



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A15080048

Page 1 of 2

A co-PI of an NSF grant provided his collaborators with interview data he said he collected from students. The interview data were used in a conference presentation and a manuscript submitted for publication. The co-PI's colleagues questioned his data during the editing process of the manuscript because the co-PI altered the quotations attributed to the students. The co-PI's university was informed and conducted an inquiry into the allegation of falsification. The inquiry concluded that there was no evidence to independently confirm the data were gathered from actual student interviews; there were missing recordings, transcripts, Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent forms, and reimbursement forms, and it questioned whether the co-PI even conducted the interviews, which raised the possibility of fabrication as well as falsification. The university concluded an investigation was warranted and notified us.

Although the co-PI initially said he would cooperate with the university investigation committee's (IC) investigation, he shortly thereafter ceased cooperating and left the university. The IC's investigation found there were three instances in which the co-PI purportedly interviewed students and collected data, but could not produce the data.

Regarding the first instance, the co-PI told differing versions of why the data were missing to his collaborators, the IRB, and the IC. As with the inquiry, the IC could not find any independent documentation supporting the premise that the co-PI carried out more than a dozen interviews of students, including documentation required to be kept in accordance with IRB guidance and basic data management standards. The co-PI's collaborators agreed to remove the co-PI's data from their manuscript and conference proceeding.

Regarding the second instance, when the co-PI's collaborators asked him for the raw recordings, he first said the data were inaccessible due to computer problems, and then asked a student, who was not involved in the original interview, to read from a "transcript" the co-PI wrote and provided to the student. The co-PI's collaborators concluded the data were invalid and retracted the publication resulting from that project.

Concerning the third instance, the IC interviewed one of the co-PI's graduate students and learned the co-PI had provided her with data from interviews he claimed to have conducted. After the IC's investigation began, the co-PI sent this graduate student a letter admitting he had cut corners with data, but did not specify which data. However, consistent with the first and second instances, he did not provide her with the raw recordings when she asked for them. The graduate student ultimately decided to retract the publication resulting from that project and not include those data in her dissertation.

The IC unanimously concluded the co-PI committed research misconduct in two of those three experiments (those relating to the first and second instances). Specifically, it concluded the co-PI fabricated and falsified student interviews in the first instance and falsified the recordings in the second instance. Because the co-PI did not specify to his graduate student which data he manipulated, the IC did not conclude a preponderance of evidence established research misconduct



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: A15-48

Page 2 of 2

for the third instance. The IC concluded the co-PI acted with culpable intent, his actions grossly departed from accepted standards of his professional and University research communities, and there was evidence of a pattern. Accordingly, the University determined the co-PI committed research misconduct.

The co-PI exhibited harmful behavior in nearly every aspect of practicing science: data management and data integrity, collaboration, and mentoring. We concur with the University that the co-PI acted culpably in fabricating and falsifying data and committed research misconduct. He did not follow the guidance or protocols of his IRB, or basic scientific rigor, in collecting or archiving his interview data. He lied to his collaborators about the authenticity of his data. He admitted to his graduate student that he manipulated interview data to ensure it supported what he wanted it to. Each of these actions significantly depart from the accepted standards of his, or any, research community. We recommended NSF make a finding of research misconduct and send the co-PI a letter of reprimand informing him of NSF's finding. We further recommended that NSF require the co-PI to take an interactive responsible conduct of research course within 1 year; debar him for 5 years; require him to provide certifications and assurances for 6 years; and prohibit him from serving as a reviewer, advisor, or consultant for 1 year following the end of the debarment. NSF agreed with our recommendations, except it debarred the co-PI for 3 years. Accordingly, this case is closed with no further action taken.