



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-16-0069-O

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A graduate student led an NSF-funded project that resulted in the submission of a computer-science manuscript to a conference. The conference reviewer rejected the manuscript because he could not verify several code examples allegedly gathered from public code repositories. The graduate student's advisor confirmed the reviewer's finding and confronted the student, who admitted to embellishing examples to better illustrate support for their results. The advisor notified the University, which conducted an investigation. The investigation committee concluded the student falsified a variety of unspecified data. A university office overseeing student conduct determined the discipline should be a 1-year suspension. The student appealed the suspension, and the University held a hearing, during which the student admitted to embellishing a specific example. The judicial panel concluded the student's embellishment constituted misconduct and recommended a 6-month suspension. The student again appealed the suspension, and the University President upheld the finding and sanction.

We conducted an independent investigation and found additional code examples that the student falsified. We sought an assessment by experts at NSF as to whether those falsified examples constituted research misconduct. The NSF experts concluded that they did, as did the embellishment on which the University made a finding. We recommended NSF make a finding of research misconduct in a letter of reprimand, require remedial training, and for 3 years, require certifications and assurances, bar the former student from participating as a peer reviewer, and require a data management plan. NSF issued a letter of reprimand with a finding of research misconduct. This case is closed with no further action taken.