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# AIS Administrative Bulletin

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**Topic: Code of Research Conduct**

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## **Overview**

The AIS Code of Research Conduct is prepared and reviewed annually by the AIS Research Conduct Committee. The following presents guidelines for members to following when dealing with scholarly works. These guidelines are not official AIS policy. The policies and procedures concerning alleged cases of scholarly misconduct are found in the [AIS Council Policy Manual](#).

*For more information on filing a plagiarism complaint, please see the [process guidelines](#). If you are a victim of plagiarism, please review the [AIS guidelines for victims of plagiarism](#). If you are a journal or proceedings editor please consult the [AIS guidelines for journal and proceedings editors](#).*

Feedback and questions may be directed to the chairperson of the Research Conduct Committee at [researchconduct@aisnet.org](mailto:researchconduct@aisnet.org).

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## **Introduction**

Members of AIS must adhere to the AIS Code of Research Conduct in their work. AIS Council's process for dealing with allegations of scholarly misconduct in the Association's journals and proceedings is detailed in the AIS Research Conduct Committee Process Guidelines. In brief, if a suspected violation is reported to a journal editor or conference chair, then it may escalate up to the AIS President who may instruct the AIS Research Conduct Committee to launch a formal investigation.

The AIS Code of Research Conduct expresses the standards expected of persons qualified to be members, in relation to research and publication. The primary focus is on scholarly works, but much of the Code also applies to publications for teaching purposes (such as course syllabi and reading materials) and for consultancy purposes. The Code does not purport to regulate general conduct (e.g., towards society and the environment) or guide members in areas of professional activity such as teaching and consultancy more generally, or workplace behavior. The Code is intended to have application in the following ways:

- It provides guidance for people entering the profession of information systems research as to what plagiarism is, and how to avoid committing it; and it is suitable for use as a resource in postgraduate training.
- It provides a reference-point for members of the profession of information systems research, including guidance on how to interpret the notion of plagiarism, how to evaluate whether a particular act or omission constitutes plagiarism, and if so how serious an instance of plagiarism it is.
- It provides a basis for consideration by the AIS Research Conduct Committee of instances of possible scholarly misconduct by a member in relation to research and publication activities.
- It provides a benchmark, recommended by AIS, against which other organizations such as courts, tribunals, employers and publishers can consider instances of possible scholarly misconduct by information systems professionals in relation to research and publication activities.
- For each Code Item below, an explanation is provided. The explanations do not attempt to cover every variation of possible misconduct; they are intended to provide a general understanding of each Code Item and its underlying principles.

## **I. Overview**

The body of the Code is divided into three groups of Code Items. They are listed below in summary form, with detailed interpretations and guidance in the following sections.

**CATEGORY ONE:** Codes that must **ALWAYS** be adhered to.

1. Do not plagiarize.
2. Do not fabricate or falsify data, research procedures, or data analysis.
3. Do not use other people's unpublished writings, information, ideas, concepts or data that you may see as a result of processes such as peer review without permission of the author.
4. Do not make misrepresentations to editors and conference program chairs about the originality of papers you submit to them.

**CATEGORY TWO:** Codes in this category are "recommended ethical behavior".

5. Give priority to the public interest, particularly when designing or implementing new information systems or other designed artefacts.
6. Respect the rights of research subjects, particularly their rights to information privacy, and to being informed about the nature of the research and the types of activities in which they will be asked to engage.
7. Do not abuse the authority and responsibility you have been given as an editor, reviewer or supervisor, and ensure that personal relationships do not interfere with your judgment.
8. Do not take or use published data of others without acknowledgement; do not take or use unpublished data without both permission and acknowledgement.
9. Declare any material conflict of interest that might interfere with your ability to be objective and impartial when reviewing submissions, grant applications, software, or undertaking work from outside sources.
10. Acknowledge the substantive contributions of all research participants, whether colleagues or students, according to their intellectual contribution.
11. Use archival material only in accordance with the rules of the archival source.

**Additional Advice:** The following suggestions are provided on how to protect yourself from authorship disputes, mis-steps, mistakes, and even legal action.

1. Keep the documentation and data necessary to validate your original authorship for each scholarly work with which you are connected.
2. Do not republish old ideas of your own as if they were a new intellectual contribution.
3. Settle data set ownership issues before data compilation.
4. Consult appropriate colleagues if in doubt.

## **II. Category One**

Code items in this category must ALWAYS be adhered to and disregard for them constitutes a serious ethical breach. Serious breaches can result in your expulsion from academic associations, dismissal from your employment, legal action against you, and potentially fatal damage to your academic reputation.

### **1. Do not plagiarize.**

Plagiarism is the presentation of the documented work of another person as one's own, without attribution appropriate for the medium of presentation. Guidance is provided in relation to the application of that definition to the evaluation of an instance of alleged plagiarism.

The seriousness of an act of plagiarism depends on the following factors:

- Whether the plagiarism is intentional or reckless (rather than merely careless or accidental);
- The nature of the new work in which the plagiarized material or idea appears;
- The extent to which originality is claimed in the new work;
- The nature of the incorporated material; and
- The nature of the attribution provided.

Guidance is provided in relation to the evaluation of an instance of alleged plagiarism against each of those factors.

The most serious forms of plagiarism are those that are extreme on all counts, i.e.:

- are intentional or reckless;
- occur in a refereed or scholarly work;
- include an expressed or implied claim of originality;
- involve appropriation of substantial and/or significant parts of a work; and
- fail to provide attribution or show evidence of having taken measures to obscure the origins of the material or ideas.

Serious acts of plagiarism are harmful to academic endeavor and constitute a serious breach of this Code. They require action by appropriate organizations, such as publishers of the plagiarizing work, the plagiarizer's employer, and the plagiarizer's professional body.

However, many instances of plagiarism are mis-judgments or errors, arising from such sources as inadequate understanding of attribution norms or failure to appreciate the importance of providing credit for ideas that are significantly original. These are appropriately addressed through such means as apology, amendment of the digital 'original' of the work with an accompanying publication of a retraction or erratum notice; and reprimand, caution or mentoring.

Isolated, minor acts of plagiarism should not be perceived, and nor should they be represented, as being 'misconduct' of a kind that warrants harsh disciplinary measures such as demotion, non-renewal of contract or cessation of employment. Further guidance is provided as follows:

- In relation to actions that should be considered by someone who, after undertaking the above analysis, believes that their work has been subject to serious plagiarism. See ['Guidelines for a Victim: Dealing with Serious Plagiarism'](#);

- In relation to actions to be taken by editors of AIS journals or conference proceedings who suspect a submission contains plagiarism. See "AIS Guidelines for Journal and Proceedings Editors"

## **2. Do not fabricate or falsify data, research procedures, or data analysis.**

Data fabrication or falsification is a very serious offense. Data fabrication and falsification deceives reviewers, editors and readers as to what really occurred in the research, and therefore the significance of the outcomes of the research. Scholars should not doctor, tamper with or edit data, misreport research methods (including adding procedures they did not perform, or omitting procedures they did perform), or tamper with the results of data analysis.

Acts of this nature are harmful to academic endeavor, and constitute a serious breach of this Code. They require action by appropriate organizations, such as the publishers, the person's employer, and the person's professional body.

## **3. Do not use other people's unpublished writings, information, ideas, concepts or data that you may see as a result of processes such as peer review without permission of the author.**

When you serve as a reviewer or editor, you gain privileged access to documents in the review process. Reviewers and editors must respect this privilege by maintaining the confidentiality of information seen in the review process. If you wish to cite or otherwise use or distribute such unpublished material, you should do so only with prior permission of the author.

Independently of a review process, you may receive unpublished work by way of working papers, visiting scholar research seminars, or in the recruiting process as candidates present a paper as part of a visit. Do not use or quote such material without obtaining prior permission of the author.

## **4. Do not make misrepresentations to editors and conference program chairs about the originality of papers you submit to them.**

Academic journals and conference proceedings are the public record of original scientific research. In addition, editors and reviewers contribute their own scarce resources of time and energy as a service to the academic community. Hence you must not:

- submit a manuscript for review which is identical or very similar to work you have published previously or which has been accepted elsewhere for publication; or
- have essentially the same paper before reviewers of multiple journals at the same time, or multiple conferences at the same time.
- re-use your own previous work without appropriate citation.

Some practices in this area may be legitimate, however. A common example is the presentation of a paper at a conference, in order to obtain comment and discussion, followed by submission of a revision that reflects feedback from reviewers and the conference presentation to a journal.

Another is republication as a book chapter, in which case the editor must be aware of the paper's prior publication from the outset, and any copyright constraints must be respected. Similarly, authors wishing to publish translated versions of previously published articles must obtain permission from the copyright holder (unless the copyright is still held by the author, as it would be for many conference proceedings) and must acknowledge the prior publication (regardless of who holds the copyright) in the translated version. With any form of republication, attention should be drawn to the prior paper by formal reference or acknowledgement. Readers should not have to compare one article to another to puzzle out whether it makes the same contribution or not. Whether the article is an original contribution or not should be obvious from the acknowledgements.

Re-using our previous work is accepted as a natural part of scientific progress – we build on what we have done before. However, if this previous work was published and if we re-use the same text, then we are duty bound to cite it correctly. Failing to cite previous work is equivalent to failing to cite the work of another author, i.e. it is a form of plagiarism. There are no exceptions to this principle and there is no lower threshold for citation-free copying just because it is of one's own previously published work. The only alternative to citation is to rewrite the text afresh. However, providing a self-citation to previous work is not frowned upon by journal editors or reviewers, so there is no reason why you should not cite previous work. If you wish to maintain your anonymity, you can blind the citation by giving the author name as "Anonymous" or indicating that the correct citation information will be provided in the accepted version of the manuscript.

Multiple papers from the same research project often share some elements, particularly descriptions of methods, data collection and some analyses. Theoretical model descriptions may also contain similar ideas. Later papers should cite the earlier ones.

It would generally be unethical to have essentially the same paper before the editor of a journal and under consideration for presentation at a conference at the same time, but not if this is negotiated with both editors at the time of submission and they both choose to have it reviewed.

You may withdraw a paper from one venue and submit it to another. This may be especially appropriate if the first journal is very slow to provide reviews, the editor requests changes that the author is not prepared to make, or the author's travel plans change and the intended conference venue is no longer on the itinerary. But it is crucial that explicit notice of withdrawal be provided to the first editor prior to submitting the work to the second editor.

### **III. Category Two**

Codes in this category are "recommended ethical behavior". Flagrant disregard of these or other kinds of professional etiquette, while less serious, can result in damage to your reputation, editorial sanctions, professional embarrassment, legal action, and the ill will of your colleagues. While individual scholars may disagree about the most appropriate action to take in a particular situation, a broad consensus exists that violation of any of the rules in this category constitutes a breach of professional ethics.

**5. Give priority to the public interest, particularly when designing or implementing new information systems or other designed artefacts.**

All members of the association are expected to consider the public interest in their scholarly work. When designing, developing or implementing new information systems or other designed artefacts, the health, welfare and safety of the public must always come first. Given that information systems or other designed artefacts can sometimes have negative consequences on people's lives, information systems scholars must attempt to ensure that any artefacts they develop are intended to and can support socially responsible actions and consequences.

**6. Respect the rights of research subjects, particularly their rights to information privacy, and to being informed about the nature of the research and the types of activities in which they will be asked to engage.**

Scholars are expected to maintain, uphold and promote the rights of research subjects, especially rights associated with their information privacy. Subjects in academic research routinely volunteer information about their behavior, attitudes, intellect, abilities, experience, health, education, emotions, aspirations, and so on. If you are collecting such data, you have an obligation to respect the confidentiality of your subjects by storing data in a secure place, destroying it after a specified period of time, and never using it for any purpose other than that to which the subjects agreed prior to their participation.

In addition, unless an institutionally-approved research protocol allows otherwise, research subjects should be informed in advance of the purpose of any research procedure or activities in which they may be asked to participate. They also have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage.

Researchers must respect these rights and not coerce or otherwise force research subjects to participate against their will, or in a manner that is not conducive with their best interests.

**7. Do not abuse the authority and responsibility you have been given as an editor, reviewer or supervisor, and ensure that personal relationships do not interfere with your judgment.**

Editors, reviewers and supervisors are by definition in a position of authority over others. Under no circumstances should you use your position for personal advantage (such as by coercion) or to the disadvantage of others. You should also take care that any personal relationship that pre-exists or develops during the course of the editorial or supervisory process does not interfere with your ability to be objective. If such a situation does arise, then you should at least make a declaration and preferably withdraw from any decision-making process concerning the individual with whom the relationship exists.

As an editor or reviewer, you also have an ethical obligation to complete your reviews and review-related actions in a timely fashion. Editors and reviewers should work together to ensure a prompt review cycle ideally not exceeding three months from the date of receipt of the manuscript to the date a decision has been communicated to the author(s).

**8. Do not take or use published data of others without acknowledgement; do not take or use unpublished data without both permission and acknowledgement.**

Compiling a set of data, whether from the field, laboratory, or secondary sources, may require a substantial investment of time, energy, and financial resources. You should not use or publish from someone else's data set without their permission. However, data appearing as part of a publication is by definition in the public record and may be used without permission, though not without acknowledgement. See "Settle data ownership issues before data compilation" in the Advice section below.

**9. Declare any material conflict of interest that might interfere with your ability to be objective and impartial when reviewing submissions, grant applications or software, and undertaking commissioned work.**

Scholars are routinely involved in reviewing submissions for journals, conferences, granting agencies, job applications, cases involving promotion or tenure, book manuscripts, and occasionally product (especially software) assessments. But conflicts of interest can and do arise in a relatively tight academic community. Such conflicts may involve personal, scholarly, financial or other relationships – any relationship which might interfere with your ability to remain objective and impartial. You must reveal to any relevant parties any actual or potential conflict of interest prior to agreeing to undertake any review, assessment or critique, and as part of the report that you submit.

**10. Acknowledge the substantive contributions of all research participants, whether colleagues or students, according to their intellectual contribution.**

Since authorship implies a claim to, and readiness to take public responsibility for, the intellectual activity involved in a publication, only those who have made a substantial intellectual contribution to the research should be listed as authors. Submitting a manuscript to which non-participating authors are added, for whatever purpose, is a form of misrepresentation.

Each participant in the work, whether colleagues, students or other research assistants, should be acknowledged according to their intellectual contribution to the final product. Such acknowledgment may occur in the form of author inclusion and authorship order, by formal acknowledgement in an endnote, or by mention in the text. Thus, a colleague who performs as the intellectual leader of the effort but who may have done little actual writing may qualify as an author, and a colleague who performs sophisticated data analyses but who may have only peripheral interest in the subject matter may also be included as an author – in both cases, depending on the intellectual contribution of the analyses performed. By contrast, a research assistant who collects the data set, however substantial, may only qualify for acknowledgement because of the absence of significant intellectual contribution.

Individuals responsible for major parts of the funding of a project are occasionally given full authorship credit. Practice varies in this regard, but such attribution should be avoided wherever possible since there is no inherent connection between intellectual contribution and financial



contribution. The IS community generally interprets an attribution of authorship as a recognition of substantive intellectual contribution to the research, not as the ability to fund a project.

#### **11. Use archival material only in accordance with the rules of the archival source.**

Archived material, perhaps in the form of digital libraries, is made available by individual researchers, institutions and professional societies. This archived material is usually subject to rules on dissemination, citation, copying and so on. Such rules may be in place to meet copyright or other legal requirements and must be respected.

### **IV. Advice**

**ADVICE:** Some suggestions on how to protect yourself from authorship disputes, mis-steps, mistakes, and even legal action.

#### **1. Keep the documentation and data necessary to validate your original authorship for each scholarly work with which you are connected.**

Plagiarism may be damaging and traumatic for all involved – those plagiarised, those who plagiarise (and are detected), editors, reviewers, colleagues, department heads, and even deans. But plagiarism complaints may be more readily resolved, and harm redressed if you maintain a ‘paper trail’, i.e., documents (hardcopy or electronic) that establish your authorship.

For each scholarly work with which you are involved, maintain sufficient information to establish that you are the original author. This includes correspondence (whether electronic or paper) with editors, reviewers, and publishers and early versions of the manuscript. Other materials of value include reviewer comments and rejection letters if the manuscript was submitted for publication; and any related working papers, conference proceedings and research grants. Dated materials are particularly important since they can serve as the strongest evidence of your original authorship. For further advice in dealing with a situation in which you feel your work has been plagiarized, see Guidelines for a Victim.

#### **2. Do not republish ideas of your own as if they were a new intellectual contribution.**

As your research program and publications unfold, you will commonly cite and describe your prior work. In fact, reviewing your own research stream may be the only practical way to provide the context necessary for the new work you are discussing. This is especially the case if you are pioneering in a niche area.

But you should not attempt to build a new article largely from a re-working of your previous publications, unless there is a sufficient new contribution. For example, the threads of previous thought may be re-woven to reveal new patterns, perspectives or insights, or the previous work may be re-expressed in order to address a new audience, in particular academics in adjacent disciplines, or information systems professionals. Unimproved re-publication of one’s own work is sometimes referred to as duplicate publication or by the expression ‘self-plagiarism’ and is an

ethical breach. Always provide citations to your own previous work that you re-use. See also item 4 above.

To avoid confusion and criticism, on your vita you should list original articles and their reprinted versions (in book chapters or as translations in other journals) together, as they are the same contribution.

### **3. Settle data set ownership issues before data compilation.**

Disputes over data sets are more likely to occur among collaborating researchers than with other parties. For example, data may be collected and analyzed by a research team, but later a team member separately publishes an article reporting new analyses of the data. Other team members ‘cry foul’ but the author argues that the work in question was not envisaged when the data set was first collected. Furthermore, he argues, as a co-owner of the data set, he should have the right to publish from it without seeking the permission of other co-owners. There are many other possible disputes regarding the use of data sets - disputes for which there may be no clear-cut resolution but which can nonetheless result in severe inter-personal tensions and recrimination.

To avoid such situations, collaborating scholars should reach an explicit agreement (in writing) on the use of a data set, ideally prior to its compilation. The agreement should include the acknowledgement necessary to satisfy the co-owners, should a publication result. The acknowledgment may be as modest as an endnote, or as significant as co-authorship, depending on the co-owners’ intellectual contribution to the publication. In general, in no case should you risk the ill will of your colleagues or accusations of misbehavior by failing to secure explicit prior permission (in writing) to use a data set, whether or not you are a co-owner.

### **4. Consult appropriate colleagues if in doubt.**

Learning the finer points of scholarly etiquette is a slow process. Even experienced scholars sometimes disagree on what constitutes acceptable behavior or whether or not a particular act is ethical. But if you have doubts about how to behave or deal with a particular research or publishing situation, consult with an appropriate colleague.

## **V. Acknowledgement**

The following sources are acknowledged:

Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Collective Bargaining Model Clause on Fraud and Misconduct in Academic Research and Scholarly Activity

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Integrity in Research and Scholarship Policy Statement

University of Minnesota - Academic Misconduct Procedures

University of Minnesota - Board of Regents Policy "Code of Conduct"

The first version of the AIS Code of Research Conduct (September 23, 2003) was prepared by the AIS Research Conduct Committee consisting of Robert Davison, City University of Hong Kong, Malcolm Munro, University of Calgary, and Detmar Straub, Georgia State University.

The second version (May 2009) was prepared by a Task Group established by David Avison, AIS President, comprising Robert Davison, City University of Hong Kong (Chair), Cynthia Beath, University of Texas at Austin, and Roger Clarke, Xamax Consultancy Pty Ltd and the Australian National University. It benefited from comments provided by a small, invited Reference Group. The supporting documents relating to the evaluation of accusations of plagiarism drew on Clarke (2006).

The current version (November, 2013) was prepared by the AIS Research Conduct Committee, composed of Robert Davison, City University of Hong Kong (Chair), Cynthia Beath, University of Texas at Austin, and Virpi Tuunainen, Aalto University.

Feedback and questions may be directed to the chairperson of the Research Conduct Committee at [researchconduct@aisnet.org](mailto:researchconduct@aisnet.org).