

CLOSEOUT FOR M-95070031

On 28 July 1995, OIG learned of three allegations of misconduct in science.¹ First, it was alleged that subject #1² misrepresented the research effort of a former graduate student when he made him second author on a published paper.³ This first paper was allegedly an edited version of the graduate student's Master's thesis⁴ on which subject #1 had listed himself as the first of three authors and which did not cite the thesis. The third author, subject #2,⁵ was considered a subject by OIG because his role in the research and publication of the first paper was unknown. Second, it was alleged that subject #1 plagiarized three sentences from the student's thesis into a second paper.⁶ Third, OIG observed that the thesis contained several tables of data that had been reproduced in the first paper. However, some of the data in the apparently copied tables had been changed in the paper. There was no indication in the paper why the changes were made. This suggested that these changed data may have been falsified in the first paper. The work presented in the two papers and the thesis was supported by NSF.⁷

The student described his relationship with subject #1 as significantly worsening when he was writing his thesis because subject #1 was never satisfied with the drafts he prepared. Subject #1 requested repeated revisions and provided numerous comments. The student said that he finally provided subject #1 with a finished copy of his thesis and left the institution disgusted. He did not provide either subject with his forwarding address. When asked about the differences observed between data in the first paper and his thesis, the student said he thought these were the results of either corrections of errors made in his thesis or re-analyses of some of the data.

In response to OIG queries, subject #1 explained that the first paper contained text copied from the student's thesis as well as two additional pages of his own work. Subject #1 said he did not cite the thesis in the first paper because he did not view theses as valid scientific publications; they were not readily available to other scientists and they did not go through the normal scientific review process. He explained that, previously, his students were first authors on articles when they were writing about their theses' research and the theses were not cited in the article. He

¹ The complainant, [REDACTED] is a [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]

² Subject #1, [REDACTED] is a faculty member in the [REDACTED] (the institution).

³ The first paper, entitled [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was published in [REDACTED]

⁴ The Master's Thesis was entitled [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]

⁵ Subject #2, [REDACTED] is a faculty member in [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

⁶ The second paper, entitled [REDACTED] by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] subject #1 was published in the [REDACTED]

⁷ NSF proposal [REDACTED] was entitled [REDACTED] Subject #1 was the PI [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] proposal [REDACTED]

CLOSEOUT FOR M-95070031

explained that, in this case, he planned the research project, wrote most of the thesis and submitted the paper for publication. Subject #1 confirmed that the student did not provide a forwarding address after he left the institution. In addition, his description of the preparation of the thesis drafts was similar to the student's account. Subject #2 explained that he had provided the original samples for the study and had assisted in the revision of the first paper. Further, subject #2 said that he had noticed the student was second author, but did not ask subject #1 why.

OIG requested that an NSF program officer, who was an expert in the subjects' field of science, provide an opinion on allegation #1. The program officer concluded that "once stripped of the ill will of the student and the arrogance of the advisor," the matter was not serious. Further, the program officer said that subject #2 had done his job appropriately. OIG agreed with the program officer's assessment. The student had a responsibility to maintain professional contact with subject #1. Subject #1 should have (1) afforded each author the opportunity to participate in the production and review of the manuscript and (2) cited the thesis as a source document for much of the work in the first paper. We concluded that subject #1 deviated from accepted practice, but that his action was not a serious deviation and therefore it did not rise to the level of misconduct in science. However, subject #1's failure to cite the thesis in the first paper introduced an error in the research record. OIG suggested that subject #1 submit a correction to the journal editor. OIG concluded that subject #2 had not acted inappropriately as a co-author.

Regarding allegation #2, subject #1 explained that the three verbatim sentences in the second paper were from the thesis, but that he had used these same sentences in the first paper on which both he and the student were co-authors. He said that he often took passages directly from his earlier publications. OIG noted that the thesis was cited in the second paper, but not in connection with the verbatim sentences. OIG determined that subject #1 deviated from accepted practice when he used these sentences in the second paper without either placing them in quotation marks or offsetting them and acknowledging their source because he had not cited the origin of these sentences in the first paper. However, because subject #1 and the student were co-authors on the first paper, subject #1 did not seriously deviate from accepted practice and this action was not misconduct in science.

With respect to allegation #3, subject #1 explained that differences observed between some of the data in the thesis and the first paper were either the results of 1) corrections in the original thesis data, 2) the application of different statistical parameters in the first paper, or 3) errors in the published data. OIG determined that the explanations provided by subject #1 were either substantiated from the available evidence, or involved minor differences in the third figure of data points. Subject #2 said that all he knew about these data was that subject #1 had told him the differences were the result of errors in the thesis. OIG determined that allegation #3 had no substance.

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

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