



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: Closeout for A02020015

Page 1 of 2

An allegation was received from an NSF Program Officer<sup>1</sup> that a proposal submitted to NSF<sup>2</sup> contained material copied from a Ph.D. thesis<sup>3</sup>, portions of which were available on the world-wide web. The duplicated material comprised approximately one page of near-verbatim text incorporated into the introductory section of the proposal. Small changes in the duplicated text are evident in that certain isolated sentences from the source material do not appear in the proposal, and some new sentences have been added in the proposal text amidst the duplicated material. However, 88% of the text in the introductory section of the proposal duplicates the text from the Ph.D. thesis. References in the proposal for the duplicated section follow the cited references in the excerpt. The excerpt from the Ph.D. thesis on the web is labeled as copyright 1995. The dissertation itself is not referenced in the proposal. No evidence for association between the PIs and the dissertation author has been found. The remainder of the proposal was examined for potential instances of plagiarism. Several paragraphs in the proposal are overviews of the authors' previous work in the area, and texts from summaries of research papers previously published by the authors appear in the proposal with appropriate citation. No other instance of duplication or plagiarism in the proposal was found.

The PI and the coPI of the proposal (the subjects) were contacted for their perspective on how the verbatim material came to appear in their NSF proposal. The PI initially suggested that the material may have appeared in an M.S. thesis of a student, but on further investigation, the PI concluded that this was not the case. The PI then suggested that the duplicated material may have been gathered in preparation for introductory sections of other graduate student theses, but on further search, the PI concludes that the material does not in fact appear in these theses. The PI also suggested that a source for the duplicated text material may have been a handbook of industrial crystallization previously prepared by the coPI. This handbook was obtained; there is no duplication of the material from the handbook into the proposal. Therefore the PI could provide no source of origin for the duplicated text. The duplicated material is not presently in the computer files of the PI. The PI indicated that the same duplicated material does appear in a research proposal submitted to another federal agency submitted in October 2000, also authored in collaboration with the coPI. The PI states that the incorporation of the verbatim material in both cases was done unknowingly. The PI states that he made personal contact with the Ph.D. research advisor to provide an explanation and an apology.

The coPI provided a similar explanation of possible sources for the duplicated material, but also confirmed that the verbatim material does not appear in any theses for his students, and confirmed that the duplicate material does indeed appear in the proposal sent to the other federal agency. The coPI also states that the incorporation of the verbatim material was done unknowingly, and that he was unaware of

<sup>1</sup> Redacted

<sup>2</sup> Redacted

<sup>3</sup> Redacted

	Agent	Attorney	Supervisor	AIGI
Sign / date				



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Page 2 of 2

its source.

An email from the Ph.D. advisor<sup>4</sup> for the former student from whose dissertation the text was duplicated confirmed that the subject had talked with him on the telephone about the situation, as indicated by the subjects. In addition, the subjects provided a copy of the earlier proposal to another federal agency in which the same duplicated dissertation text appeared.<sup>5</sup> Examination of the earlier proposal showed evidence of duplication of the same introductory text, including a few additional sentences from the source document in the middle of the duplicated text.

The duplicated text has likely been available on the web for approximately five years (between an assumed initial posting in 1995 and the submission of the first proposal by the subjects in 2000). The identity of the person that downloaded the text, and the conditions that made it available in a laboratory setting without its proper attribution are unknown and unlikely to be discoverable. The consequences of this plagiarism are minimal, and its extent limited only to the text identified. The subjects have been forthcoming and cooperative. Accordingly, this case is closed.

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<sup>4</sup> Redacted

<sup>5</sup> Redacted