

## Report on Research Compliance Volume 19, Number 4. March 24, 2022

### Vice Chancellor Blames Pressure for Plagiarism; Resigns After Faculty Pushed for Accountability

---

By Theresa Defino

Terry Magnuson, the long-time research vice chancellor at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, described his three instances of plagiarism inserted in a National Cancer Institute (NCI) award application as a “mistake” that occurred when he failed to correct text he previously entered as a “placeholder.” He knew time was short to address reviewer comments, Magnuson said, but didn’t want to let his lab staff down by not completing the resubmission.

Ultimately, disappointment of Magnuson wouldn’t just rest with his lab members but with UNC’s faculty. After the plagiarized text was found—discovered, RRC has learned, during NIH’s peer review process—and a misconduct finding announced by the HHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI), Magnuson, a geneticist, resigned.

But he didn’t step down until after a call by UNC faculty chair Mimi Chapman, who publicly asked why he had remained in his position days after the finding had been issued.<sup>[1]</sup> A day after his resignation was announced, Magnuson issued a lengthy statement explaining what happened and why he was resigning.<sup>[2]</sup> He did not apologize and blamed his schedule for the plagiarism. In an interview with RRC, Chapman raised questions about how UNC handled the situation and said it offered a different lesson than the one Magnuson described.

Plagiarism, along with fabrication and falsification, constitutes the type of violation defined as research misconduct under HHS regulations. ORI’s announcement about Magnuson said he had admitted to the misconduct and agreed to a supervisory plan for 22 months.<sup>[3]</sup> In addition to the fact that Magnuson may be the highest-ranking official charged with ensuring research integrity who has been found guilty of misconduct, the case is striking because Magnuson was still in the job at the time of the announcement, and, as noted, remained so for several days. The case also drew attention because the finding marked ORI’s first since September 2021.

According to ORI’s notice, Magnuson inserted plagiarized text from three online articles and one published paper into several sections of an NCI grant application, “Genome-wide dynamics of chromatin modifiers,” submitted March 1, 2021. He settled voluntarily with ORI effective Feb. 25 of this year, but ORI did not announce the agreement until March 8.

This document is only available to subscribers. Please log in or purchase access.

[Purchase Login](#)