

CLOSEOUT FOR M-91040019

On April 4, 1991, [REDACTED] program manager [REDACTED] at NSF, brought an allegation of misconduct in science to OIG's attention. He had received the allegation in a letter from the complainant, [REDACTED] a Professor [REDACTED]. The complainant stated that, in her role as an ad hoc reviewer, she had received NSF proposal [REDACTED] submitted by the subject, [REDACTED] a Professor [REDACTED] (the institution). The complainant alleged that the subject's proposal contained similar techniques to those she described in four of her proposals: two NSF proposals; one Office of Naval Research (ONR) proposal; and one Petroleum Research Foundation (PRF) proposal. The two NSF proposals included a funded [REDACTED] proposal [REDACTED] and a declined proposal, [REDACTED]. The ONR proposal was entitled [REDACTED] and was submitted with another PI. The PRF proposal [REDACTED]. Specifically, she alleged that the subject committed intellectual theft when, as an external reviewer for all four of her proposals, he plagiarized ideas from them.

The complainant told OIG that, prior to the subject's submission of his NSF proposal, she had been to the subject's institution to present a seminar on her research and while there she had met with him and discussed in detail her research program and plans and provided him with reprints and preprints of her work. The complainant explained that she was aware at the time of the meeting that the subject planned to initiate research in her area of study, and that he already had the necessary laboratory equipment to do so. The complainant said that she probably, unintentionally, influenced the subject's research project as a result of the meeting.

At OIG's request, the complainant provided annotated copies of three of her proposals (the NSF funded proposal, the ONR proposal, and the PRF proposal) with the alleged plagiarized ideas from each cross-referenced to the subject's NSF proposal. OIG compared the complainant's three annotated proposals and her declined NSF proposal with the subject's NSF proposal. We found that the subject's proposal contained two citations for articles written by the complainant and a sentence describing the complainant's research work. We also noted that the subject's proposal contained several approaches that were similar to those described in the complainant's proposals.

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OIG's examination of NSF's proposal and award files showed that the subject had not reviewed either of the complainant's NSF proposals. We learned that the complainant's PRF proposal had not been reviewed by the subject. Further, OIG learned that the complainant's ONR proposal had not been externally reviewed. The subject did not have access to any of the ideas in these four proposals through the review process.

OIG concluded that the subject had not reviewed the four proposals submitted by the complainant. OIG could not exclude the possibility that he could have obtained a publicly available copy of her funded NSF proposal. However, OIG concluded that the complainant had contributed to the subject's thoughts about the research project described in his NSF proposal when she shared reprints, preprints and other information about her work with the subject. She knew he was pursuing research in her area of study. Typically, scientists pursue their interests in different research areas via discussions and meetings where information can be readily and easily shared, similar to what the subject did in this case. Such exchanges are important and generally accepted as part of the advancement of science. There was no evidence that the subject had developed ideas similar to the complainant's by methods other than those commonly accepted as part of the scientific process. OIG concluded that there was no substance to the allegation of intellectual theft.

This inquiry was closed and no further action will be taken.

cc: Staff Scientist, Deputy AIG-Oversight, AIG-Oversight, IG