



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-19-0025-O

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An awardee university investigated a recent Ph.D. graduate for data fabrication and falsification after his former mentor could not find the underlying data for more than a dozen figures in his NSF-funded dissertation. The university substantiated the allegation under its research misconduct policy, made a finding of research misconduct, rescinded the graduate's doctoral degree, and required that he remove all reference to his degree from social media.

As the investigation was being finalized, the graduate copied files on a flash drive, renamed them as the missing data files, and deleted them, in hopes a new forensic review would uncover them. He also registered a web domain with a name similar to a real IT forensics firm and used this domain to email a forged letter with fake letterhead to the university official conducting the investigation. After university IT specialists uncovered the deception, the graduate confessed in a letter to the university. We accepted the university's report and concurred with its findings. Based on our recommendation, NSF made a finding of research misconduct; debarred the graduate for a period of three years; prohibited him from serving as a reviewer, advisor, or consultant for a period of four years; and imposed other requirements.

We referred the graduate's criminal conduct to the United States Attorney's Office for prosecution. To resolve the matter, the graduate agreed and signed a deferred prosecution agreement under which he admitted to falsification of records in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1519, and identity theft, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1028(a)(7). As part of the agreement, he acknowledged the accuracy of the facts surrounding the forged letter; agreed not to work for the federal government or on federally funded projects; complete 120 hours of community service; and abstain from committing any local, state, or federal crimes. If he abides by the terms of the agreement, the United States agrees not to seek or issue any charges related to his underlying conduct.

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