

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO: AIGI

File Number: M-00080033

Date: Jan. 24, 2002

Subject: Closeout Memorandum

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We were informed of an allegation that a researcher¹ failed to provide a graduate student² authorship credit on a paper.^{3,4} The researcher provided the graduate student with an acknowledgment.⁵ We reviewed information independently obtained from the researcher and the University,⁶ and determined that the researcher was alleged to have

- 1) failed to provide appropriate co-authorship to the graduate student
- 2) abused animals in the course of his research, and
- 3) harassed the graduate student.

The researcher counter alleged the graduate student plagiarized material in her unpublished dissertation proposal submitted to the University and failed to return data gathered during the project to him.

After reviewing materials provided by the researcher and the University we determined that the University appropriately handled the allegation of plagiarism and failure to return data against the graduate student. First, there is no evidence that the graduate student submitted the dissertation proposal to an outside source or that it was used in a public venue in a way that would make it

¹ Dr. [REDACTED] Associate Professor, Department of [REDACTED] University [REDACTED]

² [REDACTED] a graduate student in the same department as the subject.

³ The paper is [REDACTED]

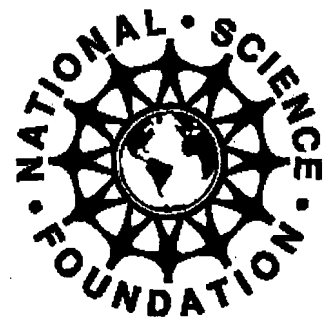
⁴ Support for the research described in the paper was credited to NSF award [REDACTED] The award provided approximately [REDACTED] in support of research described in a proposal entitled, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The award and proposal identified the researcher as the sole PI.

⁵ The paper's acknowledgment read, in part [REDACTED]

⁶ [REDACTED]

Name:	Prepared by:	Cleared by:		
	Agent:	Attorney:	Supervisor:	AIGI
Signature & date:				



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appropriate for OIG to intervene. Second, awardee institutions are responsible for the data collected under federal awards and must be able to retrieve this information at any time up to 3 years from the submission of the Final Report upon receipt of a request from an authorized federal source. OIG did not request these data and also concluded that they were not necessary to review these allegations. Further, no one asserted that the data are lost, merely that access was restricted in a contentious situation. OIG concluded that this was an internal matter resulting from the resolution of the contentious relationship between the parties. OIG need not intervene.

The researcher was alleged to have harassed the graduate student. We learned that, the relationship between the researcher and the graduate student had deteriorated to the point that the University established a new thesis committee and the graduate student conducted her research work outside of the researcher's control and laboratory. The University also resolved this matter satisfactorily by separating the two individuals in a way that permitted each to continue their research. In this circumstance, this was a satisfactory way to resolve this issue. It does not require OIG's review.

Regarding the alleged abuse of animals, the proposal contained a certification from the University's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) that it had reviewed and approved the research. The IACUC also reviewed the allegation of animal abuse and determined that there were no reportable violations.⁷ It urged the Department to ensure its faculty are aware of and sensitive to ethical norms. There is no evidence that the IACUC process was inadequate or that OIG should review its decisions.

In the context of the allegations above, we concluded that the University was best positioned to assess the authorship allegation. Accordingly, we deferred the review of it to the University. The University provided us with its report and we also received additional information from the researcher. The researcher demonstrated that the idea for the project and the research plan were the results of his longstanding interest and predated the graduate student's work. The researcher characterized the graduate student's work as similar to that of his technician, who also received an acknowledgement. Both the researcher and student agree that the student conducted experiments and collected data described in the paper's figures and table. They disagree about the quality of that work. Both also agree that the student did not participated in drafting or

⁷ The graduate student's allegations were that the subject poorly maintained research animals [REDACTED] and that he expected her to remove internal organs from an animal that was not dead. The graduate student said in deposition that she would not kill animals and required someone else to do it for her.

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revising the paper and had failed to comprehensively review the draft provided.

The University committee also reviewed written testimony from senior scientists stating that it is the scientific community's practice to determine authorship based on substantive, intellectual contributions and review and approval of the manuscripts. The senior researcher on a project typically determines who will receive authorship or acknowledgments. The University concluded that the evidence did not support the allegation. OIG concluded that the University's decision was appropriate. The researcher's paper relied in part on data gathered by the graduate student, but the graduate student had no substantial intellectual contribution to the development of the paper. Authorship is based not merely on the volume of data collected but the intellectual involvement required in successfully describing a research project and assessing the collected data. While the researcher's actions may be less than supportive of the development of a young scientist's career, his actions do not rise to the level of research misconduct.

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