



NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS

CLOSEOUT MEMORANDUM

Case Number: I-22-0037-O

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Our office contacted a University following the retraction of a paper that acknowledged NSF support. The retraction notice stated the research could not be reproduced and an author's lab notebook was missing key experimental data records. The University was already conducting a research misconduct inquiry and notified us when its inquiry determined an investigation was warranted. We concurred and referred the investigation to the University.

After concluding, by a preponderance of the evidence, that most or all of the paper's data had been intentionally falsified and fabricated by the paper's graduate student author, the University made a research misconduct finding against the author. We addressed the author's conduct as a separate matter.

Based on the preponderance of the evidence, the University also found the paper's co-author, a supervising postdoctoral researcher (Subject), culpable of reckless research misconduct for failing to review data and showing indifference to the risk of falsified or fabricated data. The University concluded this behavior was a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community.

We reviewed the University's investigation report and supporting appendices and accepted the report's conclusions. We concurred with the University that Subject's reckless actions led to the publication of fabricated and falsified data and that his ignoring warning signs, such as the inability to replicate data and inadequate data records, was a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community. We agreed with the University that it is standard practice for senior lab personnel to review student data and perform experimental verification when directed to do so by a lab's principal investigator and that the Subject's failure to follow such practices, especially after questions of validity arose, was reckless.

We recommended that NSF make a research misconduct finding. We also recommended that NSF require completion of interactive responsible conduct of research training and, for 3 years: prohibit Subject from participating as a peer reviewer, advisor, or consultant for NSF; require Subject to submit detailed data management and mentoring plans to NSF with any NSF proposal; and require Subject to submit certifications and assurances that any proposals or reports submitted to NSF do not contain plagiarized, falsified, or fabricated material.

NSF accepted our recommended actions but reduced the requirements to 2 years.

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