

The CIA's Campus Spies

By [David H Price](#)

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Exposing the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program

THE CIA'S CAMPUS SPIES

By **DAVE H. PRICE**

The secrecy surrounding the current use of university classrooms as covert training grounds for the CIA and other agencies now threatens the fundamental principles of academic openness as well as the integrity of a wide array of academic disciplines. A new test program that is secretly placing CIA agents in American university classrooms for now operates without detection or protest. With time these students who cannot admit to their true intentions will inevitably pollute and discredit the universities in which they are now enrolled.

There have long been tensions between the needs of academia and the needs of the National Security State, and even before the events of 9/11 expanded the powers of American intelligence agencies, our universities were quietly being modified to serve the needs of the intelligence community in new and covert ways. The most visible of these reforms was the establishment of the National Security Education Program (NSEP) which siphoned-off students from traditional foreign language funding programs such as Fulbright or Title VI. While traditional funding sources provide students with small stipends of a few thousand dollars to study foreign languages in American universities, the NSEP gives graduate students a wealth of funds (at times exceeding \$40,000 a year) to study "in demand" languages, but with troubling pay-back stipulations mandating that recipients later work for unspecified U.S. national security agencies. Upon its debut in the early 1990s, the NSEP was harshly criticized for reaching through an assumed barrier between the desires of academia and state. Numerous academic organizations, including, the Middle East Studies Association and the African Studies Association, Latin American Studies Association, and even the mainstream Boards of the Social Science Research Council and American Council of Learned Societies expressed deep concerns over scholars' participation in the NSEP. And though the NSEP continues funding students despite these protests, there was some solace in knowing so many diverse academic organizations condemned this program.

But while many academics reacted with anger and protest to the NSEP's entrance onto American campuses, there has been no public reaction to an even more troubling post-9/11 funding program which upgrades the existing American intelligence-university-interface. With little notice Congress approved section 318 of the 2004 Intelligence Authorization Act which appropriated four million dollars to fund a pilot program known as the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP). Named after Senator Pat Roberts (R. Kansas, Chair,

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence), PRISP was designed to train intelligence operatives and analysts in American university classrooms for careers in the CIA and other agencies. PRISP now operates on an undisclosed number of American college and university campuses, and if the pilot phase of the program proves to be a useful means of recruiting and training members of the intelligence community then the program will expand to more campuses across the country.

Currently, PRISP participants must be American citizens who are enrolled fulltime in graduate degree programs with a minimum GPA of 3.4, they need to “complete at least one summer internship at CIA or other agencies,” and they must pass the same background investigations as other CIA employees. PRISP students receive financial stipends ranging up to \$25,000 per year and they are required to participate in closed meetings with other PRISP scholars and individuals from their administering intelligence agency.

Less than 150 students a year are now authorized to receive funding during the pilot phase as PRISP evaluates the program’s initial outcomes. Beyond a few articles in a Kansas newspaper praising Senator Roberts, as well as University of Kansas anthropologist Felix Moos’ role in lobbying for the PRISP, there has been a general media silence regarding the program. The few guarded public statements issued describing PRISP stress supposed similarities between existing ROTC programs and the PRISP. For example, the Lawrence Journal World (11/29/03) published claims that, “Those in the program would be part of the ROTC program specializing in learning how to analyze a variety of conditions and activities based on a thorough understanding and deep knowledge of particular areas of the world.” Beyond the similar requirements that participants of both programs commit to years of service to their sponsoring military or intelligence branches there are few similarities between ROTC and PRISP. ROTC programs mostly operate in the open, as student-ROTC members register for ROTC courses and are proudly and visibly identified as members of the ROTC program, while PRISP students are instructed to keep their PRISP-affiliations hidden from others on campus.

PRISP is an open secret, and the CIA apparently prefers that it stay more secret than open as the CIA’s website does not maintain an active link with detailed information on PRISP. Currently PRISP limits its advertising to intelligence recruiting web sights (such as <http://www.intelligencecareers.com> or the National Ground Intelligence Center) and to small, controlled recruiting sessions. PRISP recruits scholars with “advanced area expertise in China, Middle East, Korea, Central Asia, the Caucasus,” with a special emphasis given to scholars with previous linguistic expertise in “Chinese, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Pashtun, Dari, Korean, or a Central Asian or Caucasian language such as Georgian, Turkmen, Tajik, or Uzbek.” PRISP also funds Islamic studies scholars and scientists with expertise in bioterrorism, counterterrorism, chemistry, physics, computer science and engineering.

Inquiries made to Senator Roberts’ staff concerning the current size and scope of PRISP yielded little useful information and Roberts’ staff referred me to Mr. Tommy Glakas at the CIA. Mr. Glakas was reluctant to discuss many specific details of PRISP, but he did confirm that PRISP now funds about 100 students who are studying at an undisclosed number of American universities. When asked if PRISP was up and running on college campuses Glakas first answered that it was, then said it wasn’t, then clarified that PRISP wasn’t the sort of program that was tied to university campuses-it was decentralized and tied to students, not campuses. When pressed further on what this meant Mr. Glakas gave no further information. He said that he had no way of knowing exactly how many universities currently have students participating in PRISP, claiming he could not know this because PRISP is

administered not just by the CIA, but also through a variety of individual intelligence agencies like the NSA, MID, or Naval Intelligence. He stressed that PRISP was a decentralized scholarship program which funds students through a various intelligence agencies. Mr. Glakas said he didn't know who might know how many campuses had PRISP scholars and he would not identify which campuses are hosting these covert PRISP scholars.

The Intelligence Scholars Program did not spring forth out of a vacuum. Like the Patriot Act, the germs of PRISP were conceived years ago and were waiting for the right rendezvous of fear with opportunity to be born. PRISP is largely the brainchild of University of Kansas anthropologist Felix Moos-a longtime advocate of anthropological contacts with military and intelligence agencies. During the Vietnam War Moos worked in Laos and Thailand on World Bank-financed projects and over the years he has worked in various military advisory positions. He worked on the Pentagon's ARPA Project Themis, and has been as an instructor at the Naval War College and at the U.S. Staff and Command College at Fort Leavenworth. For years Moos has taught courses on "Violence and Terrorism" at the University of Kansas. In the months after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon Moos elicited the support of his friend, former CIA DCI, Stansfield Turner to curry support in the senate and CIA to fund his vision of a merger between anthropology, academia, intelligence analysis and espionage training.

Professor Moos initially proposed that all PRISP students be required to master two foreign languages and use anthropology and history classes to learn the culture history of the regions they are studying. Moos's vision for PRISP was more comprehensive than the current pilot program and it included classes on topics such as bioterrorism and counterterrorism. Moos proposed having an active CIA campus presence where PRISP students would begin training as freshmen and, "by the time they would be commissioned, they would be ready to go to the branch intelligence units of their choice." If the pilot phase of PRISP goes well, this may be the direction in which this program develops-though it is doubtful that PRISP would expand in any way which openly identified participants.

It is tempting to describe Moos as an anachronistic anthropologist out of sync with his discipline's mainstream, but while many anthropologists express concerns about disciplinary ties to military and intelligence organizations, contemporary anthropology has no core with which to either sync or collide and there are others in the field who openly (and quietly) support such developments. Moos is a bright man, but his writings echo the musty tone and sentiments found in the limited bedside readings of Tom Clancy-literate-colonials, as he prefers to quote from the wisdom of Sun Tzu and Samuel Huntington over anthropologists like Franz Boas or Laura Nader. Two years ago at an interesting and confrontational panel examining anthropological connections to intelligence agencies at the annual American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings, I watched an angry Moos strike an action pose and rhetorically ask, "Have anthropologists learned so little since 9/11/2001, as to not recognize the truth-and practicability, in Sun Tzu's reminder that: 'unless someone is subtle and perspicacious, he cannot perceive the substance in intelligence reports. It is subtle, subtle.'" From the dais I could see not so subtle anthropologists in the audience employed by Rand and the Pentagon nodding their heads as if his words had hit a secret chord. Moos was clearly onto something.

Felix Moos' notion of scholar-spies in part draws upon an imagined romantic history of anthropologists' contributions to the Second World War, which, while this is a widespread notion, it is one increasingly undermined by FOIA and archival-based historical research of

the complexities (both ethical and practical) of anthropologists plying their trade in even this “good” war. Back in 1995 Moos testified before a commission modifying the AAA’s code on anthropological ethics that anthropologists should be allowed to engage in secretive research, arguing that, “In a world where weapons of mass destruction have become so terrible and terrorist actions so frightful, anthropologists must surrender naïve faith in a communitarian utopia and be prepared to encounter conflict and violence. Indeed they should feel the professional obligation to work in areas of ethnic conflict. But, as moral creatures so engaged, they would of course have to recognize the necessity of classifying some of their data, if for no other reason than to protect the lives of their subjects and themselves.”

It is this devotion to secrecy that is the root problem of the PRSIP’s presence on our campuses as well as with Moos’ vision of anthropology harnessed for the needs of state. Moos’ fallacy is his belief that the fundamental problem with American intelligence agencies is that they are lacking adequate cultural understanding of those they study, and spy upon—this fallacy is exacerbated by orthodox assumptions that good intelligence operates best in realms of secrecy. America needs good intelligence, but the most useful and important intelligence can largely be gathered openly without the sort of covert invasion of our campuses that PRISP silently brings.

The claim that more open source, non-classified intelligence is what is needed is less far fetched than it might seem. In *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* historian Robin Winks recounts how in 1951, the CIA’s Sherwood Kent conducted an experiment in which a handful of Yale historians used nothing but declassified materials in Yale’s library to challenge CIA analysts (with access to classified data) to produce competing reports on U.S. military capacities, strengths and weaknesses focusing on a scale of detail down to the level of military divisions. This written evaluation of this contest was known as the “Yale Report,” which concluded that over 90% of material in the CIA’s report was found in the Yale library. Kent further estimated that of the remaining 10% of “secret” materials, only half of this could be expected to remain secret for any length of time. President Truman was so furious with the results of the Yale Report that he suppressed its distribution, arguing that the press needed more restrictions governing the release of such sensitive materials, while Republican pundits joined the furor claiming that Yale liberals were trying to leak state secrets.

Evidence of the power of open intelligence is close at hand, consider only how American scholars’ (using publicly available sources) analysis of the dangers for post-invasion Iraq out-performed the CIA’s best estimates. As one who has lived in the Middle East and read Arabic news dailies online for years while watching the expansion of American policies that appear to misread the Arab world I wonder if a repeat of the Yale Report experiment focusing on the Middle East might not find another 10% intelligence gap, but with the academy now winning due to the deleterious effects of generations of CIA intellectual inbreeding. Perhaps the Agency has become self-aware of these limits brought on by the internal reproduction of its own limited institutional culture, and in its own misshapen view it sees PRISP as a means of supplying itself with new blood to rejuvenate under cover provided by public classrooms. But such secrecy-based reforms are the products of a damaged institutional mind trying to repair itself.

Some might misread my criticism of the CIA’s secret presence on our campuses as contradicting my critique of the need for more outside and dissenting (even informed hairbrained dissenting) input in intelligence circles, but such a reading would misunderstand

the importance of openness in academic and political processes. The fundamental problems with American intelligence are exacerbated by secrecy-when intelligence agencies are allowed to classify and hide their assumptions, reports and analysis from public view they generate self-referential narrow visions that coalesce rather than challenge top-down policies from the administrations they serve. Intelligence agencies do need to understand the complex cultures they study, but to suggest that intelligence agencies like the CIA are simply amassing and interpreting political and cultural information is a dangerous fantasy: The CIA fulfills a tripartite role of gathering intelligence, interpreting intelligence, and working as a supraconstitutional covert arm of the presidency. It is this final role that should give scholars and citizens pause when considering how PRSIP and other university-intelligence-linked programs will use the knowledge they take from our open classrooms.

The CIA makes sure we won't know which classrooms PRSIP scholars attend, this is rationalized as a requirement for protecting the identities of intelligence personnel. But this secrecy shapes PRISP as it takes on the form like a cell-based covert operation in which PRISP students study chemistry, biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology and foreign languages without their fellow classmates, professors, advisors, department chairs or presumably even research subjects (creating serious ethics problems under any post-Nuremberg professional ethics code or Human Subject Review Board) knowing that they are working for the CIA, DIA, NSA or other intelligence agencies.

In a decade and a half of Freedom of Information Act research I have read too many FBI reports of students detailing the deviant political views of their professors (These range from the hilarious: As anthropologist Norman Humphrey was reported to have called President Eisenhower a "duckbilled nincompoop"; to the Dadaist: Wherein former Miss America, Marilyn van Derbur, reported that sociologist Howard Higman mocked J. Edgar Hoover in class; to the chilling: As when the FBI arranged for a graduate student to guide topics of "informal" conversation with anthropologist Gene Weltfish that were later the focus an inquiry by Joseph McCarthy) to not mention the certainty that these PRSIP students are also secretly compiling dossiers on their professors and fellow students. Of course I would be remiss to not mention that students are the only ones sneaking the CIA onto our campuses. There are also unknown thousands of university professors who periodically work with and for the CIA-in 1988 CIA spokeswoman Sharon Foster bragged that the CIA then secretly employed enough university professors "to staff a large university." Most experts estimate that this presence has grown since 2001.

The quiet rise of programs like PRISP should not surprise anyone given the steady cuts in federal funding for higher education, and the resulting pressures for more mercenary roles for the academy. In the post-World War Two decades, scholars naively self-recruited themselves or followed classmates to the CIA, but increasingly those of us who have studied the languages, culture and histories of peoples around the world have also learned about the role of the CIA in undermining the autonomy of those cultures we study, and the steady construction of this history has hurt the agency's efforts to recruit the best and brightest of post-graduates. For decades the students studying Arabic, Urdu, Basque or Farsi were predominantly curious admirers of the cultures and languages they studied, the current shift now finds a visible increase in students whose studies are driven by the market forces of Bush's War on Terrorism. If the CIA can use PRISP to indenture students in the early days of their graduate training-supplemented with mandated summer camp internships immersed in the workplace ethos of CIA-the company can mold their ideological inclinations even before their grasp of cultural history is shaped in the relatively open environment of their

university. As these PRISP graduates enter the CIA's institutional environment of self-reinforcing Group Think they will present a reduced risk of creating cognitive dissonance by bringing new views that threaten the agency's narrow view of the world. Institutional Group Think can thus safely be protected from external infection.

But while PRISP protects and intensifies the inbred-limited-thinking at CIA and elsewhere, it threatens the academic integrity of anthropology and other academic disciplines that unwittingly become complicit partners with these intelligence agencies. The CIA has long recognized that anthropology, with its broadly traveled and culturally and linguistically competent practitioners has highly useful skill sets. And while we should not read too much into published reports that the CIA-directed torture techniques at Abu Ghraib were fine-tuned for high levels of culturally specific humiliation by the reading of anthropologist Raphael Patai's book *The Arab Mind* (Patai's scholarship is stained with Orientalist stereotypes and it doesn't take an insider's knowledge that Arabs generally abhor dogs and sexual humiliation to presume that tormenting bound naked men with vicious dogs would be an effective means of torture), anthropologists have long had their work pilfered by American intelligence agencies. To cite but two documented examples, in 1951, the CIA cut a covert deal with the AAA's executive board providing the CIA access to data on anthropologists' cultural and linguistic specialties as the CIA secretly produced a roster of AAA members for the CIA on the CIA's computers; and, in 1962 the U.S. Department of Commerce illegally translated Georges Condominas' ethnography, *We Have Eaten the Forest* on highland Vietnamese Montagnards for use as a counterinsurgency tool. Though no scholar can control the uses of information they make public, there does need to be an awareness of how any knowledge can be abused by others—and as awareness of the presence of PRISP spreads, many scholars may find themselves engaging in new forms of self-censorship and doublethink.

Healthy academic environments need openness because they (unlike the CIA) are nourished by the self-corrective features of open disagreement, dissent, and synthetic-reformulation. The presence of the PRISP's secret sharers brings hidden agendas that sabotage these fundamental processes of academia. The Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program infects all of academia with a germ of dishonesty and distrust as participant scholars cloak their intentions and their ties to the cloaked masters they serve.

David Price teaches anthropology at St. Martin's College in Olympia, Washington. His latest book, *Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists* has just been published by Duke University Press. His *Atlas of World Cultures* has just been republished by the Blackburn Press. He can be reached at: dprice@stmartin.edu .

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