

Closeout of M97010003

The complainant¹ informed the Assistant Inspector General of Oversight of allegations of misconduct in science, and on January 13, 1997, this inquiry was opened. The complainant requested and was granted confidential status. The complainant sent a letter, and supplementary draft manuscripts, alleging, among other things, that the subject² had:

- (a) incorporated into her manuscript, ideas and terminology from his manuscript;
- (b) cited papers in her manuscript that allegedly did not discuss the results the sentence containing the citation alluded to. The complaint said that he read the cited papers and they did not define or mention the results attributed to them. The complainant interpreted this as a misrepresentation of the research of the (incorrectly) cited authors;
- (c) included on the manuscript authors who were not at the university, but whose address indicated that they were at the university.

The complainant made other allegations that were not misconduct in science or did not involve NSF. These other concerns were passed along to the proper people to address those matters.³

Allegations (a), (b), and (c) were reviewed for this case and pertained to draft manuscripts. The complaint's source document, from which the subject allegedly plagiarized the complainant's ideas, was a draft manuscript. The subject's document, that allegedly contained the complainant's ideas, was also a draft manuscript, and was in fact, filled with corrections and changes. Draft manuscripts are preliminary versions of final manuscripts that may be submitted and published after the author and his or her co-authors have had a chance to make corrections. Some draft manuscripts are never submitted or published, making an allegation of intellectual theft hard to sustain. It is doubtful that the scientific community expects authors to adhere to scientific publication standards in their draft manuscripts as stringently as they are expected to adhere to those standards for submitted or published manuscripts.

Because the alleged errors were in a draft manuscript, allegations (b) and (c) would not be considered misconduct in science. Regarding allegation (b), authors are expected to properly reference their cited sources, but an incorrect citation in a draft manuscript, not submitted for publication, could not be sufficiently serious to constitute a serious deviation from the accepted practices of the scientific

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community. When a manuscript is submitted to a journal for review and possible publication, it is among the responsibilities of the referees and editors of the journal to point out any references that are irrelevant or to suggest to the author including more relevant references. At that stage, the author has the opportunity to correct erroneous references of his or her own volition. Since this corrective feedback mechanism occurs before publication, the existence of citation errors in a submitted manuscript would not commonly be perceived by the scientific community to be as serious as the existence of such errors in a published article. Regarding allegation (c), the address associated with an author on a paper does not necessarily mean that the author is employed at the institution whose address is listed. For example, the address could indicate that the author was temporarily at the institution when the research discussed in the manuscript was performed. It may also mean that the author will receive any correspondence sent to that address.

Allegation (a) was based on a one paragraph explanation of the technical meaning of a few specific words. The complainant alleged that the subject's explanation and use of the technical words was a special case of a more general theory he developed. There is no evidence that the subject took ideas or text from the complainant's draft document, indeed, most of the terminology is common to the field in which the subject has published, and the specific technical aspects could derive from the subject's research in that field. Thus, there was nothing in the subject's draft document that was unique to the complainant's draft document. Furthermore, the subject's paragraph discussion, which the complainant alleged was a special case of his broader, more general theory, in no way infringes on the publication, usefulness, or intellectual ownership of the complainant's more general theory.

This inquiry into allegations of misconduct in science is closed and no further action will be taken on this case.

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