

CLOSEOUT FOR M93090048

On September 21, 1993, Dr. [REDACTED] a program officer in the Division of [REDACTED] in the Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences, provided OIG with a letter he had received from the complainant, [REDACTED] who is a faculty member in the Department of [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] University. The complainant was an *ad hoc* reviewer for proposal [REDACTED], entitled "[REDACTED]". The proposal was submitted by Dr. [REDACTED] the subject and faculty member in the Department of [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]. The complainant alleged that the subject's proposal contained text plagiarized from the draft of a paper a scientist had presented at a scientific meeting. In response to the subject's request the scientist had given the subject a copy of the manuscript. The scientist had not, however, given the subject permission to reproduce its text.

OIG compared the scientist's unpublished paper with the subject's proposal and found one block of text in the subject's proposal, approximately 29 lines of text, that appeared to have been copied from the scientist's paper. The block of text in the subject's proposal contained text drawn from five separate sections of the scientist's paper. The copied text was interspersed with text original to the proposal. None of the copied text was offset from the remaining proposal text, nor was it accompanied by a citation to the complainant's paper. OIG also found three other sections of text in the proposal, approximately 15 lines, that were copied from three sections of the scientist's paper. Each of the three proposal sections was accompanied by a citation to the scientist's paper. Two of the sections were indented from the other proposal text, while the text in the remaining proposal section was not. The bibliography accompanying the proposal contained a reference to the scientist's paper.

In response to OIG's inquiry, the subject said that he had scanned the scientist's paper onto a computer disk and had then incorporated the text that was eventually reduced to one large block of text into the introduction of his proposal. Initially he had placed a citation to the source in an opening sentence; however, he had inadvertently removed that sentence when editing the proposal draft. He had postponed working on the introduction because it was so large and, by the time he returned to it, he had forgotten that the text in question had been taken from the work of another. He then edited and paraphrased the draft text as if it were original to him. This, he explained, was why the copied text in the five sections was interspersed with his own writing. He characterized his actions as "sloppy editing." He said that the reason the three remaining sections all contained citations to the scientist's paper but only two were offset was because he was following convention in his field.

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OIG concluded that the subject's responses did not sufficiently explain why the text copied from five sections of the scientist's paper and found as one block of text in the subject's proposal was not offset or cited to the source document. OIG concluded that an investigation was warranted. At the subject's institution's request, OIG deferred its own investigation into the allegation of plagiarism until the institution had completed its own. This institution's procedure for misconduct in science requires that, upon receipt of an allegation, an inquiry be performed before the initiation of an investigation is considered. Inquiries can lead to findings of misconduct and investigations are only performed under special circumstances.

With regard to the block of proposal text that contained copied material from five sections of the scientist's paper, the institution's inquiry committee said that the subject told them that his usual practice was to write copied text out by hand and to include the appropriate quotation marks and citations. However, in this case, he had been experimenting with a new technology, a scanner, and did not follow his usual practice. The committee found there was no reason to doubt the subject's statements. The committee concluded that the subject had correctly explained and followed his field's convention for handling the copied text found in the remaining three sections. The committee stated that the facts were supported by clear and convincing evidence and that, although the subject's actions were improper, he had, at worst, acted negligently or carelessly, but not with a level of intent that justified a finding of misconduct. The committee members said, "along with his carelessness under pressure of time, we believe it was his use of a new technology with which he was unfamiliar (the scanner), enabling a new experiment in a new technique in writing, that led to his submission of the NSF proposal with improperly copied material" OIG later learned that the scanner had been purchased a few months before the proposal was written. Hence, it is likely that the use of the scanner was new to the subject.

The officials that reviewed the report concurred with its findings and conclusions, but stated, "the careless behavior on the part of [the subject] is inconsistent with the normal expectation that attention and care would be given when using an unfamiliar technology." The report was forwarded to the university provost for action. The provost sent a memo to the director of university research stating that although the inquiry was concluded, his "concern about the issue/complaint [had not] ended." He informed OIG that he met with the subject to express his "dismay and to warn against any repetition of that kind of misappropriation of intellectual property." He said he was "convinced that [the subject] was aware of the consequences."

OIG accepted the institution's inquiry report and concluded that the subject's copying of text from a source document without offset or attribution was careless and sloppy. These actions, however, were mitigated by his correct use of offset and attribution for text copied from the same source document in three other places in his proposal. OIG concluded that a recommendation for a finding of misconduct in science by NSF was not warranted in this

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case. Without the mitigating factors, OIG believes the subject's actions would probably be considered misconduct in science, specifically plagiarism.

At OIG's request, the subject amended NSF's copy of his proposal with new proposal pages in which he had correctly offset and attributed the copied text. OIG verified that the corrected pages were incorporated into the proposal jacket. OIG concluded that the institution's inquiry and the process of correcting the proposal pages provided the subject with adequate reminders of the scientific community's expectation for proper attribution. OIG concluded that there was no need to recommend to NSF additional actions to protect the Government's interests.

OIG accepted the institution's report and closed this case. No further action will be taken in this case.

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