WHAT DOES PRISP MEAN FOR THE ACADEMY AND ANTHROPOLOGY?

ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

The Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program, a government-funded initiative designed to recruit new analysts with critical skills into the US intelligence community, has sparked heated debate in a number of media outlets, raising questions about academic freedom, anthropological ethics and the relevance of anthropology. Send your comments to slathrop@aaanet.org.

Spies in Our Midst

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In the months following the Sept 11 terrorist attacks some anthropologists in the US began advocating for increased anthropological contributions to intelligence work. The efforts of University of Kansas anthropologist Felix Moos and former CIA Director Stansfield Turner led to the establishment of the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program. Moos' original plan (a program for intelligence operatives modeled after ROTC, combining intelligence-training skills with classroom study of anthropology and other subjects) was more transparent than PRISP as it has been implemented. PRISP, now in its second year as a pilot program, has with little notice placed over 150 student participants in an unknown number of university classrooms.

COMMENTARY

Shift in Area-Studies Funding

But PRISP is not the only such program, and the development of similar programs may represent an emergent shift in funding sources for anthropologists and other scholars studying foreign languages and cultures. Last December Congress passed the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (S 2845), establishing the Intelligence Community Scholars Program. Like PRISP, ICSP students' identities are not publicly announced as they undertake their studies in university classrooms; in addition, ICSP scholars have to repay the costs of their education plus penalties assessed at three times the legally allowed interest rate if they decide not to work for US intelligence upon graduation. Other outcome-based payback scholarship programs are reportedly in the works.

Moos and other PRISP supporters see these new programs with their mandatory service commitment on graduation as a response to the failure of Title VI and other programs to produce competent area experts and speakers of "needed" languages. In fact the academy before PRISP produced many such scholars, but many had critical perspectives that were unwelcome at intelligence and policy agencies such as the US State Department or CIA.

Why Be Concerned?

There are a number of reasons to be concerned by PRISP and related programs, but we will focus on two aspects in which we see these programs as the thin end of a disturbing wedge threatening the settled norms of academia in the US.

The first concerns the way these programs use a form of debt bondage to constrain student career choices. Young people go to university at a fluid and formative time in their lives. Universities are places to explore different disciplines, ideological commitments and career plans. PRISP and ICSP seek to preempt and constrain student choice by locking students into intelligence careers long before they graduate, sometimes with draconian penalties for those who have a change of heart. If one connects the dots from a past generation of non-committal governmental funding grants (programs such as Fulbright and Title VI) through the limited commitments of the National Security Education Program (viewed as controversial by many area study associations because its participants are contractually required to seek employment at specified national security governmental agencies upon graduation) to this new generation of pay-back programs such as PRISP and ICSP, there appears to be an escalation in agency-tied educational funding just as funds for more independent, non-payback-linked inquiry are being reduced.

Our second concern is with secrecy. Over the last 30 years a norm has been established in the American academy favoring the open circulation of knowledge and opposing secret networks within. Classified research is prohibited on almost all campuses; it is generally recognized that the CIA abused the trust of academics in the early years of the Cold War when they secretly funded conferences and research programs without the knowledge of the academics involved; and researchers are usually required to disclose their funding

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Ambivalent Strands of Anthropology and Warfare

Anthropology in the US has had an ambivalent relationship with the national security state. While anthropologists have supported some wars (notably World War II) more than others, they have felt conflicted about contributing their expertise to the warfare state. During World War I a number of anthropologists used their professional credentials as cover for espionage in Latin America. When Franz Boas (a German immigrant, incidentally) criticized these actions as unethical and damaging to science and anthropology's reputation, he was censured by the AAA—a slight only formally reversed this year.

During World War II anthropologists worked for such agencies as the Office of Strategic Services, the Office of Naval Intelligence, the Office of War Information, the Ethnogeographic Board and the Military Intelligence Division. Anthropologists also consulted for the internment camps for Japanese-Americans. The most famous anthropological contribution to the war effort was Ruth Benedict's study of Japanese culture "at a distance" (eventually published as *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*).

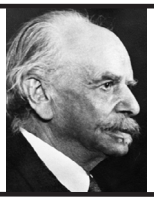
At the 1941 AAA meetings, just weeks after Pearl Harbor, a group of prominent elder anthropologists failed in their efforts urging the AAA not to establish a national committee on anthropological contributions to the war, fearing that the AAA would become "an agent for propaganda." During the war anthropologists like Laura Thompson became increasingly concerned that the conflict was transforming anthropologists into "technicians for hire to the highest bidder." After the war some anthropologists, like OSS agent Gregory Bateson, came to have second thoughts about what they had done while still others expressed bitterness at the ways their contributions were ignored or used in ways against their will.

During the Cold War the US government and foundations such as the Ford Foundation funded area studies and research in Third World development, public-opinion management and mind control as part of the struggle with Communism. While a number of anthropologists consulted discreetly for the CIA and other agencies, this became increasingly controversial during the Vietnam War. The AAA meeting in 1968 was dominated by debates over the ethics of such work.

Revelations of Project Camelot's declassified counterinsurgency research program led to concerns that anthropology was being used to support repressive régimes, and the AAA's investigations of Thai counterinsurgency programs in the 1970s brought scrutiny that led to prohibitions against clandestine research in the AAA's first ethics statement in 1971, though these explicit prohibitions were short-lived.

Contemporary anthropologists' reactions to the "War on Terror" are inevitably linked to these historical interactions—with some anthropologists calling for a Second World War-like mobilization of anthropologists and others arguing that this war is fundamentally misconstrued.

1919

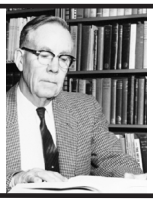


Boas criticized anthropologists who used their professional credentials as cover for espionage during WWI.

1940s

A number of anthropologists worked for government agencies during WWII, including Ruth Benedict and Gregory Bateson.

1967



Publication of Statement of Problems of Anthropological Research and Ethics, prepared by Ralph Beals and the AAA Executive Board in response to members' concerns regarding the US Army's support of projects dealing with "insurgency" and "counter-insurgency" in various countries.

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sources so we can make judgments about possible biases and interests. PRISP and ICSP use current fears to turn back the clock on these developments, reestablishing a beachhead of government secrecy in the academy. Such conditions of secrecy stand to undermine the quality of academic knowledge and intelligence produced because they preclude honest debate. We are particularly concerned that while universities seek to inculcate honesty among students, many PRISP and ICSP students will be expected to concoct fraudulent narratives about themselves, systematically deceiving faculty and fellow students about commitments their sponsors want kept secret. While we have little control over the secretive actions of others, as anthropologists we need to be open and clear about who we are, who we work for, and what is to be done with our research. Any involvement or passive support of PRISP undermines the reputation of anthropology in the US and abroad, for if anthropology becomes indirectly tied, no matter how involuntarily, to US foreign policy decisions through the training of intelligence agents, it could put some anthropologists and those with whom we work in danger.

Debating PRISP in the Academy

Given the arguable conflict between PRISP and the core values of openness in the academy, PRISP should be debated on campus in the same way that ROTC has been in the past. As with ROTC, some universities may decide that the program is compatible with their overarching values, and some may not, but the question should at least be debated.

Key questions in campus discussions of PRISP would include:

What role should academics play in the so-called "War on Terror"? Is the academic culture of openness compromised by a secret scholarship program? Would PRISP scholars, as some in the intelligence community have claimed, be scapegoated on campus if their identity were publicly known? Will PRISP's increased reliance on pre-selected intelligence analysts dangerously narrow the range of intelligence views at the CIA and elsewhere? Are faculty right to fear that PRISP scholars may be covertly compiling dossiers on them? Will increased knowledge of PRISP's secretive presence on campuses chill open academic classroom discussions on controversial topics? Even though PRISP is described as a scholarship program to help students acquire particular skill sets, rather than a program to fund research with human participants, should PRISP students engaged in research be required to report their ties to campus IRBs?

Such discussions on campus might lead some universities to publicly condemn PRISP, or at least to press the government for more openness in its administration of the program. Universities could also contract to pay off the debt of students who, unable to work for the CIA in good conscience when they graduate, find themselves trapped by onerous repayment obligations. (This is by analogy with MIT's commitment to finance any student expelled from ROTC for his or her sexual orientation).

Debating PRISP in Anthropology

Finally, given that the intelligence community is outsourcing its training programs to us, we recommend that anthropologists who are concerned by PRISP make it a matter of explicit debate in the classroom and at our conferences. Those of us teaching classes of interest to the intelligence community (in Middle Eastern studies, for example) may never know whether we have PRISP scholars in the room, but might ask ourselves what we would want such students to learn and to reflect on if they were in class.

The AAA should also foster debate on PRISP, ICSP and the similar programs that will follow. AAA members should be aware of a new generation of government funding programs that will secretly place intelligence recruits in our classes, even though it is likely that few anthropology students in the US receive PRISP funds. Members must be attentive to the dangers such programs pose to the academy and to anthropology.

Hugh Gusterson *is the author of* Why America's Top Pundits Are Wrong: Anthropologists Talk Back *(2004).*
David Price *is the author of* Threatening Anthropology: McCarthyism and the FBI's Surveillance of Activist Anthropologists *(2004).*

Some Thoughts on Anthropological Ethics and Today's Conflicts

Felix Moos
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Almost 70 years of applied anthropology since the onset of World War II have become a compass for much of our anthropological present. Yet, the gulf between an anthropologist's two major roles—as field researcher and analyst—has become evermore complex and challenging.

In the 1960s, activist anthropologists like Kathleen Gough and others reminded us ever so often that in our first role as field researcher, anthropologists share the lives of the people they study and identify with them even to the point of siding with them in the conflicts they face. Whereas in our second role as analysts, anthropologists should, if at all possible, objectify and distill actual field experiences.

Responsibility to the Public

As a matter of record, we should not ignore the fact that World War II was instrumental in raising the profile of applied anthropology, and even contributed to the formation of the Society for Applied Anthropology. This applied emphasis, characteristic of wartime in the past, seems to have disappeared. Anthropology has no longer played a significant role in public policy since World War II, especially since Vietnam, and one possible reason rests in many academic anthropologists' views about academic freedom. This is the view that anthropologists who work with—or, even worse, for—the "government" lose their academic freedom. Such applied anthropologists, in fact, are thought to forfeit their abilities, or perhaps, rights, to champion "the people," if not more specifically, "their people."

Yet today it is generally contended in the profession that anthropologists—be it academic or applied—are absent from public forums, and that this should be changed. Few, if any, voices from anthropology are heard in seats of power, nor are they conspicuous in domestic or international mass media. To keep such silence while playing it safe is currently even sanctioned by the AAA Code of Ethics adopted in 1998, which provides the following guidance: "Anthropologists may choose to move beyond disseminating research results to a positive advocacy. This is an individual decision, but not an ethical responsibility."

As current debate among anthropologists focuses on issues of ethical responsibility in times of conflict, both in terms of our primary responsibility to those who participate in our research, and our secondary responsibilities to our profession and public, we might well ask if it is time for the AAA to put together a group to hash out the issues and report on anthropological ethics and national security. The AAA could follow the American Psychological Association, which established a Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security, a task force that issued a report this year.

COMMENTARY

Anthropology and National Security

Entering the field in the 21st century, returning in one piece, and then climbing up the ladder of professional success surely is not what it used to be. It is a far more complex process, and above all, far more dangerous—not only physically dangerous, but potentially dangerous academically and intellectually. It is no surprise then that only a handful of the AAA's 11,000 members have spoken out on the asymmetric warfare in which a majority of the globe's 200 countries are now engaged.

In 2004, Murray Wax and I noted in our *Human Organization* article, "Anthropology: Vital or Irrelevant," that North American anthropologists—and most likely British anthropologists—"may delude themselves with the belief that if they could only disassociate themselves from military and intelligence agencies, and avow that they were different from their fellow Americans [and Britons], that then their *bona fides* would be globally accepted." This certainly was not always the case.