



CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A08100050

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We reviewed an allegation that a PI,¹ his student,² and a colleague³ had plagiarized the look-and-feel of a graphical user interface (GUI) in their NSF-funded⁴ development of open-source software.⁵ The alleged source was a commercial product⁶ developed through earlier NSF SBIR awards⁷ to an unrelated researcher.⁸ The university⁹ completed an inquiry prior to our involvement and closed the matter.

At our request, the university conducted an investigation, finding no research misconduct because it could identify no standards in the relevant research community for plagiarism with respect to GUIs. However, we found relevant standards for the professional associations in whose journals the subjects published, as well as the university's own academic conduct policy for students, which has a sufficiently broad scope to include the alleged copying of non-textual design as plagiarism.¹⁰ It appeared that the source material served as a template from which the subjects copied both functional and distinctive non-functional elements. However, the development of open-source software is characterized by constant change (including the look and feel of the GUI) without the archiving of previous versions. Because of the passage of time, evidence of the version(s) alleged to have the most similarities to the source is sparse and thus confounds further substantiation of the allegation.¹¹

Accordingly, this case is closed.

1 [REDACTED]

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6 [REDACTED]

7 In particular NSF awards [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

¹⁰ The university policy applicable to research faculty contained no definition for plagiarism.

¹¹ If archived versions of the software in different developmental stages existed, those files do not appear to have been secured by the university either during its inquiry or investigation.