

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A13050063

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We received an allegation that the subject took intellectual ideas from an NSF proposal (denoted P1¹) and included them in her NSF proposal (P2²) without providing appropriate credit. The complainant identified nine specific examples of possible plagiarism.³ NSF's database showed the subject was on the panel that reviewed P1, but the subject disclosed a conflict of interests with P1 and did not participate in its discussion. The subject submitted P2 approximately four months after P1 was submitted.

Because of the technical nature of the alleged intellectual theft, we asked an expert⁴ in the research area to review both proposals and the complainant's nine examples. The expert was not convinced that four of the examples, either taken separately or together, created enough doubt that the subject took those ideas from P1. He thought that in five of the examples, the subject's use of similar variables and notation, combined with failure to reference the PI of P1's (the PI's) research, appeared sufficiently suspicious that those allegations should be pursued.

We wrote to the subject asking about the alleged overlap between P1 and P2. The subject argued that her notation and some confusing citation created the misimpression that she relied on P1's research. The subject said she cited the PI's research in her early papers and thesis, but subsequently cites her own papers and thesis when discussing that idea, instead of the original sources. She provided an internal proposal—submitted to her university only six days after she was asked to serve on the panel—that contained some of the same ideas as in P2 and P1. She said she could not have prepared a proposal so quickly based on P1. She noted the research model in P1 was more complex than what she is using in P2.

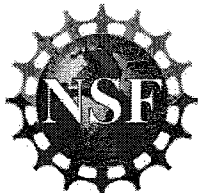
We had some concerns about parts of her response, particularly about her explanation that the reader should look up her original papers and thesis, and follow the citations there to learn the original sources of the ideas in her proposal. We shared her explanations with the expert, who agreed that her answers did not

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completely dispel the allegation, but, nevertheless, thought her overall explanation was sufficient to address the noted similarities. Based on the subject's response and both our and the expert's assessment, we conclude further investigation is not necessary. Thus, we are closing this case and sending the subject a questionable research practice letter advising her to be careful about citing original material and to be clearer with her overall citations.