



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-18-0052-O

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NSF OIG received allegations that a PI at an institution manipulated an image in one publication and plagiarized material in two other publications. The three publications acknowledged NSF award support. We referred an inquiry to the university. Following completion of the inquiry report, the university concluded the manipulated image was enhanced for visualization purposes in the publication and was not an act of research misconduct. The university counseled the PI to disclose such image enhancements in the figure caption in forthcoming publications. For the identified plagiarism in the two publications, the inquiry committee assessed evidence provided by the PI and concluded that some of the questioned material could be explained by the PI's use of common knowledge within her scientific discipline. However, the inquiry committee recommended an investigation to explore the issue of common knowledge and accepted practices within the scientific community to determine if the copied material constituted acts of plagiarism. The university agreed with the inquiry committee, and we referred an investigation to the university.

After reviewing evidence provided by the PI, the convened investigation committee concluded the copied text represented common knowledge within the specific scientific discipline. Thus, they were not acts of plagiarism but the consequence of improper paraphrasing and citation practices. The investigation committee also assessed several recent publications authored by the PI and concluded that one publication contained a minor amount of plagiarism that did not constitute misconduct. The university agreed with the investigation committee's recommended actions of instructing the PI to complete additional research ethics and science writing training and, for 2 years, have her submitted research documents scanned by plagiarism detection software.

We accepted the university's findings with the exception that we found that two publications did contain a small amount of plagiarism that could not be solely explained by the practice of using common language. The identified copied text originated from other publications that were referenced in the PI's publications but not appropriately demarcated. We concluded the amount of copied text in the two publications and the other publication identified by the investigation committee was minimal and did not constitute acts of research misconduct.

We sent the PI a questionable practices letter, reminding her to appropriately cite material and complete the actions imposed by the university. In regard to the image enhancement issue assessed during the university's inquiry, we reminded the PI to follow guidelines of the corresponding journal and applicable standards of her scientific community in the presentation of images.

Accordingly, this case is closed with no further action taken.