

Closeout for M97060020

On June 23, 1997, we received a letter from the complainant¹ alleging the subject² committed intellectual theft because the subject's paper contained some similarities of ideas and results to his unpublished manuscript. The complainant believed the subject, who was the thesis advisor of the complainant, took ideas from a manuscript the complainant was preparing for his thesis and published them.³ The complainant said he raised this issue with a Dean⁴ in his university who told him to withdraw the allegation. The complainant alleged that the Dean retaliated against him by expelling him from the university when he did not retract his allegation against the subject. The complainant agreed to provide documentation to support his allegations of intellectual theft and retaliation.

The complainant provided copies of his manuscript, the subject's paper, an earlier paper of the subject's from which both complainant and subject use as a starting point for their calculations, and a document comparing the complainant's and subject's manuscripts. Both the complainant and the subject begin from the same point and have the same goal (to extend the applicability of the subject's earlier result). Because of the similar starting point and end goal, it is not unexpected that there might be some similarities in methodology and some use of the same terminology; it is possible that such similarities are common to the field. We asked a scientist in the field⁵ to compare the documents the complainant provided and provide an assessment of his allegation of intellectual theft.

The scientist discussed specific technical points about why he believed the two manuscripts were different. The scientist wrote that the complainant's manuscript used one method while the subject's paper used a different method to achieve their respective results. He also noted that their respective approaches and notation was very different, and the similarities in the two manuscripts was not obvious and required a lot of technical discussion. He thought that although there was some overlap in the ideas, the possibility of intellectual theft was "remote" and "it is much more likely that this is a case of parallel discovery by two sets of authors who began by trying [to] extend the results of the same paper."

The complainant did not provide the documents that he said he would to support his allegation of retaliation. Without such documentation, there is no evidence to substantiate that allegation.

OIG believes the scientist's analysis is fair, accurate, and reasonable. Because of their different approaches to a similar problem, the complainant could submit his

¹ (footnote redacted).

² (footnote redacted).

³ (footnote redacted).

⁴ (footnote redacted).

⁵ (footnote redacted).

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paper for publication just as the subject did. Based on the evidence we have, this inquiry is hereby closed and no further action will be taken on this case.

cc: Legal, AIG-Oversight, IG