



NEWS

From the Office of the New York State Inspector General
Kristine Hamann

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Former Bilingual Center Director Pleads Guilty and Pays Restitution

Maria Garcia Underwood, who quit her bilingual center job at Hunter College after an investigation by State Inspector General Kristine Hamann, pleaded guilty to petit larceny and paid \$1,766.35 in restitution.

Garcia Underwood, 46, the former \$90,740-a-year director of a Bilingual/ESL Education Technical Assistance Center (BETAC), had falsified travel vouchers, used a debit card to buy restaurant dinners, limousine service and to deliver poinsettias to her home, bilking her employer out of more than \$3,500, according to the Inspector General's report.

Garcia Underwood supervised three BETAC staffers and was on the payroll of the Research Foundation of City University (RFCUNY). She was prosecuted by the New York County District Attorney and arrested March 13 on a charge of grand larceny in the fourth degree. That day, Garcia Underwood pleaded guilty in New York County Criminal Court to petit larceny and agreed to pay restitution and a \$500 fine.

The Inspector General launched a joint investigation with RFCUNY last July after receiving a complaint about Underwood's spending. The probe uncovered a pattern of fraudulent expenses from a \$1,738 bill for a 2005 educators' conference in Phoenix, which Underwood never attended, to \$280 in Nordstrom cosmetics charges and more than \$1,000 in car service fees.

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