NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A03060031

We were asked to reconsider a closed case[1] containing allegations of plagiarism and intellectual property theft. The two documents alleged to contain the copied material and misappropriated ideas were an unpublished manuscript submitted to a peer-review journal,[2] and a published conference proceedings paper.

We compared the subject's[3] two texts with several published alleged source texts provided to us.[4] The examination of the documents revealed no instances of direct or substantially similar copying to substantiate the allegation of plagiarism. While seemingly distinctive words were found in both subject and source texts, we found few synonyms in the thesaurus that retained the same meaning in the relevant context. Figures illustrated concepts common to both the source and subject documents. The similarities between these figures were insufficient to support an allegation of plagiarism.

With regard to the allegation of intellectual theft, we do find similarity between the subject's and source's work especially with regard to the conclusions and rationale. However, we find that the subject's experimental method and supporting data are sufficiently distinct from that reported in the source documents. Both subject and source are working in the same developing field of research. It is to be expected that similar conclusions and rationale would develop and could be valuable as confirmation of new concepts.

A review of subject's awarded NSF proposal[5] indicates that the research presented is consistent with the work proposed. The program was aware of the potential overlap between the subject's work and the source documents' authors' work when making the award.[6] The decision to fund the proposal in light of this information rests with the program office. At this time we find no reason to question this programmatic decision.

We did note that the subject's use of citations throughout the manuscript, proceedings paper, and proposal was marginally adequate. Citations in the text were appropriate where used in that they supported the proffered statements. However, the subject made frequent generalized statements[7] without supporting citation in the text. The reference lists in each respective document appeared to

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1 [redacted]

2 According to the information available, this manuscript is still unpublished at this time.

3 [redacted]

4 The documents were provided by [redacted].

5 [redacted]

6 Specifically, the program office had the benefit of citations to some of the source material provided to our office as well as comments from the review panel.

7 For example statements that contained "It is well-known that..." or statements that provided historical perspectives.

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support the text as a whole, although citations embedded in the text were not as thorough as most scholarly journals would require. At this time, we believe that the proposal and journal peer-review systems are adequately addressing the subject's *de minimis* approach to citation. We have written the subject to advise that poor citation may lead to future allegations of research misconduct.

Accordingly, this case is ***closed***.