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Purdue, Citing Research Misconduct, Punishes Scientist

By KENNETH CHANG

An appeals committee at Purdue University has upheld findings of misconduct on the part of a professor who claims to have created energy-generating fusion in a tabletop experiment, the university announced on Wednesday.

With the findings, William R. Woodson, the university's provost, has imposed punishment on the professor, Rusi P. Taleyarkhan. Dr. Taleyarkhan remains on the Purdue faculty, but his distinction as a "named professor" has been removed, along with an annual allotment of $25,000 that accompanied it.

In addition, he is prohibited from serving as a thesis adviser to graduate students for at least the next three years.

John Lewis, a lawyer for him, said Dr. Taleyarkhan was considering his options, among them challenging the sanctions in court.

Beginning with a paper published in the journal Science in 2002, Dr. Taleyarkhan, who then worked at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, has claimed that the force of sound waves can collapse bubbles in a liquid violently enough to generate conditions that fuse together hydrogen atoms, releasing energy. Scientists working in other laboratories have not been able to reproduce the experiments.

In July, an investigatory committee at Purdue, though coming to no conclusions about that finding itself, determined that Dr. Taleyarkhan had later falsely claimed independent confirmation of the work. Actually, the committee said, he had been involved in supervising the follow-up experiment, which was conducted by a postdoctoral researcher in his laboratory, and in writing the resulting scientific papers.

The committee also found that a graduate student in his laboratory whom Dr. Taleyarkhan added as an author to those follow-up papers had made no substantial contributions.

Dr. Taleyarkhan appealed the decision. The rejection of that appeal, by a three-member panel appointed by Dr. Woodson, the provost, was unanimous.

Responding to a request for comment, Dr. Taleyarkhan referred in an e-mail message to the investigatory committee's dismissal of 10 other accusations of misconduct, including improper presentation of data.

"The immense three-year-long investigation," he wrote, "has thrown out all allegations related to fraud and fabrication and therefore represents a success for the science."

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