

## CLOSEOUT FOR M-96020003

On 8 February 1996, a program officer<sup>1</sup> brought an allegation of misconduct in science to OIG's attention. The complainant's<sup>2</sup> *ad hoc* review of an NSF proposal<sup>3</sup> contained an allegation of plagiarism against subject 1, the PI, and subject 2, the co-PI. He alleged that the subjects plagiarized text and a figure from a source document.<sup>4</sup> Although the source document was listed in the proposal's reference section and cited in the text of the proposal, the similar text and figure were neither distinguished<sup>5</sup> from the other material in the proposal nor cited to the source document.

OIG identified about 26 lines of similar or closely paraphrased text from the source document in the proposal that had not been distinguished from the other proposal's text or cited to the source document. All the identified text appeared in the background section of the proposal. OIG noted that the source document was cited in the body of the proposal three times, but not in connection with the apparently copied text or figure. OIG determined that the figure in the proposal that appeared to be identical to a figure in the source document represented general knowledge and, as such, was no longer considered as part of the allegation of plagiarism. OIG's comparison of the source document and the NSF proposal noted that several of the ideas presented in the proposal were substantially similar or identical to ideas in the source document, but they had not been cited to it giving rise to an allegation of intellectual theft.

OIG wrote to subject 1 requesting information about the allegations of verbatim plagiarism and intellectual theft. The subject said that the source document's author knew that the proposal contained information from the source document. The subject explained, and provided documentation to support his explanation, that originally the author was to be the co-PI on the proposal. As co-PI, the author received the preliminary draft of the proposal, which contained the identical and substantially similar text and ideas. After reading the draft proposal, the author provided comments and also explained that he had to

<sup>1</sup> The program officer, [REDACTED] works in the Division [REDACTED] in the Directorate for [REDACTED]

<sup>2</sup> The complainant [REDACTED] works at the [REDACTED]

<sup>3</sup> NSF proposal [REDACTED] entitled [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] was submitted by [REDACTED] (subject 1), a [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (subject 2), [REDACTED]

<sup>4</sup> The complete reference for the source document is [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]

<sup>5</sup> The term "distinguished," is used to indicate a method, such as font, indentation, or quotation marks, that is used to differentiate copied material and original material in a document.

## CLOSEOUT FOR M-96020003

withdraw as the co-PI because of other conflicting commitments on a competing project. At the same time, he gave subject 1 permission to use any of his ideas from one of his papers<sup>6</sup> in the proposal, suggested that subject 1 get another co-PI, and encouraged subject 1 to proceed with the submission of the proposal. Subject 1 arranged with subject 2 to be the new co-PI. Because subject 1 had prepared most of the proposal prior to adding subject 2 as a co-PI, subject 2 was no longer considered a subject in this case.

OIG's review of the author's paper showed that it summarized much of the information contained in the source document. OIG determined that the ideas in the subjects' proposal were in the paper the co-author had given the subject permission to use. OIG concluded that there was no substance to the allegation that subject 1 committed intellectual theft.

At OIG's request, subject 1 corrected the proposal to accurately identify and attribute the text that was derived from others' work. He sent corrected copies of the relevant pages of the proposal to the program officer. OIG verified that the subject had adequately addressed all the issues related to the copied text and that the corrected pages had been placed in the program jacket.

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

cc: staff scientist, AIG-Oversight, legal, IG

---

<sup>6</sup> The unpublished paper was entitled [REDACTED] by [REDACTED] it was presented [REDACTED]