

CLOSEOUT FOR M-92040014

OIG was informed on April 6, 1992, by [REDACTED] that its Graduate Honor System was performing an inquiry and investigation into an allegation of falsification of data by one of its graduate students. The complainant, [REDACTED] alleged that the subject, [REDACTED] a graduate student under his supervision, falsified data included in his doctoral dissertation. A part of the research along with the subject's Graduate Research Assistantship [REDACTED] and again from [REDACTED] was supported by NSF proposal [REDACTED] entitled, [REDACTED]

The allegation of falsification of data arose after a series of events that began when the complainant requested that the subject re-analyze one sample reported with a poster presentation and described in his as yet unfinished thesis. He made this request because the original photograph of this particular sample analysis for the subject's thesis was not clear enough. However, the subject's re-analysis was different from his original result. As a consequence, the complainant requested that the subject do a second re-analysis of this sample. The result of the subject's second re-analysis proved different from either of his first two results. At this point, faced with three different results for the same sample, the complainant requested that his technician analyze the sample. The technician's result was different from any of the subject's three previous results.

This prompted the complainant to set up a blind experiment using a previously analyzed sample as an unknown. The complainant's technician and the subject both analyzed the unknown sample. The technician's result was identical to a previous analysis of the unknown, whereas the subject's analysis was different. These discrepancies in analytical results prompted an in-depth discussion between the subject and the complainant concerning the subject's sample preparation and analytical procedures for these analyses. It was during this discussion that the subject allegedly confessed to falsification of data in his thesis.

The complainant requested that two other faculty members witness the subject's admission that he had falsified data contained in several figures in his dissertation. At the complainant's request, these two also witnessed the subject write, sign and date, a short statement on each allegedly falsified figure that explained what he had done. Following the subject's witnessed confession, the complainant formally requested that the head of his department officially terminate the subject as a graduate student in his laboratory.

The department head called a meeting of the subject's graduate advisory committee which

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was attended by the subject and complainant. The committee, 1) determined the time period over which the alleged falsifications had occurred; 2) voted unanimously to terminate the subject's participation in the doctoral program under its direction; and 3) voted unanimously to not accept a request from the subject that he be permitted to resign as a graduate student. Because the allegation represented a possible violation of its graduate student Honor Code, the situation was forwarded to the graduate inquiry committee.

The inquiry committee consisted of six student voting members and three faculty non-voting advising members. The committee voted unanimously to investigate the allegation and forwarded the case to the graduate investigation committee.

The investigation committee consisted of five student voting members representing five departments and four faculty voting members from four science departments. The subject pleaded guilty to the charge of falsification of data for a Ph.D. dissertation at the committee hearing. According to Honor Code regulations and procedures, "[t]he accused must be adjudged guilty before any consideration is given to the penalty, unless the accused pleads guilty, in which case the deliberations shall focus solely on the penalty." The investigation committee recommended the following sanctions: that the subject 1) be permanently dismissed from the University, 2) lose all work accomplished in the most recent semester, and 3) have the statement, "permanently dismissed for violation of the graduate Honor Code," placed on his official transcript.

The chairperson of the investigation committee notified the Dean in charge of the Honor Code of the committee's decision. The Dean subsequently notified the subject of the decision and the sanctions. The subject did not appeal the decision or sanctions. The Dean in charge notified OIG that the subject had been found guilty of falsification of data, an act of misconduct in science encompassed by NSF's regulations. In addition, OIG received a copy of the subject's official academic transcript, verifying that the above stated sanctions were implemented by the institution.

OIG was informed that the complainant had notified all the relevant symposia organizers and journal editors in which the subject's falsified data had been presented.

OIG's evaluation of this case found that the institution adhered to its established graduate Honor Code procedures and that the procedure was fair and the information accurate. OIG subsequently learned that the subject had left the institution and returned to his country of origin. OIG concluded that no further action was necessary to protect NSF's interests and, therefore, closed this case.

cc: Staff Scientist, Deputy AIG-Oversight, AIG-Oversight, Counsel to IG, IG