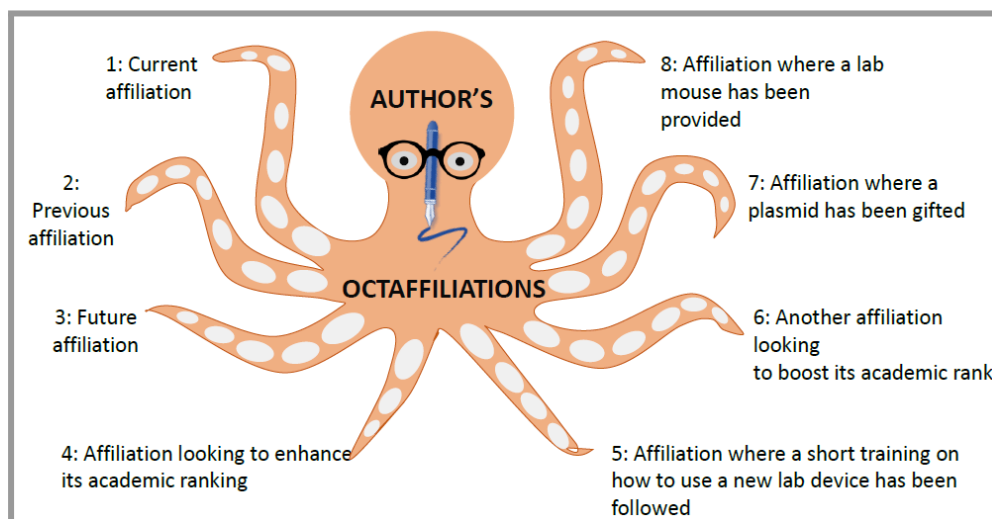


Image 2 Octopus affiliation [8]

“Affiliations to different organisations can be construed as facilitating knowledge exchange without entailing that there is a misrepresentation of the affiliation. Universities should pay authors for their work, but there may also be secondary appointments that include visiting positions, courtesy appointments or emeritus status, among others. These secondary or honorary appointments may enable and further facilitate continued collaboration between researchers, with no additional commitment for space or resources on the part of the institution. Some institutions have complete descriptions of the privileges and responsibilities of these secondary appointments” [1].

Multiple affiliations are common in highly internationalised and higher education-centred affiliations, as well as in stronger cross-sector research and on high-impact papers. “Types of multiple affiliations depend on the structure of the research sector and its international openness” [9].

There is no regulated checking of author affiliations [6].

Committee on Publication Ethics has not issued discussion documents or recommendations on the potential ethical implications of affiliation misrepresentation [1].

Why it happens

- local quality certification processes
- need for universities to rise in the international ranking systems
- funding attached to the publications that report university affiliations [1]
- efforts to increase the prestige of the scientist through prestigious scientific affiliations [7]

Consequences

- violation of public trust
- misappropriation of public funds
- distortion of the indicators used by the higher education ranking houses [1]
- false productivity of institution and researcher [10]
- an author with multiple affiliations may be influenced by one organisation's interests in promoting a particular agenda or downplaying specific findings [1], [7], [11]

Case examples

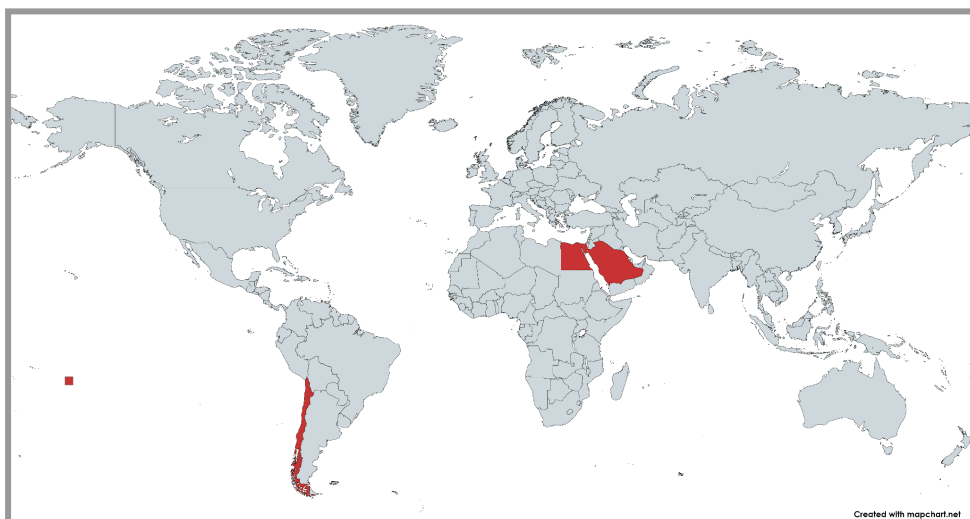


Image 3 Three countries with case examples of affiliation misrepresentation

Chile:

“We know that some authors reporting an affiliation to a Chilean university have received fees for the only purpose of adding on the institutional affiliation, while not having any real academic or research-based employment relationship with the university” [1].

“38% of authors have multiple affiliations in at least one article that was not verifiable, and 40% of articles have at least one author in which it was not possible to verify the reported affiliation to a Chilean university. In 30% of author/article records for the year, we could not corroborate the reported affiliation to a Chilean university” [10].

Egypt:

Certain patterns of authors' affiliation misreporting are present in about 50 % of the studied articles; the authors misreported their department name or mentioning a division or a unit that is not present in the faculty official website [2].

Saudi Arabia:

Universities offer cash to scientists and ask for adding their names as second affiliations [12], [13].

Solutions

For all:

- ☐ consensus on the definition of affiliation [10]
- ☐ clear policies and guidelines about affiliations, including sanctions
- ☐ uniform and accurate presentation of affiliations - standardisation (ROR)
- ☐ accurate and standardised translations of the institutions' and departments' names [2]
- ☐ change of evaluation system of scientists and universities

For authors:

- ☐ complete and publicly available history of affiliations in ORCID
- ☐ researchers should use their academic e-mail addresses
- ☐ researchers should use researcher identifiers, such as ORCID

For institutions:

- ☐ clear recommendations on how to write the names of the institutions (according to identifier ROR)
- ☐ monitoring mechanisms to ensure that researchers use correct affiliations

For journals/publishers:

- ☐ protocol for verifiability of affiliations
- ☐ publication process should include verifying the authors' affiliation before submitting manuscripts [14]
- ☐ publication process should include error detection for affiliations
- ☐ transparent policies for corrections of affiliations

Note: Artificial intelligence tools were used for writing this summary, specifically Ideogram for image creation, Copilot and scite_ for research and text writing, and ChatGPT Plus for drafting and text enhancement.

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