

FBI targets universities in new scheme to recruit informers

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation recently paid visits to a number of universities in New England as part of an effort to enlist faculty, students and staff in informing for the national police agency. The bureau's rationale for its campus initiative is the danger posed by foreign spies and terrorists stealing sensitive research. It provides briefings on what it calls "espionage indicators" supposedly aimed at protecting the data in question.

"What we're most concerned about are those things that are not classified being developed by MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], Worcester Polytech [Worcester Polytechnic Institute] and other universities," said Warren Bamford, special agent in charge of the FBI's Boston office. Amherst College and the University of Massachusetts, among others, have also been approached by the FBI, and other institutions are on the agenda.

"It's to make sure these institutions receive training...[on] what spies look for. There are hundreds of projects going on that could be useful to a foreign power," Bamford said at a meeting with *Boston Herald* editors on June 11.

The agent, who was appointed to the Boston office in January, said that fighting domestic terrorism will remain the "Number one priority" and ominously claimed that there are currently 250 open "terror" cases under investigation in Boston.

The kind of profiling the FBI has in mind was suggested by Bamford: "It could be [tracing] a telephone number from a cave in Afghanistan that could be completely innocent or it could be something else. The problem is, we don't have the luxury of saying, 'It's probably nothing.'"

"Espionage indicators" might very well include raising unusual questions, particularly on the part of international students and faculty. On a June 19 CNN news segment about the FBI campus effort, Melissa Goodman of the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU's) National Security Division asked rhetorically: "If you know that the FBI is training your professors or your colleagues to look out for suspicious behavior, are you going to think about that before you ask a particular question?"

The WSWs spoke with Chris Ott, Communications Manager of the ACLU of Massachusetts: "My understanding is that what the FBI is proposing is not illegal, but it does raise questions about the chilling effect in regard to academia. What will it mean about feeling free to pursue information? People on the campuses will be afraid to ask questions or take on the investigation of certain areas, say, for example, nuclear energy.

"The FBI is asking university faculty, staff, and students to create a form of neighborhood watch against anything that is so called 'suspicious.' What kinds of things are they going to report on? Who has the right to be snitching? One of the scary things is who [on the campuses] will take it upon themselves to root out spies?"

Contacting the Boston FBI, the WSWs was told that the program was not new, but had recently received publicity because Bamford, as a new appointee to the area, was aggressively promoting it. The Boston bureau's Gail Marcinkiewicz said that the FBI attends a *Boston Globe* editorial board meeting once a year. The *Globe*, together with the *Herald*, broke the story.

The acting assistant special agent in charge of the FBI's counterintelligence branch in Boston, Lucia Ziobro, told the media the program's goal is "to get ahead of the curve on counter-proliferation and espionage." However, that the campuses are considered an FBI hot spot has far more to do with emerging political dissent than global technological warfare or anti-terrorism.

The FBI's current foray into the campuses was launched in September 2005, with the creation of a 17-member National Security Higher Education Advisory Board to "provide advice on the culture of higher education...and establish lines of communication on national priorities pertaining to terrorism, counterintelligence, and home land security."

Graham Spanier, president of Pennsylvania State University, was made chairman, while other members of the board are a Who's Who of representatives from top universities, including William Brody, president of Johns

Hopkins; Albert Carnesale, chancellor of UCLA; Jared Cohon, president of Carnegie Mellon University; Amy Gutmann, president of the University of Pennsylvania; and Susan Hockfield, president of MIT. According to the FBI, “they will also assist in the development of research, degree programs, course work, internships, opportunities for graduates, and consulting opportunities for faculty relating to national security.”

The board is one of two lines of attack in the FBI’s “Academic Alliance,” whose description on the FBI web site begins by asking: “How could terrorists, spies, and criminals threaten national security by taking advantage of the openness and activities of US universities?”

“Consider the possibilities: Foreign spies—posing as international students or visitors—trying to steal sensitive and classified university research and to undermine technology export policies and controls; Terrorists and criminals studying advanced technologies and scientific breakthroughs on campus to use against the US; Violent extremists using student visas to slip into the country undetected; and Hackers attacking college computer networks and possibly stealing secrets, research and identities.” No examples are presented to bolster the fear mongering.

The second prong of the “Academic Alliance” is the College and University Security Effort or CAUSE. “Through CAUSE, FBI Special Agents in Charge meet with the heads of local colleges to discuss national security...and why some foreign governments may be attempting to pry loose their research and property creations.”

The FBI has a lengthy and notorious track record of spying, provocation and, when necessary, violence against political opposition. Neither the warnings about “foreign spies” nor the recruitment of informers on college campuses is anything new. Both took place during the period of the McCarthyite anti-communist witch-hunt and beyond. It is shameful, but not surprising, that college administrators are so receptive to the FBI’s overtures and so naïve, at best, about the police agency’s intentions.

Dennis D. Berkey, president of Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI), appreciated the FBI’s intervention. “He said it was useful to open lines of communication,” according to the *Boston Globe*, “although he didn’t think WPI would take the FBI up on its offer to train faculty, because the university is already well versed in how to protect its research. He welcomed the FBI’s interest, however.

“ ‘I think that in the era we’re living in, we have to be more aware of what’s going on around us, generally,’ he said.”

The FBI’s “Academic Alliance” is only one element of a wider effort by various intelligence agencies to monitor, control and also recruit from US colleges and schools.

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the penetration into higher education by the American intelligence community, which is funneling millions into the operation, “paying for hundreds of scholarships, intelligence-related courses and fellowships at nearly a dozen universities.”

The article notes that in 2006, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), the recently created body charged with directing US spying operations, more than doubled the number of schools in its program. The ODNI is the principal intelligence advisor to the president, the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council. It also oversees and directs the National Intelligence Program.

“The sponsoring agencies, including the CIA, say the [campus] programs help ensure they get enough recruits skilled to wage the war on terrorism,” says *USA Today*, pointing out that the programs began in 2004. “Agencies also pay for internships and summer ‘spy camps’ aimed at attracting high school students to study intelligence.”

The article compares these projects to ones in the 1950s when the FBI “sometimes encouraged students to report on professors’ political leanings, and the 1960s, when the CIA paid for the National Student Association and tapped its members for intelligence work.” In those years, faculty members at elite universities, such as Yale, Harvard and MIT “served as talent spotters, steering promising students into intelligence careers.”

David Price, an anthropology professor at St. Martin’s University in Spokane, Washington, quoted by *USA Today*, has researched FBI surveillance of academics in the 1950s. He told the newspaper, “I’ve looked at far too many old FBI documents to ever be comfortable with the idea” of such agencies funding students.



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