

CLOSEOUT FOR M90030017

On March 28, 1990, OIG received an allegation of misconduct in science against [REDACTED] the first subject, a faculty member in the Department [REDACTED] at the University [REDACTED], from [REDACTED] the complainant, a scientist then employed in the [REDACTED] Department at the University [REDACTED]. The complainant alleged that in [REDACTED] the first subject's graduate student, [REDACTED], had difficulty producing data, with acceptable replicate variabilities, that were required for a meeting presentation. With what the complainant felt were insignificant changes to a standard experimental protocol the graduate student, the second subject, had eventually produced data with acceptable variabilities. The complainant suspected that the data were fabricated and brought this to the attention of the first subject. At the first subject's direction the complainant tested the protocol changes and was unable to obtain data with acceptable variabilities. The complainant informed the first subject of his negative results. The complainant alleged that the first subject presented the graduate student's allegedly fabricated data at the meeting even though the subject was aware that they might have been fabricated. The complainant told OIG that the data might have been published and agreed to provided copies of, or references to, publications containing the data. In [REDACTED], the complainant provided OIG with a copy of a paper resulting from the meeting which contained the allegedly fabricated data and a reference to another paper submitted to a refereed journal that he suspected contained the fabricated data.

OIG reviewed the first subject's NSF grants and relevant publications but could not find another instance where these data were published. OIG unsuccessfully attempted to contact the graduate student, who had moved several times since receiving her degree. In [REDACTED] the complainant provided OIG with a reference to a journal article stating that the allegedly fabricated data were in that article's Figure [REDACTED]

At the first subject's institution's request OIG deferred the inquiry and any investigation into the allegations of data fabrication and the knowing presentation and publication of fabricated data to the institution. The inquiry committee formed by the institution attempted to review the first subject's laboratory notebooks containing the primary data and found that the subject had permitted the graduate student to depart with the notebooks and he no longer had [REDACTED] from his meeting presentation. The first subject told the committee that the procedure developed by the graduate student was still in use in the laboratory and provided the committee with examples of recent data showing acceptable variabilities between replicates. The first subject said that independent laboratories sent samples to his laboratory for analysis and they found the resultant data acceptable. The subject said that the data in Figure [REDACTED] were not the graduate student's. He explained that, after the student's departure, the paper had been declined by the journal several times. During the extended revision process he substituted a more contemporary set of data developed by another individual in his laboratory for the graduate student's data. The committee concluded that the data in the meeting publication and in the refereed journal were not related. The committee informed OIG that it could not review the primary data and therefore no substance could be found for the allegations. The institution informed OIG that it did not have a formal policy requiring the retention of laboratory notebooks.

At OIG's suggestion the committee interviewed many of the first subject's former laboratory personnel and determined that it was the subject's standard policy, and his understanding of common practice, to permit individuals to leave with the primary data and their notebooks. The absence of the graduate student's notebooks was not selective; it was consistent with the first subject's standard policy.

OIG located the graduate student and obtained copies of a diskette containing some of the data in a spreadsheet program and her papers and abstracts. She had discarded her laboratory notebooks during her relocations. She stated that she had not fabricated or falsified data in any of her work including that supported by NSF. After evaluating the data in the spreadsheet the committee concluded that this partial set of data appeared genuine and it reinforced their earlier conclusion, that despite an inability to review the primary data and notebooks, no evidence could be found to support the allegation.

Separate from the inquiry into the allegation, but as a result of the information provided by the committee, OIG suggested that the institution consider the need for a formal policy on retention of laboratory notebooks. The institution has decided that it would be appropriate to develop such a policy and is in the process of doing so.

After extensive searching by the committee and OIG it is apparent that the primary data and notebooks related to this allegation cannot be located. OIG has reviewed the material provided by the inquiry committee and concluded that they constitute a complete, thorough, and accurate report. No evidence can be found to substantiate the allegations and, therefore, this case is closed.

