



AIS Administrative Bulletin

Number: 2014.0325.01

Subject Area: Publications

Topic: AIS Research Conduct Committee Guidelines for Editors

Last Update: March 27, 2014

Overview

AIS seeks to help Editors of Journals and Conference Proceedings (e.g., Conference Program Chairs) deal with problems of scholarly misconduct, especially plagiarism (including self-plagiarism and simultaneous or duplicate submission). Editors may also encounter scholarly misconduct among editors and reviewers, and in those circumstances we urge editors to involve the Research Conduct Committee (RCC) quickly.

Common Principles

Because the timing pressures faced by journal editors and proceedings editors are so different, there are some differences in the processes that are recommended. But common principles for both processes include:

1. **Fair play for everyone.** Just as the peer reviewing process must be fair, so too must the process for dealing with charges of scholarly misconduct.
2. **Disclosure of conflict of interest.** Editors are responsible for disclosing their own conflicts of interest and finding substitutes to handle situations where they have a conflict of interest. If you were involved in accepting either the original or the plagiarized article, appoint an alternative or ask the VP Publications to do so.
3. **Confidentiality.** Keep identities confidential unless and until it is totally impractical to do otherwise. Be careful when consulting with colleagues that confidentiality is maintained.
4. **Cooperation in investigations.** If another journal editor, another publisher, or any institution contacts you for help in resolving a charge of scholarly misconduct, it is your obligation to assist them in all haste.
5. **Swift correction of the record, if necessary.** If the RCC asks you to correct the publication record because scholarly misconduct has been determined, please do so in all haste. Remember that any decision to remove a paper from the digital library must come from the RCC and/or the AIS President, and should not be done just because the author requests it.
6. **Maintain organizational memory.** The Chair of the RCC will keep records of all cases of misconduct, both those that have been formally referred to the RCC by the President, as well as cases that have been resolved by the Journal or Proceedings editor. These records will be kept in a manner that will protect the confidentiality of all parties involved. No names or other details will be divulged outside the RCC, unless the case requires more formal action by AIS.

Much scholarly misconduct is the result of poor training. Many authors, when confronted with a charge of misconduct, will withdraw the paper. If the author has learned a lesson, that may be a satisfactory outcome. If there are several authors and one is senior enough to insure that training gaps are filled, that might be an even better outcome. But if the paper simply gets submitted elsewhere, the editor has simply handed on the problem to the next editor. The editor's judgment is paramount here. If you believe for any reason that stronger remedies than you can deliver are needed, you should turn the case over to the AIS President, who will forward it to the RCC if deemed

necessary. For one thing, the RCC has legal protections that editors don't have. For example, in England or Australia, an editor that makes a charge of plagiarism may be personally liable for making a disputable accusation, if not also for defamation, even if the charge is accurate. For another thing, the RCC has more remedies at their disposal. Thus, an editor's job is to marshal as many facts as possible, deal quickly and fairly with situations where the authors have simply made a mistake and/or are sufficiently contrite, and turn the remaining cases over to the RCC. When you forward a case to the President, please copy the Chair of the RCC in your email.

For Journal Editors

Suspicion of misconduct can come from different sources. Journal editors may have the time and resources to evaluate submissions using automated tools such as iThenticate. Or, associate editors or reviewers may report suspicions of misconduct. Or readers or the victim of plagiarism may report misconduct after work is published.

Step 1 -- Get the facts together.

This is your most important role in this process. If the problem is **simultaneous submission**, contact the other publication outlet for details on when the publication was submitted and when it was withdrawn or rejected. If the problem is **self-plagiarism or duplicate submission**, you must compare the submissions and decide (or find someone else who can decide) whether the second article adds anything at all to knowledge in the particular domain. If the problem is **plagiarism**, request information from complainants and authors that might help establish original authorship. If the problem is other kinds of scholarly misconduct, get as much information as you can from anyone who might have information. Keep records of your communications and your decisions, in case you get to Step 3.

Step 2 -- Ask the author for an explanation.

The author may have simply made a mistake, or the author may offer an explanation that satisfies you. If you are satisfied that the author did not deliberately engage in any misconduct at all, you may simply close the case. For example, a reviewer may say that a paper seems to be a duplicate submission. The author, however, may persuade you that this is not the case. You need do no more than wind up the case (see Step 3).

Step 3 -- Choose how best to resolve instances of misconduct.

- A. If the author admits to misconduct, apologizes, and seems to have learned his/her lesson, you may simply chastise the author(s), reject the submission, and wind up the case.
- B. If, however, any of the following, more serious remedies are needed, then the case should be forwarded to the AIS President, who will probably turn the case over to the RCC:
 - Contacting editors at other journals or conferences about duplicate submissions or plagiarized work,
 - Alerting administrators or dissertation supervisors about ethical breaches and the need for retraining,
 - Contacting authors whose work may have been plagiarized,
 - Prohibiting the author from submitting to future AIS journals or conferences,
 - Prohibiting the author from being an AIS member.

Step 4 -- Wind up the case.

If you resolved the case yourself, you still have two things to do:

1. You should inform complainants (e.g., reviewers or editors), if any, of the actions you have taken, while not violating confidentiality.
2. You must also send a summary report of the case to the Chair of the Research Conduct Committee providing details of it. At minimum, this summary should name all parties involved, identify all papers involved and the places where they were submitted, accepted or published, indicate the actions that you have taken and explain why you consider the case to have been closed and not require RCC action. If you think that there are any significant lessons learned from the case that you would like to share with the RCC, please feel free to say so. If you think that there is a need for changes to any AIS document or bylaw, again, please feel free to say so.

If you have turned the case over to the AIS President, you do not need to send the summary report, but you do need to inform complainants and authors that you have done that.

For Proceedings Editors

The most common source of complaint is a reviewer or AE who happens to have read or been exposed to similar work. If reviews are blind, complainants may not know if work has been plagiarized or self-plagiarized, but they usually guess "self-plagiarized." Because Program Chairs will not have much time to resolve these problems, we recommend that they make a rapid evaluation and then forward the case to the AIS President for further review. If problems are reported after the proceedings are published, the case should be forwarded to the AIS President (see Step 2 below).

Step 1 -- Get the facts together to the extent that time allows.

This is your most important role in the process. Does the paper appear to violate submission conditions? (Simultaneous submission elsewhere, related work not disclosed). Can the related paper be identified and compared? Can the paper be evaluated by iThenticate? Is there evidence of self-plagiarism or plagiarism? If the complaint appears to be unfounded, all you need to do is to wind up the case (See Step 3).

Step 2 – Forward the case to the AIS President.

If there is any suspicion of or evidence of misconduct, create a package with as much relevant information as possible, and send it to the AIS President, who will probably turn it over to the RCC. For a conference paper, this package should include: the submitted paper, all of the meta data for the submitted paper, the decision letter and any attachments to it (e.g., all reviews), copies of any related correspondence with the track chair and reviewers, and copies of the plagiarized papers or pointers to them, if possible. Reports from automated comparisons can be helpful.

Step 3 – Wind up the case.

If you have resolved the case yourself, you should inform complainants of the actions you have taken while not violating confidentiality. You must also send a summary report of the case to the Chair of the Research Conduct Committee providing details of it. If you have turned the case over to AIS, you do not need to send the summary report, but you do need to inform complainants and authors that you have done that.

Conclusion

The reputation of AIS, our e-Library, our journals and our conferences depend on the diligence of our editors to identify and root out scholarly misconduct, but to do so in a way that is fair to all parties, educates where necessary, is beyond reproach in its processes, and is effective over the long term.

*These guidelines draw from the section, by Malcolm C. Munro, entitled "Dealing with Plagiarism: Behavioural Guidelines for Complainants and Editors," in the article, "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Member Misconduct to the AIS Council," J.F. George, R.M Davison, J. Heales and M. Munro, *Communications of the AIS*, Volume 11, Article 2, Jan. 15, 2003.

These guidelines were prepared in November 2013 by the AIS Research Conduct Committee consisting of Robert Davison, City University of Hong Kong, Cynthia Beath, University of Texas at Austin (AIS VP Meetings & Conferences), Virpi Tuunainen, Aalto University (AIS VP Publications).

Feedback and questions may be directed to the chairperson of the Research Conduct Committee at researchconduct@aisnet.org.