

CLOSEOUT FOR M93070044

On July 21, 1993, [REDACTED] a program officer [REDACTED] brought allegations of misconduct in science to OIG's attention. The complainant was [REDACTED] a researcher [REDACTED]. He alleged that the subject, [REDACTED] a faculty member [REDACTED] violated the confidentiality of peer review when, as an ad hoc reviewer, he misappropriated a "novel" research idea from either or both of the complainant's equivalent NSF proposals. The complainant's proposals were [REDACTED] (the first proposal) and [REDACTED] both entitled [REDACTED]. The subject allegedly pursued the complainant's "novel" research idea which resulted in the publication of the paper, [REDACTED] by the subject with co-authors [REDACTED]. The complainant sent OIG a copy of the subject's paper along with a copy of the complainant's first proposal in which he marked the allegedly stolen research idea.

The complainant explained that he received a telephone call from the subject who identified himself as an ad hoc reviewer for one of his NSF proposals. The complainant said that the subject asked him if he had published anything about the research idea presented in the proposal he had reviewed. According to the complainant, the subject told him that, if the complainant had published his results from the research idea, the subject, who had completed a similar study, wanted to reference the complainant in a paper that he was about to publish. The complainant said that he told the subject that he had not started the work associated with this research idea.

NSF's computerized award and proposal system showed that the subject had been an ad hoc reviewer for both of the complainant's proposals. OIG also found that the subject had submitted his NSF proposal [REDACTED] concurrently with his receipt of the complainant's first proposal for review.

OIG focused on the complainant's first proposal because it was the subject's initial exposure to the complainant's research idea from an NSF source. A comparison of the complainant's first proposal and the subject's paper revealed that they were alike in that they described a similar research idea, but that they were different in that they described dissimilar

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research approaches. OIG's review of the subject's proposals (including his proposal submitted concurrently with the receipt of the complainant's first proposal) and publications determined that he had been pursuing the same specific area of research for over ten years, a research area that overlapped significantly with the complainant's. We noted that the subject had been using the same experimental research approaches for the entire period, approaches that were different from the complainant's.

OIG determined that, following the subject's review of the complainant's first proposal, there were no unexpected or unreasonable changes in the subject's research direction or approach. Evidence suggested that the research idea presented in the subject's paper was the logical progression of his ongoing research rather than the result of his having reviewed the complainant's proposal. In addition, the evidence suggested that the subject may have started work on part of the research related to the research idea before he received the complainant's first proposal for review.

OIG concluded that the similarity between the complainant's research idea and the research work reported in the subject's paper was the consequence of two scientists working in the same specific area of research, each developing the same idea independently. There was no substance to the allegation that the subject, as a reviewer, had violated the confidentiality of peer review by misappropriating a research idea from the complainant's NSF proposal.

This inquiry was closed and no further action will be taken.

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