A NISO Proposed Work Item

WORK ITEM TITLE

Develop a Recommended Practice to Update Author Name Changes in the Academic Publication Record after Publication as a Result of Identity Change

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Proposal for Consideration by the NISO Voting Membership
Approval Ballot Period: January 25, 2021 – February 24, 2021

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INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Academic authors are generally expected to be productive during their research or teaching careers, and as part evidence of this are required to publish the results and outcomes of their research activities. Publication can take the form of many guises – articles in learned journals, books and book chapters, database entities, conference posters and abstracts, blog posts, preprints, governmental and non-governmental position papers and reports, and many others. One aspect of such formally published research outputs, in addition to disseminating their work more widely, is to register and recognise the author's ownership and involvement in the work (in both senses of the meaning of involvement). Being identified as the author associated with particular outputs is important for many reasons – accountability, funding, precedence, promotion, tenure. Therefore, it is important that an author can be identified accurately and correctly in such outputs. It is equally important that secondary citations to the outputs and third-party indexing of the metadata are also accurate and correct.

Prior to the ability to publish articles and the like online, print products had limited capability to make changes to published material. This was usually done by publishing a separate correction notice with the expectation (or hope) that the reader would manually correct the original. Occasionally, a corrected page was provided that the reader was expected to insert in place of the original. This was an inefficient method of updating the record, and many requested changes went unnoticed and uncorrected. With the advent of online publishing and access, changes became (in theory) very simple to effect. Updates of the textual parts of articles, etc., might be changed, along with a notice to alert readers that a change has been made in order to be fully transparent. However, key parts of the metadata components (by which are meant the components of an online work that are used in accessory functions such as indexing, discovery, citation, data- and text-mining) of articles pose a separate challenge. Like text errors, these might be changed easily enough. But, where the article has been indexed under the original author name, or cited elsewhere using that name, how might those instances be corrected, let alone identified? If the original article is updated, but those secondary and tertiary sources are not updated in every instance as well, the inter-connectivity of the author's body of work within the wider literature and databases will be broken. This will result in, among other things, mis-reporting of citations to work of the author (by dilution to more than one name), broken links from citations (pointing to the 'wrong' item, as identified by name) and consequential loss of attribution and credit to the author as a result.

Author names might change for a number of reasons - deed poll, divorce, gender transition, marriage, remarriage, pseudonyms, etc. Authors increasingly expect that the online technology will allow them to update their names and identity with ease. As noted, this can be relatively simple to effect in the original item, but the citations to that article and other functions that spread out from the original are much harder to correct, even if they are all known. The original publisher has limited influence on those other third-parties that use the articles and metadata for their own purposes.

A risk associated with not addressing this issue is that the information that is part of the published works of individuals and communities affected falls out-of-sync with their actual situation in real life. If changes by the publisher are made without corresponding changes downstream, in third parties, the dissonance will be multiplied.

The aim of this proposal is to review and agree on the process by which any of these changes might be accomplished in an agreed and equitable way.

STATEMENT OF WORK

1. Goals.
   - To develop best practice in handling requests to update author names in published outputs.
   - To develop methods by which secondary and tertiary parties can be informed of the changes.
   - To develop best practice for those additional parties to update their own records to reflect the change in the original source.
   - Authors whose names have changed will benefit from corrected metadata for their contributions and, additionally, their publication record will be updated to reflect their new status.
   - To recognise and acknowledge where changes might be impossible (for example, in printed copies) or unlikely to be accomplished to 100% (for example, indexers that are not provided with a direct feed of metadata from the publisher).

2. Deliverables and Objectives.

   - Defining a new best practice for ensuring the widest possible notification and implementation of changes to author names post-publication.
   - Consultation with all stakeholders involved (including, but not limited to, authors, publishers, funders, institutions, indexers, databases, CrossRef, ORCID, Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), social media sites that mention article metadata that include author names).
   - Defining new best practice where changes to author names are requested, or required, not to be made public (for example, transgender name changes where the author does not wish to reveal their change to a wide audience).
   - If wider updates are not feasible, the project could be narrowed to consider practices at the primary, publisher level when such requests are received.

- Successful deployment will be measured by: author satisfaction; frictionless processes to update all of the relevant records.

3. Process.
   - Appointment of a Working Group, to include representatives of stakeholders, especially authors.
   - Break out deliverables into several levels of ease of implementation, to inform a possible timetable to implementation.
   - Consultation document for wider discussion and comments.

PARTNERS AND PARTICIPATION

Publishers, Crossref, ORCID, COPE, Indexers, Social media sites and others to be determined. Several publishers (Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, Taylor & Francis), Clarivate and Crossref are already in support, and COPE has embarked on a review of their guidance policy and documents.

TIMELINE

As soon as feasible (but following NISO's recommended workflow), given the increasing number of requests that publishers are receiving, especially from transgender authors.