



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-18-0104-O

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A University informed us that it had completed an inquiry into possible data falsification by a PI and a former graduate student (the Subject) and determined an investigation was warranted. We concurred and referred the investigation to the University.

At issue were multiple sets of identical figures that appeared in different works with different labels, all of which could not be correct. The source data and the lab notebooks required to tie the data to the allegedly false figures were never found, partly due to the fact that the experiments in question had been conducted at least 8 years prior to the investigation. The Subject claimed any discrepancies in the labelling of the figures between works were errors or typos. The University deemed that errors or typos on this scale could only result from the reckless mishandling of data. The University also noted several instances where it concluded that the Subject acted intentionally. The University concluded the Subject committed research misconduct and found that although the PI did not commit research misconduct, he did not provide proper oversight of the Subject.

The University barred the Subject from applying for funding through the University for 2 years; required she complete extensive Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) training before being allowed to engage in research at the University again; and required that if she were to ever be re-hired by University, her research must be overseen by an independent researcher. The University required the PI establish data management and maintenance guidelines for his laboratories and that he participate in RCR training.

At the time the University initiated its inquiry, the Subject was no longer at the University; she was employed by a Federal Entity. The Federal Entity also investigated similar allegations against the Subject, and ultimately terminated her. In the meantime, the Subject left academia, and the current disposition of the Subject makes a return to academia highly improbable.

We concur with the University's findings for both the Subject and the PI. Regarding the Subject, we concluded the totality of the circumstances — the age of the misconduct, the Subject's departure from academia, and the University's and Federal Entity's actions — adequately protected the federal government's interests. Therefore, no further action was necessary beyond sending her a letter reminding her that should she return to academia, she would have a responsibility to properly and accurately manage, maintain, and report data. We also sent the PI a letter reminding him of his responsibility to oversee graduate students and enforce proper data management and reporting practices in his lab.

This case is closed with no further action taken.