

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A-01110041

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We received an allegation that the subjects' NSF proposal (subject 1, PI; and subjects 2 and 3, co-PIs)<sup>1</sup> contained over two paragraphs of text plagiarized from a published paper (the source document).<sup>2</sup> Our initial review confirmed that the text appeared to have been copied into the NSF proposal's background section from the source document without appropriate citation.

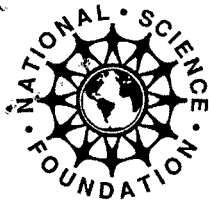
We wrote to each subject requesting an explanation. Subject 1 took full responsibility for the plagiarism, explaining that he, not subjects 2 and 3, prepared the section of the NSF proposal containing the copied text. He intended to cite the text appropriately in the NSF proposal, but failed to do so in his rush to complete it. Subject 1 emphasized, however, in his own defense, that he provided the name of the source document's first author in the NSF proposal as a suggested proposal reviewer, an action he would not have taken if he intentionally plagiarized the text. Subjects 2 and 3 stated they were each unaware of the copied text until receiving our letter. We determined that the allegation had substance and referred the investigation to subject 1's University.

The report from the University's investigation committee (the Committee) stated that subject 1 was solely responsible for the copied text. The Committee determined that subject 1 acted carelessly, recklessly, and knowingly when he copied the text. It also determined that subject 1 self-plagiarized when he copied text from the background section of an earlier publication that he authored into a more recent publication he authored without appropriately citing the origin of the text. The Committee determined that subject 1's copying of text in the NSF proposal and his self-plagiarism represented a pattern of behavior. The Committee concluded that the subject committed misconduct in science according to the University's policy.

The University adjudicator accepted the Committee's assessment that subject 1 plagiarized text from the source document into his NSF proposal, but disagreed that subject 1's self-plagiarism constituted evidence of a pattern of behavior. The adjudicator concluded subject 1 committed misconduct in science. The University sanctioned subject 1, sending him a letter of reprimand and requiring him to certify to University officials for 3 years from the date of the reprimand letter that any proposal sent to an external funding agency contained no plagiarized material.

<sup>1</sup> NSF proposal [REDACTED], entitled "[REDACTED]" was submitted by PI [REDACTED] (subject 1) and [REDACTED] (subject 2), and co-PIs, [REDACTED] (subject 3), [REDACTED]

<sup>2</sup> [REDACTED]



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The University adjudicator stated that there was no preponderance of evidence either way in this case, concluding, nonetheless, the fact remained that subject 1 plagiarized text from the source document. Further, neither the Committee nor the adjudicator determined if subject 1's copying was a serious deviation from accepted practice for subject 1's community of scientists. Finally, the Committee did not specify a level of intent, but rather a range of levels for subject 1's action (careless to knowing).

A finding of misconduct<sup>3</sup> by NSF requires (1) There be a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community; and (2) The research misconduct be committed intentionally, or knowingly, or recklessly; and (3) The allegation be proven by a preponderance of evidence.

The University clarified that the preponderance of the evidence supported its finding of misconduct in science. The University explained that overall it considered the intent as knowing. Finally, the University stated that it considered subject 1's act to be a deviation from accepted practice, not a serious deviation. Because the University did not find that subject 1's behavior was a serious deviation from accepted practice within his community, the conduct did not meet the federal definition of misconduct in science. We agree with the University's finding, given the amount of copied text, which consisted of background information, in conjunction with other extenuating circumstances, such as subject 1's suggestion in the proposal that the author of the source document be a merit reviewer for the NSF proposal. We wrote to subject 1 informing him that we had closed this case without a finding of misconduct in science, warning him to be more vigilant in the future when he prepares NSF proposals. We wrote to subjects 2 and 3, who had been found to have no culpability, and informed them that the case was closed.

This case is closed and no further action will be taken.

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<sup>3</sup> Because the alleged conduct occurred before April 17, 2002, NSF will use the following definition of misconduct in science: "Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other serious deviation from accepted practices in proposing, carrying out, or reporting results from activities funded by NSF."