

**Project proposal form**

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**1. Project title:** *Cultures of credit: authorship practices in the life sciences*

**2. Commissioners / external clients:**

Company: CWTS Leiden (Centre for Science and Technology Studies)

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**3. Project coach:**

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**4. Problem statement**

What constitutes an author? This seemingly simple question is answered in various and heterogeneous ways. In this honours project, a variety of perspectives on the issue of authorship in the life sciences will be sought, collected and compared at three universities in three countries: Maastricht University (Netherlands), RWTH Aachen (Germany) and Hasselt University (Belgium).

The production of knowledge has, for a long time, gone hand in hand with writing. Through academic texts, knowledge was assembled and distributed. Authorship associated with these texts (and this knowledge) reflects the allocation of responsibility for the work, and the distribution of credit for the work. Determining who was responsible for a piece of knowledge, who could be held accountable for it, and who deserves the credit has never been easy. However, in contemporary life sciences in which knowledge is constructed in growing teams and with pressures on scientists to publish to advance (or even maintain) their careers, the *problem* of authorship is growing.

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Who is considered a legitimate candidate for authorship? What constitutes a legitimate contribution to the published research to warrant authorship? How is the sequence of authors determined? How are authorship rules and regulations interpreted and operationalised – or ignored? These questions, when combined and expanded, paint a picture of a moral economy of authorship that potentially (or probably) differ across laboratories, universities, disciplines or countries. As a consequence, one may hypothesise that this influences the distribution of accountability and credit and thus influences the ways in which junior and senior scientists shape their careers, how research groups are organised and how people work.

### **5. Assignment**

The assignment is to perform a research to map the breadth of authorship cultures as they exist in the life sciences groups/labs in the (international) region. To that end you will visit, next to our university, the universities of Hasselt (Belgium) and Aachen (Germany). This research will require you to (1) carefully delineate what you will study, and where. It will also require (2) contextualisation, through consulting relevant literature on the topic. Subsequently, you will have to (3) gather data, (4) analyse data and (5) connect literature, data and analysis in a critical discussion of authorship practices.

Given the object of study (moral economies, cultures and practices), the research will be largely qualitative (in depth, semi-structured interviews) – however, options exist to include quantitative dimensions where relevant (e.g. detailed analyses of group outputs).

### **6. Project result / product**

- a. Every six months, the commissioner (CWTS) will receive an update of the progress, outcomes and status of your research.
- b. At the end of the project, a full length report will be presented to the CWTS, accompanied by a presentation in Leiden.
- c. You will also become authors yourselves: production of a draft scientific paper, eventually/ultimately to be submitted to a scientific journal. In the step from draft to paper submission, you will be assisted by the coach and one or more of the consultants under 7.

### **7. Advisor and Consultants**

Sarah de Rijcke, CWTS, Leiden University

David Shaw, Maastricht University

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Ruth Müller, Munich Centre for Technology in Society, Technical University Munich

### **8. Literature and other data and information sources**

Müller, Ruth (2012). Collaborating in Life Science Research Groups: The Question of Authorship.

*Higher Education Policy* 25, 289–311.

Shapin, Steven (1989). The Invisible Technician. *American Scientist* 77, 554-563.

Zwart, Hub (2001). *De wetenschapper als auteur. Geschiedenis en toekomst van het wetenschappelijk communiceren* (oratie). Nijmegen: Sun (37 pp.).