

CLOSEOUT FOR M95010001

This case came to OIG on January 4, 1995, when we received an "Open Letter from the Department of [redacted] [the department] to the College of [redacted]" (the open letter) at the University of [redacted] (the university). The letter, containing various allegations of impropriety, was sent anonymously. We received further allegations on February 6, 1995 from Dr. [redacted] NSF program director for the [redacted] Program, who had been sent the open letter and an additional anonymous letter. An anonymous informant subsequently sent the program director more information concerning this matter, which he also passed on to OIG. At a later date, OIG received additional allegations from members of the department.

The open letter alleged misrepresentations in NSF proposals, two of which proposals resulted in awards. These proposals were submitted by Dr. [redacted] (the subject), who heads the [redacted] (the Laboratory) at the university. The Laboratory is affiliated with the department but, according to the letter, there is considerable tension between the two. The awards involved are [redacted]¹ (Award #1) and [redacted]² (Award #2). These awards support personnel and equipment to improve the infrastructure for research, but do not support specific research projects as such. A declined proposal, [redacted]³ was also involved in the allegations.

The open letter alleged that the subject's proposals contained the following misrepresentations: (1) they misrepresented proposed equipment purchases as placing new equipment under the control of the subject's department and (2) they misrepresented the subject's

¹This award is entitled [redacted]
[redacted] " The subject's co-PIs are [redacted]
[redacted], and [redacted].

²This award is also entitled [redacted]
[redacted]. " The subject's co-PIs are [redacted]
[redacted], and [redacted].

³The proposal is entitled "[redacted]
[redacted]." The
subject's co-PIs are [redacted], [redacted],
[redacted], and [redacted].

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department as endorsing his plans for a new Ph.D. program at the university. In addition, an anonymous letter to the NSF program officer alleged that the subject misrepresented his credentials.

OIG examined the subject's three proposals and determined that he did not make any of the alleged misrepresentations. With regard to the first alleged misrepresentation, OIG determined that the proposals clearly indicated that equipment purchased with NSF funds would go to the Laboratory, which is affiliated with (but not controlled by) the department, and not to the department itself. In this respect, the representations in the proposal were entirely consistent with what the open letter claimed was the actual situation. With regard to the second allegation, the proposals referred to a new Ph.D. program involving researchers in the department, but never represented this planned program either as under the department's control or as endorsed by the department. There was no evidence or allegation in the open letter to suggest that the PI and other faculty associated with the Laboratory were not in fact planning such a program.

The anonymous letter alleged that the subject misrepresented his credentials by claiming to hold three Ph.D. degrees when he held only one. OIG examined the subject's curriculum vitae and determined that it indicates he holds only one Ph.D.

Department members later alleged that the subject misrepresented the participation of two researchers in the activities proposed as part of Award #2. Specifically, they alleged that Dr. [REDACTED] (the alleged co-PI) was listed as a co-PI without his knowledge or consent and that Dr. [REDACTED] (the alleged collaborator) was listed as a collaborator on certain research projects although he was not expected to return to the university after a leave of absence.

OIG examined NSF's award jacket for Award #2. We determined that the alleged co-PI was one of twelve researchers listed as co-PIs in the body of the proposal and on the cover page, but was not one of the five researchers whose signatures certified to NSF that they "accept responsibility for the scientific conduct of the project." We also determined that, shortly after the allegation concerning the alleged co-PI surfaced, the subject informed NSF that the alleged co-PI was no longer involved in the activities Award #2 supported. OIG concluded that the proposal's alleged misrepresentation of the alleged co-PI's involvement was not sufficiently serious that it could be considered misconduct in science. OIG concluded that there was no evidence that the alleged collaborator's involvement in the project was ever misrepresented to NSF. The award jacket indicated that NSF, at the same time it learned that the alleged co-PI was not involved in the project, was informed that the alleged collaborator had officially left the

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university. OIG concluded that, although the subject might have provided NSF with more complete and timely information about the alleged collaborator's involvement in the project, his action did not significantly deviate from accepted practice in this regard and could not be considered serious.

The open letter also raised the possibility that funds awarded the university in Award #1 had not been used for their intended purpose and "still sit in a university account." It further alleged that the equipment whose purchase the funds were intended to support had been purchased with other grant money. We referred this issue to OIG's investigations section, which, with assistance from OIG auditors, found that the evidence did not support this allegation.

After receiving information about internal dissension at the university that involved Award #2 and the declined proposal, NSF management received two reports from independent committees that scrutinized the activities that Award #2 was intended to support or facilitate. NSF management also learned that the university had attempted to alleviate its internal conflicts. In the light of all of this information, NSF chose to fund an additional increment to Award #2. OIG did not involve itself in these matters because they involved monitoring whether Award #2 was achieving its goals and did not raise issues of misconduct in science or other serious wrongdoing.

There is no evidence of misconduct in science in this case. This inquiry is closed, and no further action will be taken regarding this matter.

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