



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-17-0005-O

Page 1 of 1

A PI (Subject) obtained an awarded NSF proposal through a Freedom of Information Act request and later used it as a source to craft his own proposal submission to the same NSF program. Approximately one-half of the Subject's proposal was substantially similar to the source proposal, including ideas, structure, and text copied without attribution.

We referred an investigation to the Subject's university, which found that the Subject committed "structural plagiarism," or a mirroring of the source proposal's ideas, organization, and arguments. The university concluded the Subject's proposal and the source proposal were "essentially the same." It further concluded the Subject intentionally plagiarized and that this magnitude of structural plagiarism constituted a significant departure from accepted practices.

We agreed with the university. We also learned that during our inquiry the PI submitted his proposal to NSF again, with minimal revisions. This time NSF awarded the proposal. The cognizant NSF Program Officer noted that had the Subject properly identified ideas that were not original to him, the panel would have ranked the proposal lower, due to the number of good proposals submitted. However, because the award supports only scholarships, the impact of an award termination would most heavily fall on students already partway through a college career. We therefore did not recommend termination.

NSF made a finding of research misconduct and issued a letter of reprimand. In addition, NSF:

- a. Required the Subject to certify completion of the actions the university mandated as a result of its investigation;
- b. Required the Subject to complete an instructor-led responsible conduct of research course within 1 year;
- c. Required the Subject to submit certifications and assurances to NSF for 3 years; and
- d. Prohibited the PI from serving as a reviewer, consultant, or advisor for NSF for 3 years.

This case is **closed** with no further action taken.