

About the contents of this case file:

**Animal Welfare Oversight Works on an Honor System That is Too Easy to Dupe:
The Death of a Laboratory Monkey Named ‘Ovechkin’ at Augusta University,
Augusta, GA**

Jay Hegdéⁱ

1. What are these documents about? Anatomy of a cover-up of animal welfare crimes

◆ These documents pertain to a whistle-blower case concerning the January 7, 2014 death of a monkey named Ovechkin in my federally funded research program (funded by the National Science Foundation – NSF) at Augusta University (AU; formerly known as Georgia Regents University or GRU) in Augusta, GA.

◆ The case is ongoingⁱⁱ. But because of space limitations, the documents in this repository cover only the first couple of years of this case. This is not a problem. Indeed, some of the most blatant cover-up in this case occurred during this period, so that the documents herein are enough to succinctly show what is wrong with the regulatory oversight of animal welfare in the US.

◆ Here’s a brief timeline of the case covered by these documents:

■ On January 7, 2014, Ovechkin died of an apparent overdose of a narcotic painkiller administered by an AU veterinarian.

■ Over the next weeks and months I witnessed various criminal and civil violations of federal and state laws, including (but not limited to) cover-up, with falsification and forgery of regulatory documents; fraud; lying to the government; and retaliation.

■ I kept blowing the whistle, and AU officials kept retaliating against me. They even had NSF terminate my grant, although they asserted no wrongdoing on my part.

■ I asked the Grievance Committee of the AU Faculty Senate to ask the AU president to refer the matter to federal and state authorities. The committee unanimously did so. But on March 24, 2016, the President of AU declined to follow their recommendation, without explanation.

2. How to read these documents? Follow the folder numbers

◆ The 300 or so documents herein are organized in 9 top-level folders numbered serially 1 through 9. The numbers reflect a rough chronological order of the events, where the contents of folder 1 outline the earliest events in the case, and the subsequent folders cover subsequent events.

■ The top-level folders also have names that are hopefully fairly self-explanatory.

◆ Perhaps the best way to read these documents is to go through the folders in order (from 1 through 9).

■ Start with the document named “Jay Hegde_grievance_statement.pdf” in the folder “1. Grievance Statement submitted by JH (Jay Hegdé) to AU Faculty Senate on 29Oct2015”. This was the complaint I submitted to the Faculty Senate panel that heard my case. It summarizes all the key events in the aforementioned 15-month period. Executive Summary on p. 5 of this document provides a good overview of the complaint.

• This document is organized in such a way that you can get a good overview of the entire case even if you just skim through the section headings thereinⁱⁱⁱ. If you wish to delve deeper into this case, simply follow the footnotes and other references.

■ I have added explanatory text (.txt) files to a few folders to help clarify the contents of that folder.

3. Why should you care? Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help fix a rigged system of animal welfare oversight

- ◆ On the one hand, this case is highly unusual:
 - The whistle-blower in this case, yours truly, is an animal researcher himself. It is extraordinarily rare for animal researchers to blow the whistle on animal welfare oversight. (Can you name any other case in which the whistle-blower was an active animal researcher?) This is because there are countless, multi-tier disincentives that discourage/prevent you from blowing the whistle, and none that encourage you.
 - No animal welfare case in a generation has had the amount of physical evidence (e.g., animal tissues^{iv}) and documentary evidence (e.g., pictures, audio recordings, emails).
- ◆ On the other hand, this is a very typical case – a poster child for how rigged and broken our regulatory system for animal welfare is:
 - The whole thing has been successfully covered up. No one has been held accountable. Not a penny's worth of fine, not a word of reprimand, let alone prosecution and punishment.
 - Despite being provided documentary evidence of malfeasance, every single government regulator/accreditation agency has chosen to look the other way, actively assisted in the cover-up or both.
- ◆ Taken together, these facts go to show that it is trivially easy to cover animal welfare crimes, no matter how egregious: The entire regulatory process works on an honor system. If you're dishonorable enough to lie with a straight face, you can get away with anything. *Think about it: If cheating is this easy, it cannot be that rare.*
- ◆ If you are bothered by this state of affairs, there is much you can do to help change things for the better. Regardless of our positions on animal research itself, we can all agree that it must be done lawfully, if at all.

4. What can you do? There is much you and I can still do to help ensure that Ovechkin did not die in vain

- ◆ Recognize, and help spread the word, that this case speaks to a whole host of issues in the broad public interest, and is far larger than the whistleblower, yours truly. (Incidentally, I neither need nor want any help of whatever kind for myself^v.)
- ◆ Press for thorough, transparent investigations, e.g., by Congress, so that the public understands how all oversight mechanisms, bar none, could have failed so completely and repeatedly as they did in this case. This understanding must then inform future legislative and regulatory changes to the system.
- ◆ Help explain this case and its importance to the public.
 - Cases like this are complicated, and will make most peoples' eyes glaze over. This is exactly what the cover-up artists have bet on, with great success so far. People of good will must counteract and defeat this cynical strategy.
 - Bring expertise to bear. Professionals in a variety of arenas, including law, journalism, biomedical research, public policy and veterinary medicine, all have a role to play in helping explain this case to the public, lawmakers, donors, benefactors, activists, celebrities, and influencers.
 - If you're a student, study this case. If you're an educator, teach it. If you're a scholar, research it. If you're a journalist, write about it.
 - Contact your Congressperson/Senator and ask them to look into this case in the public interest.
- ◆ Leverage this case for the public good. If you are looking for a test case to help improve animal welfare laws, you will probably not see a better one in your lifetime.

ⁱ About me: I am the whistle-blower in this case. I am not accused of any wrongdoing whatsoever. I'm a PhD research scientist (an Associate Professor of Neuroscience at Augusta University [AU]). I'm not a lawyer; I have no legal training or expertise. I speak solely for myself, and not for AU or anyone else. I support animal research, but I believe it should be carried out only when absolutely necessary, and carried out humanely and lawfully, or not at all. I am sharing these documents in the hopes of using the lessons of this case to bring about salutary changes in the relevant laws and public policy. I believe regardless of our positions about animal research, we can work together to help change the system for the better. Please feel to contact me at my personal email address: jay@hegde.us.

ⁱⁱ Some of the [press coverage](#) of [the case](#) can be found by googling "Augusta University, monkey", or "Augusta University, Whistleblower".

ⁱⁱⁱ I sincerely apologize for the numerous typographical errors in this document. The only explanation -- not defense -- I can offer is that I am typo-prone to begin with, and the situation was made worse by the fact that I wrote this 50-page document in a hurry (three days), and decided not to have my colleagues proofread it, for fear that I would be accused of misusing AU resources.

^{iv} The Attorney General of Georgia, who has taken over as the attorney for the Defendants, has been trying to [prevent the testing of the physical evidence](#). I wonder why?

^v I am very happy with the legal representation I have in my ongoing [civil case](#) against the University under Georgia Whistleblower statutes in the state Superior Court in Augusta, GA (Case # 2016RCCV00388 / JAY HEGDE VS. GEORGIA BOARD OF REGENTS). But I'm mindful of the fact that regardless of the outcome of my case, our broken animal welfare regulatory system is likely to remain broken. I feel a certain civic and professional responsibility to do what I can to inform the public how badly the system is broken. Sharing these documents with the public is my earnest attempt to do so.