

The Homeland Security Campus: Repress U

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Free-speech zones. Taser guns. Hidden cameras. Data mining. A new security curriculum. Private security contractors. Welcome to the homeland security campus.

From Harvard to UCLA, the ivory tower is fast becoming the latest watchtower in Fortress America. The terror warriors, having turned their attention to “violent radicalization and homegrown terrorism prevention”—as it was recently dubbed in a House of Representatives bill of the same name—have set out to reconquer that traditional hotbed of radicalization, the university.

Building a homeland security campus and bringing the university to heel is a seven-step mission:

1. Target dissidents. As the warfare state has triggered dissent, the campus has attracted increasing scrutiny—with student protesters in the cross hairs. The government’s number-one target? Peace and justice organizations.

From 2003 to 2007 an unknown number of them made it into the Pentagon’s Threat and Local Observation Notice system (TALON), a secretive domestic spying program ostensibly designed to track direct “potential terrorist threats” to the Defense Department itself. In 2006 the ACLU uncovered, via Freedom of Information Act requests, at least 186 specific TALON reports on “anti-military protests” in the United States—some listed as “credible threats”—from student groups at the University of California, Santa Cruz; State University of New York, Albany; Georgia State University; and New Mexico State University, among other campuses.

At more than a dozen universities and colleges, police officers now double as full-time FBI agents, and according to the *Campus Law Enforcement Journal*, they serve on many of the nation’s 100 Joint Terrorism Task Forces. These dual-purpose officer-agents have knocked on student activists’ doors from North Carolina State to the University of Colorado and, in one case, interrogated an Iraqi-born professor at the University of Massachusetts about his antiwar views.

FBI agents, or their campus stand-ins, don’t have to do all the work. Administrators often do it for them, setting up “free-speech zones,” which actually constrain speech, and punishing those who step outside them. Protests were typically forced into “free-assembly areas” at the University of Central Florida and Clemson University, while students at Hampton and Pace universities faced expulsion for handing out antiwar fliers, aka “unauthorized materials.”

2. Lock and load. Many campus police departments are morphing into heavily armed

garrisons, equipped with a wide array of weaponry, from Taser stun guns and pepper guns to shotguns and semiautomatic rifles. Lock-and-load policies that began in the 1990s under the rubric of the “war on crime” only escalated with the President’s “war on terror.” Each school shooting—most recently the massacre at Virginia Tech—adds fuel to the armament flames.

Two-thirds of universities arm their police, according to the Justice Department. Many of the guns being purchased were previously in the province of military units and SWAT teams: for instance, AR-15 rifles (similar to M-16s) are in the arsenals of the University of Texas campus police. Last April City University of New York bought dozens of semiautomatic handguns. Some states, like Nevada, are even considering plans to allow university staff to pack heat in a “special reserve officer corps.”

Most of the force used on campuses these days, though, comes in less lethal form, such as the rubber bullets and pepper pellets increasingly used to contain student demonstrations. Then there is the ubiquitous Taser, the electroshock weapon recently ruled a “form of torture” by the United Nations. A Taser was used by UCLA police in November 2006 to deliver shock after shock to an Iranian-American student for failing to produce his ID at the Powell Library. A University of Florida student was Tased last September after asking pointed questions of Senator John Kerry at a public forum, his plea “Don’t Tase me, bro!” becoming the stuff of pop folklore.

3. Keep an eye (or hundreds of them) focused on campus. Surveillance has become a boom industry nationally—one that now reaches deep into the heart of campuses. In fact, universities have witnessed explosive growth since 2001 in the electronic surveillance of students, faculty and campus workers. On ever more campuses, closed-circuit security cameras can track people’s every move, often from hidden or undisclosed locations, sometimes even into classrooms.

The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators reports that surveillance cameras have found their way onto at least half of all colleges, their numbers on any given campus doubling, tripling or, in a few cases, rising tenfold since September 11, 2001. Such cameras have proliferated by the hundreds on private campuses, in particular. The University of Pennsylvania, for instance, has more than 400 watching over it, while Harvard and Brown have about 200 each.

Often it can be tricky to find out where the cameras are and just what they’re meant to be viewing. The University of Texas battled student journalists over disclosure and ultimately kept its cameras hidden. Sometimes, though, the cameras’ purpose seems obvious. Take the case of Hussein Hussein, a professor in the department of animal biotechnology at the University of Nevada, Reno. In January 2005 the widely respected professor found a hidden camera redirected to monitor his office.

4. Mine student records. Student records have in recent years been opened up to all manner of data mining for purposes of investigation, recruitment or just all-purpose tracking. From 2001 to 2006, in an operation code-named Project Strike Back, the Education Department teamed up with the FBI to scour the records of the 14 million students who applied for federal financial aid each year. The objective? “To identify potential people of interest,” explained an FBI spokesperson cryptically, especially those linked to “potential terrorist activity.”

Strike Back was quietly discontinued in June 2006, days after students at Northwestern University blew its cover. But just one month later, the Education Department's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, in a much-criticized preliminary report, recommended the creation of a federal "unit records" database that would track the activities and studies of college students nationwide. The department's Institute of Education Sciences has developed a prototype for such a national database.

It's not a secret that the Pentagon, for its part, hopes to turn campuses into recruitment centers for its overstretched, overstressed forces. The Defense Department has built its own database for just this purpose. Known as Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies, this program tracks 30 million young people, ages 16 to 25. According to a Pentagon spokesperson, the department has partnered with private marketing and data-mining firms, which in turn sell the government reams of information on students and other potential recruits.

5. Track foreign-born students; keep the undocumented out. Under the auspices of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been keeping close tabs on foreign students and their dependents through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). As of October 2007, ICE reported that it was actively following 713,000 internationals on campuses, while keeping more than 4.7 million names in the database.

The database aims to amass and record information on foreign students throughout their stay inside the United States. SEVIS requires thick files on the students from the sponsoring schools, constantly updated with all academic, biographical and employment records—all of which will be shared with other government agencies. If students fall out of "status" at school—or if the database thinks they have—the Compliance Enforcement Unit of ICE goes into action.

ICE, of course, has done its part to keep the homeland security campus purified of those not born in the homeland. The American Immigration Law Foundation estimates that only one in twenty undocumented immigrants who graduate high school goes on to enroll in a college—many don't go because they cannot afford the tuition but also because they have good reason to be afraid: ICE has deported a number of those who did make it to college, some before they could graduate.

6. Take over the curriculum, the classroom and the laboratory. Needless to say, not every student is considered a homeland security threat. Quite the opposite. Many students and faculty members are seen as potential assets. To exploit these assets, DHS has launched its own curriculum under its Office of University Programs (OUP), intended, it says, to "foster a homeland security culture within the academic community."

The record so far is impressive: DHS has doled out 439 federal fellowships and scholarships since 2003, providing full tuition to students who fit "within the homeland security research enterprise." Two hundred twenty-seven schools now offer degree or certificate programs in "homeland security," a curriculum that encompasses more than 1,800 courses. Along with OUP, some of the key players in creating the homeland security classroom are the US Northern Command and the Aerospace Defense Command, co-founders of the Homeland Security and Defense Education Consortium.

OUP has also partnered with researchers and laboratories to "align scientific results with

homeland security priorities.” In fiscal year 2008 alone, \$4.9 billion in federal funding will go to homeland-security-related research. Grants correspond to sixteen research topics selected by DHS, based on presidential directives, legislation and a smattering of scientific advice.

But wait, there’s more: DHS has founded and funded six of its very own “Centers of Excellence,” research facilities that span dozens of universities from coast to coast. The latest is a Center of Excellence for the Study of Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism, the funding for which cleared the House in October. The center is mandated to assist a national commission in combating those “adopting or promoting an extremist belief system...to advance political, religious or social change.”

7. *Privatize, privatize, privatize.* Of course, homeland security is not just a department, nor is it simply a new network of surveillance and data mining—it’s big business. (According to *USA Today*, global homeland-security-style spending had already reached \$59 billion a year in 2006, a sixfold increase over 2000.) Not surprisingly, then, universities have in recent years established unprecedented private-sector partnerships with the corporations that have the most to gain from their research. DHS’s on-campus National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terror (START), for instance, features Lockheed Martin on its advisory board. The Center for Food Protection and Defense relies on an industry working group that includes Wal-Mart and McDonald’s offering “guidance and direction,” according to its chair.

While vast sums of money are flowing in from corporate sponsors, huge payments are also flowing out to “strategic contracts” with private contractors, as universities permanently outsource security operations to big corporations like Securitas and AlliedBarton. Little of this money actually goes to those guarding the properties, who are often among the most underpaid workers in the universities. Instead, it fills the corporate coffers of those with little accountability for conditions on campus.

Meanwhile, some universities have developed intimate relationships with private-security outfits like the notorious Blackwater. Last May, for example, the University of Illinois and its police training institute cut a deal with the firm to share its facilities and training programs with Blackwater operatives. Local journalists later revealed that the director of the campus program at the time was on the Blackwater payroll. In the age of hired education, such collaboration is apparently par for the course.

Following these seven steps over the past six years, the homeland security state and its constituents have come a long way in their drive to remake the American campus in the image of a compound on lockdown. Somewhere inside the growing homeland security state that is our country, the next seven steps in the process are undoubtedly already being planned.

Still, the rise of Repress U is not inevitable. The new homeland security campus has proven itself unable to shut out public scrutiny or stamp out resistance to its latest Orwellian advances. Sometimes such opposition even yields a free-speech zone dismantled, or the Pentagon’s TALON declawed, or a Project Strike Back struck down. A rising tide of student protest, led by groups like the new Students for a Democratic Society, has won free-speech victories and reined in repression from Pace and Hampton, where the university dropped its threat of expulsion, to UCLA, where Tasers will no longer be wielded against passive resisters.

Yet if the tightening grip of the homeland security complex isn't loosened, the latest towers of higher education will be built not of ivory but of Kevlar for the over-armored, over-armed campuses of America.

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