



Multiple Publication Case Study 2

1) Complicated Case of Multiple Submission

This plagiarism case was brought to Elsevier's attention by a Customer. This Customer contacted the Helpdesk and asked if it was Elsevier policy to publish previously published (and copyrighted) material. The Helpdesk passed this case on to the Publishing Editor (PE). The PE downloaded the paper from ScienceDirect and, after an unsuccessful search of the Internet for the paper as it had first been published, later requested a copy of the original article from the other publishing company (it was eventually learned that the paper had first appeared in a conference proceedings). During that initial search of the Internet, the PE also found an article that mentioned the Customer that had brought this case to our attention. According to the article, the Customer has made a crusade of searching for potential cases of plagiarism and was focusing his search on the writings/publications of his former professors! Apparently, his relationship with his former professors has become adversarial, and he was on a mission to expose widespread plagiarism by academics and researchers in his field. The PE compared the two papers (the conference proceeding paper and the Elsevier-published article) and realized that there were many similarities between them. Large portions of the article were identical although there were some differences throughout (including some changes to the figures). The PE sent both papers and a discussion of her findings to the editors of the affected journal. The editors agreed that there were extensive similarities and asked for the PE's advice. The PE advised them to contact the authors and ask for their response; the PE provided the editors with templates for these letters.

Eventually, the authors responded to the editors and the other publisher. The authors explained that additional work was presented in the paper that was published by Elsevier. The editors of the Elsevier journal re-examined the paper and agreed with the authors that some new findings had been presented. The authors also pointed out that the work was a government paper and, therefore, there could be no transfer of copyright (they supplied documentation regarding this). The PE contacted the Ethics Helpdesk for advice. After some discussion the PE and Helpdesk came to the conclusion that publishing a corrigendum might be the best solution. This corrigendum would mention that the previous work should have been cited in the paper published by Elsevier. Meanwhile, there was the matter of the copyright transfer. The authors had signed copyright over to the first publisher (even though they claim that they shouldn't have). Plus, there was a copyright symbol on the Elsevier-published version of the paper. The PE contacted the JM for help in tracking down a signed copyright form for the Elsevier paper. The PE found that there was indeed another signed copyright form and e-mailed it to the other publisher. Strangely enough, the authors transferred copyright twice for a work that they now say is a government document.

This case is currently unresolved. However, the case has been handled carefully because of the apparent animosity between the Customer and the authors. The copyright issue is probably a formality that the publishers must resolve separately (by removing the copyright line from the papers). Ultimately, this case will in all likelihood be resolved with a corrigendum acknowledging the first paper that was presented at a conference. Because of this paper, the editors of the Elsevier journal have requested that authors obtain permission from conference organizers to republish their conference proceedings papers and also cite that original work in the final version that they submit for publication to Elsevier.

2) Multiple Submission to Several Elsevier Journals

In this example of alleged plagiarism, a Journal Manager noticed that several papers that had very similar titles and very similar content (and were all written by the same authors) were circulated to several different Elsevier journals. Two of those journals were in a single portfolio. After an initial investigation with the Journal Managers and Publishing Editors of the various journals affected, it was determined that none of the papers had been published yet; however some had already been accepted by the editors and were in various stages of production. The PE obtained copies of all the papers and sent them to the affected journal editors. The editor of Journal X reviewed the articles and wanted the Journal Manager to remove the paper due to a lack of originality. The PE advised this editor to first correspond with the author and allow them the "due process" period of 30 days to respond to the allegations (as recommended in our guidelines). Also, the PE was awaiting the response from the editor of Journal Y (which is also in her portfolio). The editor of Journal Y later responded with a thorough analysis of all the papers. He agreed that the papers were all very similar but that there were some distinct differences in the results. He decided not to reject the article submitted to his journal. The PE sent these comments to the editor of Journal X. The authors also contacted the editor of Journal X and argued a case for their article. The outcome? The editor ultimately agreed that the article should not be removed or rejected. However, he did ask the authors to revise and submit their work as a short communication instead of as a full-length article.