



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

## CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-21-0041-O

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We investigated an allegation by a scientist (Complainant) that his Employer and a collaborating University retaliated against him for reporting a gross waste of Federal funds on a research cruise (Cruise) operated by the University. The Complainant alleged that as a result of his negative Cruise report and his advance notice to University employees of his intention to write a negative report, the University initiated an internal investigation involving allegations of his gender bias and unprofessional behavior during the Cruise. Following the internal investigation, the University forwarded its findings to the Employer in the form of a complaint. The Employer then conducted its own investigation, and consequently reduced the Complainant's salary, rendered him ineligible for a merit raise the following year, and barred him from serving as a Chief Scientist on future cruises.

Our investigation determined that:

- (1) The Complainant made multiple protected disclosures. They included:
  - a. his threat to write a negative report about the Cruise;
  - b. a written communication to a colleague, which was then forwarded with the Complainant's permission to a University management official;
  - c. a written communication detailing the Complainant's criticisms of the Cruise to an NSF program manager; and
  - d. his written negative assessment that was then forwarded to NSF.
- (2) Within 7 months of the Complainant's initial disclosure, the Employer levied sanctions against him based on allegations by University employees that he created a hostile work environment.
- (3) The Employer conducted its own investigation of the Cruise events and stated during an interview with OIG that there was no outside influence on their investigation and findings.
- (4) The Employer stated the severity of the Complainant's sanctions was informed by a previous finding for similar misconduct against the Complainant.

We submitted a report of our findings to NSF and shared redacted copies with the Complainant, the University, and the Employer. NSF reviewed the report and concluded that the Employer and the University did not subject the Complainant to a prohibited reprisal. NSF provided its decision to the Employer, the University, and the Complainant.

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