



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A11020011

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We requested a university<sup>1</sup> conduct an Inquiry to into several allegations against one of its faculty members (the subject)<sup>2</sup> supported by NSF. The university assigned a committee to examine the allegations, which were 1) plagiarism in an article<sup>3</sup>; 2) misrepresentation of research in that same article; 3) falsification of figures (images) in a paper<sup>4</sup>; and 4) misrepresentation of research equipment and laboratory environment in that same paper.

Regarding the plagiarism (1), the committee learned the university had already investigated this matter and taken appropriate action. The first author, not the subject, was responsible for the plagiarism; the university reprimanded that individual, and the article was withdrawn. Documentation supporting the previous action was supplied to the committee (and us). Accordingly, it dismissed this allegation. We concurred.

Allegation (2) had been addressed and dismissed during the university's preliminary review. The committee agreed with that conclusion and dismissed this allegation as well. We independently reviewed the article and found none of the alleged misrepresentation, so we agreed with the conclusion as well.

For the alleged image falsification (3), the specific allegation was that the subject had taken multiple images, merged them together, and misrepresented that as a single image for three images in the paper. The committee noted for two images that certain physical characteristics of the imaged object were present in the published image, and also in multiple raw images taken under different conditions, in such a way that they could not have been falsified. Thus, the committee concluded a preponderance of evidence did not support the allegation. We concurred, but noted the committee did not address one of the allegedly falsified figures, so we asked it to specifically address that figure. The committee concluded this figure was a combination of two images, but this published image was only representative of a process, and the image itself was not falsified. We agree with the committee's conclusion about the three images.

With respect to the alleged misrepresentations (4), the committee interviewed lab

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<sup>1</sup> [redacted]

<sup>2</sup> The subject is [redacted]

<sup>3</sup>

[redacted]

<sup>4</sup>

[redacted]



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personnel and obtained information from the equipment manufacturer about the equipment's capabilities. It concluded the equipment could perform as the subject described in the paper. It likewise concluded the subject's description of the laboratory environment was accurate. We concurred with the committee about the equipment usage, but did not follow the committee's reasoning about the laboratory environment, so we asked for clarification. The committee provided an expanded explanation about its conclusions and provided pictures of its inspection of the laboratory supporting its conclusions. We agreed with the committee that a preponderance of evidence does not support this allegation.

Thus, the committee dismissed two of the allegations and concluded there was insufficient evidence supporting the remaining two allegations. Based on the university's inquiry and clarification, we concur with all the university's conclusions regarding the allegations. Accordingly, this case is *closed* with no further action taken.