

## CLOSEOUT FOR A01100034

On October 26, 2001, our office received an allegation concerning ethical issues in the preparation of an NSF proposal. The Complainant<sup>1</sup> alleged that he had discussed his recently funded proposal<sup>2</sup> with two fellow researchers (Subjects 1 and 2)<sup>3</sup> at a meeting of their professional society, and that Subjects incorporated his research plans into their NSF proposal<sup>4</sup>. In support of his allegation, Complainant included a 2-page outline of his proposal. In response to our request for additional information, Complainant informed us that the full proposal was in Japanese, that he had not given a copy of the full proposal to Subjects, and that he had not requested that the discussion of his research plans be treated as confidential.

In assessing Complainant's allegation, we considered the possibility of intent to secure funding for work already performed, plagiarism, and/or intellectual theft. On the issue of duplicative research, we determined that it is not unusual for multiple teams to conduct population genetics research in the same region. We further determined that Subjects did not claim their project was innovative or unique. Their proposal explicitly acknowledges that at least one other team is engaged in the same fieldwork.

We next compared Complainant's proposal outline with Subjects' NSF proposal and found little identifiable overlap beyond the geographical area shared by the two proposals. Based on Complainant's statement that his full proposal was in Japanese and that he did not give a copy to the Subjects, we determined that verbatim plagiarism was unlikely. In terms of intellectual theft, we observed that a recognized purpose of professional meetings is for scholars to share ideas and plans. We found no evidence that Complainant's research plan, if shared with Subjects at such a meeting, was so unique or innovative as to support a claim of intellectual ownership.

In Subjects' defense, the NSF proposal represents the direct progression of a research agenda established with Subject 1's dissertation and continued through scholarly articles and NSF-funded research. Reviewers comment that the Subjects are highly-respected investigators in the field, that the proposal builds on the Subjects' long-standing research, and that the proposed project is an appropriate next step to previous work performed by the Subjects. Finally, Subjects recommended the Complainant as a reviewer for their proposal, indicating no attempt to conceal their research plans from Complainant.

OIG concluded there is no substantive evidence that misconduct occurred. This inquiry is closed and no further action will be taken.

cc: Investigations, IG

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<sup>1</sup> [redacted]

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<sup>3</sup> [redacted]

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