

The Diane Archer Case

Professor Diane Archer is a tenured member of a biology department at a major Midwestern university. She has been in the department for 15 years, and during that time she has supervised the work of 20 Ph.D. students. As part of the mentoring process, she has worked closely with her students, teaching them the ropes of writing grant proposals and on occasion inviting students to assist her in reviewing NIH grant applications.

Professor Archer is currently in her last year on an NIH study section. As she is reviewing a group of proposals, she comes upon one written by Charlie West, a former graduate student of one of her close departmental colleagues. Archer knows and remembers Charlie West because she had solicited his help two years earlier in reviewing a proposal closely related to West's own area of research. As she now reads West's proposal, Archer is impressed with the scientific soundness and fine writing style in the Background section. She notes, however, the extremely terse and awkward phrasing in the Research Design and Methods.

Perplexed by this shift in style, Archer retrieves from her files the grant proposal West had reviewed with her two years earlier. She is dismayed to see that West has used verbatim virtually the entire Background section of the earlier proposal for his own current proposal.

Archer is torn. If she reports her discovery of West's plagiarism to the NIH, she knows she will have thrown this young scientist's otherwise promising scientific career into jeopardy. If, however, she says nothing, she will be shirking her responsibility to the NIH, as well as risking her own professional reputation, should the plagiarism be detected later.

She decides to contact West directly, and confront him with her finding. She plans to advise West that what he has done constitutes plagiarism and suggest to him that he withdraw the proposal. If West agrees, and withdraws the grant application, Archer feels she need take this incident no further.

Should Archer proceed with her plan to contact West? Why or why not?