CLOSEOUT FOR M97020007

This case came to OIG on February 7, 1997, when Dr. [redacted] (the program officer), Deputy Director of NSF's Division of [redacted] supplied us with a letter from Dr. [redacted] (the complainant) of [redacted] in [redacted] The complainant expressed concern about possible misconduct in science by Drs. [redacted] of the [redacted] and [redacted] formerly of [redacted] (the subjects). The complainant was concerned that one or both subjects submitted a review that dishonestly criticized research the subject(s), as evidenced by the fact that they later did the research themselves, genuinely believed to be meritorious (Concern #1). The complainant's letter suggested additional concerns about possible intellectual theft (Concern #2) and violation of the integrity of NSF's confidential merit review process (Concern #3).

The complainant submitted a proposal[1] that NSF declined to fund. When submitting the proposal, the complainant named the subjects as potential reviewers. The complainant developed his concerns when he saw a publication[2] by the subjects in which they allegedly reported results that the complainant sought to achieve in the project the complainant proposed to NSF and NSF declined to fund.

OIG examined the merit reviews of the complainant's proposal and related NSF records that documented the basis for NSF's decision to decline the complainant's proposal. We determined that neither subject had submitted a review that dishonestly criticized the proposal to prevent NSF from funding it.[3] We concluded that there was no substance to Concern #1.

With regard to Concerns #2 and #3, OIG obtained evidence indicating that the subjects had a history of working in the general scientific area of the complainant's proposal, had initiated their project prior to the review of the complainant's proposal, and had not misused his proposal. OIG noted that scientists often choose substantially similar research topics

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[1] The proposal [redacted] was entitled [redacted]" It was submitted by the complainant when he was affiliated with the [redacted] NSF declined to fund the proposal.

[2] The publication cited by the complainant was [redacted]

[3] Nothing in this sentence should be taken to imply that either subject reviewed or even received the proposal. The sentence says only that the file contained no reviews by either subject that dishonestly criticized the proposal.

independently and that the fact that two research groups did so does not, by itself, suggest that one derived its research ideas from the other.

In his letter to NSF, the complainant asked whether either of the subjects "reviewed my grant proposal" or was "in any way responsible for rejecting it." OIG informed the complainant that as a matter of policy NSF does not disclose the identities of reviewers (Proposal and Award Manual, Section 123f) and that we could neither affirm nor deny that the subjects had reviewed the complainant's proposal.

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

cc: Acting Deputy Assistant Inspector General Oversight, Assistant Inspector General Oversight, IG