



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A01070024

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Our office received a complaint concerning the administration of NSF's Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) by an institution.<sup>1</sup> According to the complainant<sup>2</sup> the institution mandated completion of the SED despite clear instructions on the front cover of the SED which state that "[y]our response is voluntary and failure to provide some or all of the requested information will not in any way adversely affect you." Although the complainant submitted a partially completed SED, scheduled and completed her dissertation, our office decided to address this issue with the institution along with NSF management.

In an interview with the NSF official<sup>3</sup> responsible for the administration of the SED, our office learned that completion of the SED by doctoral thesis candidates is not mandatory, and SRS employees and NSF contractors do not state or imply as much to institutions. However, as the SED receives a 91% return rate, the NSF official suspects that some institutions mandate completion of the survey.

In an interview with an institution official<sup>4</sup> our office learned that forms mandating completion of the SED may have been developed before the adoption of any human subjects protocol, and apparently never changed because no graduate student ever formally complained about the policy. After receiving a letter from our office, and consulting with their legal office, the institution eliminated mandatory completion of the SED as a prerequisite for completion of a thesis defense. This change is reflected in all paper and electronic forms.

As the complainant completed a doctoral dissertation with a partially completed SED form, and the institution changed their SED policy in light of our correspondence, there are no remaining issues to address.

Accordingly, this case is closed.

<sup>1</sup> [redacted]

<sup>2</sup> [redacted]

<sup>3</sup> [redacted]

<sup>4</sup> [redacted]

	Agent	Attorney	Supervisor	AIGI
Sign / date				