

## Report on Research Compliance Volume 18, Number 11. October 28, 2021 RRC E-Alerts: October 21, 2021

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By Theresa Defino

### **University of Washington Pays \$800,000 to Resolve FCA Allegations**

A professor in the University of Washington (UW) College of Engineering allegedly falsified award documents submitted to the National Science Foundation (NSF) from August 2018 to September 2019, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Washington announced. The brief announcement said the university is paying the government \$801,756 to resolve False Claims Act (FCA) allegations. The payment consists of "restitution and a penalty," the announcement said without providing specifics. However, according to settlement documents the government sent to RRC, \$400,878.37 is restitution.

The government did not disclose the nature of the alleged falsifications. The unidentified professor was a principal investigator (PI) on NSF awards, including for the "highly competitive 'Designing Materials to Revolutionize and Engineer our Future' program," the announcement said. Interestingly, and again, without providing any specifics, the government said the "investigation began with a whistleblower complaint regarding work performed under the grant and the grant application." However, AP reported, citing information from UW, that the PI "misrepresented the involvement of two researchers who in reality were not involved in the work... That could have made the grant application more attractive. The university was awarded about \$1.4 million for the work, which concerned how biology interacts with man-made solids at the molecular level."

[Link to settlement announcement](#)

[Link to AP article](#)

### **OIG Gives HHS 'Excellent' Rating on DATA Act Compliance, Suggests Improvements**

HHS' overall data quality related to compliance with the Digital Accountability and Transparency (DATA) Act earned the agency an "excellent" rating, according to the Office of Inspector General, "indicating that HHS's data was generally reliable," OIG reported Oct. 8. However, the performance audit also determined that the agency still needs to address "certain control deficiencies identified within HHS information technology systems that house the source data utilized as part of the reporting of the DATA Act." OIG said they found some "accuracy exceptions" related to the period of performance, including 21 for reporting of the period in total; 10 for the end date; and five for the potential end date. "In the 36 period of performance exceptions, the information in Files D1/D2 did not agree with the supporting documentation provided," OIG said.

As a result of the findings, OIG recommended that "HHS focus on refreshing the operating divisions' understanding of Departmental guidance and identifying those areas for which operating division training would be developed to prevent and detect future accuracy issues related to the performance dates." In its response, OIG officials said they were "pleased with the audit results" and "generally concur with the audit findings. HHS will focus increased attention on issues noted in the audit report, especially those relating to the 'period of performance' data element to identify root causes, implement corrective actions, and monitor remediation efforts."

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