NSF OIG CORNER

Strategies to Help Prevent Plagiarism

By Aliza I. Sacknovitz and Lisa Vonder Haar

Plagiarism — defined by federal policy as "the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit" — is a global issue within the research community. We conducted a review to provide insight into plagiarism as it relates to NSF-funded research and offer plagiarism prevention strategies to educational institutions based on our investigative experience. In this article, we'll go over some of the common reasons for plagiarism and strategies to help prevent plagiarism described in our recent report, *Observations from NSF Plagiarism Investigations and Strategies to Prevent Plagiarism.*

Subjects of the Review

We analyzed 134 plagiarism cases involving researchers who applied for or received NSF funding and against whom NSF made a finding of research misconduct. The subjects were primarily faculty, often in junior academic positions, recent degree recipients, and/or educated outside of the U.S.

Reasons for Plagiarism

The most common reasons researchers gave for their plagiarism suggested they:

- did not know what constitutes appropriate citation;
- thought they used appropriate citation when they did not;
- did not understand what kinds of text require citation;
- considered appropriate citation less important in certain document sections;
- recklessly incorporated sources into drafts; and/or
- rushed through document preparation.

Strategies to Help Prevent Plagiarism from our report are summarized below:

Institutional Culture

- Foster a culture of research integrity by continually educating all faculty and students about the responsible conduct of research (RCR) and emphasizing academic integrity in all courses.
- Hold faculty and students to the same standards and treat plagiarism as seriously as other research misconduct.
- Ensure faculty and students can confidentially report research misconduct allegations and are aware of whistleblower protection rights.
- Publicize an institutional research misconduct policy that emphasizes the consequences of research misconduct; require faculty and students to certify they read the policy; and discuss the policy during RCR training.

RCR Training

- Require RCR training during orientation and refresher training every three years for all new faculty and students; identify existing faculty and students who have never taken RCR training and require them to enroll.
- Create ongoing RCR training targeting at-risk individuals such as inexperienced grant writers and those educated outside the U.S.
- Ensure all RCR training is interactive and conducted at least partially in person; addresses institution- and U.S.- based norms of appropriate citation; includes plagiarism definitions, exercises, and case studies; addresses common reasons for plagiarism; and addresses cultural differences related to research integrity.
- Emphasize potential consequences of plagiarism, such as harm to academic records, institutional and individual reputational harm, and retractions of published work.

Support

- Require a proposal writing course for inexperienced grant writers that includes proposal writing skills and emphasizes research integrity; establish a grant writing mentorship program.
- Consider the weight placed on successful grant submissions for tenure or promotions and balance the need to win awards with other required teaching and research obligations.
- Offer time and stress management courses for faculty and students to help alleviate academic and professional pressures.

Document Submission

- Make plagiarism detection software available and require faculty and students to use it before submitting internal or external documents.
- Consider a human- or a software-based quality assurance process for important external documents.
- Set review and revision deadlines in advance of proposal submission deadlines and include time to review plagiarism detection software results.

To report research misconduct or other forms of fraud, waste, abuse, or whistleblower reprisal, please contact us by?

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