

Report on Research Compliance Volume 17, Number 8. July 23, 2020 OIG Details Debarment Recommendations In Misconduct Cases; NSF Cites Timing for Inaction

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Despite data falsifications that were severe enough to require four retractions or corrections and which led to his demotion at a university and a redo of experiments, a postdoctoral researcher escaped any sanctions by the National Science Foundation primarily because, in NSF's view, its Office of Inspector General (OIG) took too long to close the case. However, there is no statute of limitations that applies in research misconduct cases, RRC has learned.

NSF has the authority to impose a range of sanctions, from lifetime debarment to training and integrity certifications, against researchers who commit misconduct, defined as fabrication, falsification and plagiarism. With some variation, these are the same that the HHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI) has at its disposal when it makes a finding involving research supported by Public Health Service agencies, such as NIH.

The unidentified researcher (his university is also not identified) is just one of two cases of research misconduct that NSF considered for action from Oct. 1, 2019, to March 31 of this year, according to OIG's recent semiannual report (SAR) to Congress.^{[\[1\]](#)}

Historically, NSF OIG does not identify the names of sanctioned investigators nor their institution—even when debarment is imposed. Debarment and exclusion are black marks that generally mean no federally supported institution can do business with them (at least for the period of the sanction), something organizations need to know. This information can be obtained through authorized access to a nonpublic database, but the general research community and the public (and news media) won't be able to learn about such principal investigators (PIs) or their institutions.

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