

On April 21, 1998, the complainant¹ called the Office of Inspector General (OIG) with allegations that her former graduate student², planned to publish data from an experiment funded by the complainant's NSF grants without providing proper credit to the complainant. The complainant learned of the former graduate student's manuscript as a journal reviewer. She had provided editorial changes on the manuscript, but the former graduate student apparently submitted the manuscript without her changes.

The complainant asked if NSF could send a letter to one journal³ about her ownership of the data and request proper authorship credit on any published manuscript involving her NSF grants. OIG discussed these concepts with the complainant and suggested that she request a letter to this journal from her university. In addition, OIG advised the complainant that if the former graduate student should publish a manuscript which she believed did not provide her with appropriate credit, the complainant should call our office. OIG never received any additional correspondence from the complainant regarding this former graduate student. A search on the ISI Citation and ArticleFirst databases found no publications by the former graduate student from 1998-1999.

On April 2, 1999, OIG received an email message from an NSF program director⁴ which contained another allegation from the complainant. According to this allegation, the complainant suspected that two scientists⁵ (the subjects) stole her experimental hypothesis and subsequently submitted a manuscript⁶ for publication which tested this experimental hypothesis. The complainant alleged the subjects learned of her experimental hypothesis as confidential reviewers of her NSF proposal.⁷

The complainant provided a copy of the manuscript which the subjects submitted sequentially to two journals⁸ along with comments sent by the complainant to the journal editors. According to one letter to the editor, the complainant stated that one subject asked about her NSF proposal at a meeting, but the complainant provided "virtually no information" to the subject. In addition, in her letter to OIG, the complainant conceded "it is not impossible" the subjects independently conceived their experimental hypothesis after reading an earlier manuscript published by the complainant.⁹ Although the subjects cite her manuscript, the complainant questioned whether the subjects could implement a

¹ [footnote redacted]

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⁴ [footnote redacted]

⁵ [footnote redacted]

⁶ This manuscript is entitled [footnote redacted]

⁷ [footnote redacted]

⁸ [footnote redacted]

⁹ [footnote redacted]

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test of their experimental hypothesis in such a short period of time after the publication of her manuscript.

Consistent with NSF policy to keep the identity of reviewers confidential, OIG neither affirms nor denies the subjects ever reviewed or even received a copy of the complainant's proposal. However, OIG examined the complainant's proposal and related NSF records along with the subjects' manuscript and determined the subjects did not obtain the complainant's experimental hypothesis from her NSF proposal.

As OIG has determined the complainant's allegations against the former graduate student and the subjects are without merit, this inquiry is closed and no further action will be taken on this case.

cc: Integrity, IG