

From: Richard Holdaway
Sent: Friday, 19 August 2016 7:00 a.m.
To: Alison Johnston
Subject: Premature release of an embargoed MSc thesis

Dear Alison

I write to you in your position in the Library Research Services and as my first avenue of contact with reference to issues of research concerning the library.

In March, Olivia Johnston received a request from the library for someone she thought was a student to get access to her embargoed thesis. She did not recognise that the person was from a rival research group to that which she had worked with and that the information was of very great importance to the group in its publication programme, where priority is unfortunately paramount. As her supervisor, who devised the overall project, I should have been consulted. It is too much for the library to assume (a) that the student has sole right to the information in their thesis, and (b) that its release through an embargo should be requested without ensuring that the student properly understands the implications of letting their data get into the hands of other groups before they themselves, and the research group of which they were part, have published their results. Few MSc students have the background to make such a judgement of the intrinsic value of their data on their own.

I consider this to be a very serious matter indeed, as my research group's priority in this field has now been compromised through loss of this intellectual property to another group, which has already referred to it in a publication submitted well before the expiry of the embargo. The student had been advised to place the full two year embargo on her thesis precisely because of the importance of the data it contained. She cannot be held responsible for allowing the release when she had received no information on the potential consequences for that release by the organisation holding the embargoed publication, nor advice to discuss the release with her supervisor(s) before doing so.

There should be processes in place to ensure that a student does not, with the best of intentions, release their thesis from embargo prematurely, to the detriment of themselves and their colleagues. This is not a matter of "creative commons" but a clear matter of ownership of intellectual property and its uninformed release to a competitor who can now profit by the highly innovative work by our group.

Please forward this email to the appropriate officer in the library. I would like, as supervisor and leader of the group whose research position has been compromised, to discuss the conditions under which embargoed theses can be released to potentially hostile third parties.

Thank you.

Regards
Richard

Dr Richard N Holdaway
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