

11. A Question of Authorship – Horton and Hou Case

Cast

Dr. Wei Hou, postdoctoral fellow
Dr. Alex Horton, lab chief
Ms. June Jones, technician
A former research associate
The chair of the department

Dr. Wei Hou is a first-year postdoc in Dr. Alex Horton's laboratory. When she arrived, Dr. Horton suggested that she begin by completing some analyses that were initiated by a research associate who had since left the group. The study involved examining the effects of temperature on a biochemical process, $X \rightarrow Y$.

Ms. June Jones, a technician, taught Dr. Hou the necessary techniques. Dr. Hou then proceeded with the study, working mainly on her own at night. She quickly discovered that the reaction had two different temperature optima, and reasoned that there actually were two different enzyme-catalyzed steps in the process, $X \rightarrow W \rightarrow Y$. Together with Ms. Jones, she developed a method for testing her hypothesis. Dr. Hou's results provided clear evidence for the presence of two, sequential reactions whereas it was previously believed to be a single step. The research associate who began collecting the data had apparently not examined enough temperatures to detect the clue that eventually led to Dr. Hou's discovery of a new enzyme.

Dr. Hou wrote up the results as a short communication to *Science* with herself as the author and presented it to Dr. Horton. It was the first time he had seen any of the results. Several weeks later, Dr. Horton returned the paper to Dr. Hou with only a few changes, a note that congratulated her on the fine work but scolded her for not staying in closer touch with him during the experiments, and a new list of authors: Dr. Hou, the research associate who began the project, the chair of their department, and Dr. Horton. In the note, Dr. Horton explained the rationale behind each of his changes, including the fact that the chair of the department was the principal investigator on the grant that supported the work. Dr. Hou was dismayed at the thought of sharing authorship with anyone. After all, it was her work.

Discussion Question: Who do you think should be an author on the manuscript?