Issue(s) addressed:
- Who is the author of a student paper?
- Can a professor use a student paper in their own work and presentations?
- Can a professor build upon the ideas and approach of a student paper?

Brief Summary: Dr. Henry has a graduate student that wrote a paper for his class directly related to his own scholarship. He worked closely with this student and helped with and suggested many of the main ideas. The finished paper advanced Dr. Henry’s thinking on the topic and he would like to use it for a panel discussion, crediting the student’s work as a “paper written with my direction and input.” The student feels the paper belongs to her and he should not be able to use it or continue building on her ideas and approach.

Contributed by Erica Stern. This case may be freely copied, altered or adapted as needed.

Case Study: Authorship

Dr. Henry teaches a well-respected graduate course in American Labor history. He has his students write a scholarly paper addressing a selected provocative issue. The list of issues is related to Dr. Henry's own scholarship, on which he is an international expert. Past students have been pleased to have Dr. Henry's input on their efforts and his guidance in their process of scholarly inquiry. Dr. Henry meets with each student several times during the semester, he recommends new ideas, confronts poor thinking, and guides the project along.

One of the graduate students, Jan, chose to work on a novel issue that is deeply connected to Dr. Henry’s own body of scholarly work, and integral to his latest efforts. Jan used both Dr. Henry's suggestions and some of his own ideas in producing the final concepts and then wrote an excellent paper. The finished result earned an "A" in the course, and the process and product actually advanced Dr. Henry's thinking on the topic.

Dr. Henry has been asked to lead a panel discussion on the topic at an international forum. Dr. Henry planned to prominently feature much of Jan's work in his paper for the panel. He has already encouraged a graduate student to continue to build upon Jan's ideas and approach. Dr. Henry informed Jan that his work will be cited by name, and credited as a “paper written with my direction and input.”

Jan is unhappy, and feels that although her work was created in Dr. Henry’s class, it is hers - a single author paper. She feels that Dr. Henry’s claiming 'direction' is inaccurate since the paper is her work and ideas. Dr. Henry’s input was helpful, but that was what she paid for in the class - and it does not entitle him to any claim as a creator. In addition, Jan feels he does not have the right to continue with this work. It is her decision to use it or let it lie.