

One Scientist Neglected His Grant Reports. Now U.S. Agencies Are Withholding Grants for an Entire University.

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The National Institutes of Health, the Office of Naval Research, and the U.S. Army are withholding all of their grants from the University of California at San Diego because one scientist failed to turn in required final reports for two of his grants, according to a message sent to the campus community on Tuesday.

“This action is the result of one Principal Investigator’s extended non-submission of final technical reports for two awards,” Corinne Peek-Asa, vice chancellor for research and innovation, wrote in the message. “If you are a PI receiving a new or continuing award from one of these agencies, you will receive a notice that the award will be delayed.”

UC San Diego has a total of \$688 million in research funding from the National Institutes of Health, distributed over nearly 1,200 projects, according to the NIH’s

RePORTER database. The university has \$10.4 million in grants from the Office of Naval Research for the fiscal year 2024, and \$7.8 million from the Department of the Army, according to USASpending.gov.

Peek-Asa's message linked to a [webpage](#) where the federal government posts a spreadsheet of grants for which it believes grantees haven't fulfilled their responsibilities. "All agencies watch" this list, Peek-Asa wrote. The spreadsheet doesn't name people in charge of the grants, only their institutions. But it does provide grant identification numbers, which *The Chronicle* cross-referenced with the NIH's RePORTER database to conclude that the late-submitting scientist is Jeffry S. Isaacson, a retired professor of neuroscience. The grants in question explored the neuroscience of smell and hearing.

The Chronicle reached Isaacson by phone and asked if he was the one who didn't turn in his reports: "Well, apparently," he said.

Isaacson retired in June 2022 and said he hasn't been in close contact with the university since then. "The first time I was personally aware that there was some issue involving these project reports was yesterday," he said. He received a call from his former chair on Tuesday, telling him that because of these reports he hadn't submitted, the university couldn't receive government funding.

"I'm in the process of submitting these reports right now," Isaacson said. "My understanding was, frankly, when I left UCSD, I thought UCSD would take care of these things."

The NIH and UC San Diego both declined to confirm whether Isaacson was the scientist in question. "We don't generally discuss details about individual grants," Amanda Fine, a spokesperson for the NIH, wrote in an email.

Matt Nagel, a spokesperson for the university, wrote in an email to *The Chronicle* that this is the first time any funding agency has paused payments to UC San Diego. The university was aware of the missing reports and sent "multiple reminder notes" to the scientist, according to Nagel. Officials are "working quickly to resolve this situation," he wrote, adding that the university recently increased the number of employees who work on ensuring grant-funded projects are completed properly.

"Most agencies require final financial, technical, invention, and equipment reports to be submitted within 90-120 days of the project end date," Peek-Asa said Tuesday in her message. "Federal sponsors are increasingly enforcing policies on delinquent awards, raising risks for UC San Diego's research portfolio."

Brian O'Leary and other Chronicle data reporters and editors contributed reporting.

Update (April 10, 2024, 6:52 p.m.): This article was updated with a statement from a University of California at San Diego spokesperson.