

CLOSEOUT FOR M-97010002

On 11 January 1997, an NSF program officer¹ brought an allegation of misconduct in science to OIG's attention. The complainant,² an *ad hoc* reviewer of an NSF proposal,³ alleged that the subject⁴ had plagiarized text into the NSF proposal from a proposal previously declined by a joint U.S.-foreign government foundation (other proposal).⁵ According to the complainant, the other proposal had been submitted by the complainant and the subject's supervisor.⁶ OIG noted, however, that the subject had signed the other proposal as a co-PI.

OIG wrote to the complainant who provided a copy of the other proposal as well as materials he said he sent the subject's supervisor to assist in the preparation of the other proposal. He explained that the subject had permission to use the materials only when preparing the other proposal. According to the complainant, the subject copied background information and objectives from the complainant's materials and the other proposal into the NSF proposal. He stated that no scientific ideas had been misappropriated. As additional evidence that the subject had copied these materials, the complainant listed references that were common to the subject's NSF proposal, the other proposal, and the materials he had provided to the subject's supervisor.

OIG noted that the other proposal was submitted a year and a half before the subject's NSF proposal at a time when the subject was a young post-doctoral researcher in the supervisor's laboratory. The other proposal was signed by the supervisor as PI and the subject as co-PI, included the subject in the budget, and assigned the subject most of the responsibility for the U.S. portion of the research. The other proposal described a collaborative effort that included the complainant and two other scientists that were listed as co-PIs,⁷ but neither the complainant nor the other two scientists signed the proposal. OIG determined that the other proposal appeared to have been prepared, in part, from the

¹ [REDACTED] is a program officer for the [REDACTED] portion of the [REDACTED]

² The complainant, [REDACTED] is a faculty member in the [REDACTED] at the [REDACTED]

³ The subject was the sole PI for NSF proposal [REDACTED] entitled [REDACTED]

⁴ The subject, [REDACTED] is a faculty member in the [REDACTED]

⁵ The proposal was submitted to the [REDACTED] jointly supported by the [REDACTED]. The proposal, entitled [REDACTED] and submitted and signed by [REDACTED] the PI and the subject as the co-PI.

⁶ [REDACTED] is an [REDACTED]

⁷ [REDACTED] were the two other scientists. Both were from the [REDACTED]

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materials the complainant provided, and that it was likely that the subject assisted in its development. OIG noted that the subject's proposal contained text and references copied directly from the other proposal, not from the materials provided by the complainant to the subject's supervisor.

OIG determined that, because the subject was a co-PI of the other proposal and had participated in its development, the subject's use of materials from it was reasonable. The apparently copied portion of the other proposal into the subject's NSF proposal contained only the research project on which the subject was to be a participant, excluding the complainant's and the two other scientists' proposed project. Further, the subject stated, in the NSF proposal, that the proposed research had been developed in the supervisor's laboratory and that the supervisor would provide expertise and collaborate with the subject on the project. OIG noted that the subject and the supervisor published several papers together on the same general topic as the NSF proposal, consistent with the continued collaborative relationship between the subject and the subject's former supervisor.

Although the subject did apparently copy text and references from the other proposal, and this information was extracted from materials originally provided by the complainant, OIG concluded that these actions did not seriously deviate from accepted practices for the following reasons: 1) the subject was a co-PI on the other proposal, the source of the copied text and references; 2) the subject acknowledged the proposed work as the continuation of a previous and ongoing collaborative effort with the supervisor; 3) the subject had not misappropriated any scientific ideas. The NSF proposal described only that portion of the other proposal that had originally been assigned to the subject and the subject's supervisor; and 4) the subject copied none of the text from the complainant's materials.

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

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