

Closeout for M98100035

A graduate student¹ alleged retaliation by a professor² and university officials³ after raising questions about possible plagiarism by the professor. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) had previously examined the plagiarism allegation in case M97060020 and found it to be without merit [REDACTED]

In the winter of 1994, the professor, who served as the graduate student's thesis advisor, presented a possible thesis topic involving a mathematical conjecture. The graduate student spent several years writing and revising a solution to this conjecture, with infrequent assistance and commentary from the professor.

In March 1997, the student completed a revised solution to the mathematical conjecture, which the professor criticized for containing a significant error. After this discussion, the graduate student presented the manuscript to a colleague⁴ of the professor, and learned the professor and the colleague recently completed a similar solution to the same mathematical conjecture.⁵ The graduate student suspected plagiarism and contacted university officials.

The plagiarism allegation placed considerable strain on the relationship between the professor and the graduate student. Accordingly, another professor⁶ offered to serve as a replacement advisor. However this professor retracted the offer after learning the graduate student discussed the alleged plagiarism with a faculty member⁷ at a different university.

In an effort to resolve the plagiarism allegation, university officials requested a review of the manuscripts. After several professors⁸ dismissed the plagiarism allegation, university officials requested a written apology from the graduate student. According to the university, this written apology would help repair the strained relationships in the small mathematics department and serve as a pedagogic lesson for the graduate student.

However, the graduate student did not accept the dismissal of the plagiarism allegation and expressed reluctance about signing a written apology. After extended discussions about the exact nature of the written apology and the graduate student's future at the university, in late May 1997, university officials set a deadline for a written apology. This deadline passed without delivery of a written apology.

In accordance with university policy of prohibiting financial assistance to a graduate student without a thesis advisor, in early June 1997, university officials

¹ [Footnote redacted].

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informed the graduate student that it had terminated his financial aid. In addition, the graduate student would not be permitted to register in the fall of 1997 without a replacement advisor. The graduate student did not find a replacement advisor and subsequently withdrew from the university.

After considering all relevant information, OIG concludes that university officials completely and fairly assessed the plagiarism allegation and expended significant time and resources on finding an appropriate resolution that would repair the professor's professional reputation while allowing the graduate student to complete a thesis with the professor or a replacement advisor. The professor and university officials did not retaliate against the graduate student for raising a good faith allegation of plagiarism. This case is closed.

Cc: Integrity, IG