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Drexel Settles FCA Allegations, Accepts Prof's Resignation, Repayment

Drexel University has agreed to pay the federal government nearly \$190,000 to settle allegations that, for 10 years, one of its researchers spent U.S. awards on “gentlemen’s clubs and sports bars in the Philadelphia area,” according to an Oct. 7 announcement by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, part of the Department of Justice (DOJ).^[1] Chikaodinaka Nwankpa, who formerly headed Drexel’s Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, is accused of submitting “improper charges against the federal grants for items such as personal iTunes purchases and for ‘goods and services’ provided by Cheerleaders, Club Risque, and Tacony Club” from 2010 to 2017.

“The government’s investigation began in 2017 after Drexel voluntarily disclosed the improper charges to eight federal grants for energy and naval technology related research that it received from the Department of the Navy, the Department of Energy, and the National Science Foundation,” DOJ said. Nwankpa “repaid \$53,328 to Drexel, resigned his position in lieu of termination, and was debarred from federal government contracting for a period of six months. Drexel has implemented changes to prevent similar misconduct in the future, such as improvements to its charge approval and auditing policies.” The settlement resolves any False Claims Act (FCA) enforcement actions the government could potentially have brought against Drexel. Payments in such settlements often include penalties in addition to restitution. The DOJ announcement did not address this issue, and Drexel would not answer any of RRC’s questions, including about how the \$189,062 amount was calculated, but provided a statement that echoes sentiments in the DOJ announcement. Nor is it clear whether Nwankpa is facing any FCA or other related actions himself. In recent weeks, the government has indicted three principal investigators (PIs) for misuse of federal funds.^[2]

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