

# From PRISP to ICSP: Skullduggery Among the Acronyms Carry on Spying (or Pay Us Back at a Rate of 2,400 Per Cent )

BY DAVID H. PRICE

My recent CounterPunch exposé (“The CIA’s University Spies,” Vol. 12, No.1) on the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP) bruised those tender souls in spookworld, also Senator Roberts. After this piece circulated and some press coverage followed, Roberts gave some interviews designed to diminish concerns that something was wrong with secretly placing students on the payrolls of the CIA and other intelligence agencies in American university classrooms.

Senator Roberts’ spin was interesting for what it addressed and what it conceded. Roberts dismissed the possibility that the PRISP scholars covertly funded by the CIA would or even *could* compile dossiers on faculty and fellow students. The *Wichita Eagle* reported that, “Roberts noted that legal safeguards against domestic spying are in place that weren’t in the 1950s and 1960s, when the anti-Communist fervor of former Sen. Joe McCarthy and FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover created a climate that contributed to agency abuses. Specifically, a 1981 presidential executive order clearly prohibits physical surveillance of American citizens by agencies other than the FBI.” This is a remarkable statement. Pat Roberts, Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, really does not understand that the U.S. Patriot Act dismantled safeguards preventing domestic surveillance by the CIA and other agencies.

More revealing is that when pressed by reporters, Roberts and sources at CIA did not dispute the likelihood that having undisclosed CIA operatives amongst the ranks of academics could seriously damage the credibility of American academics conducting domestic and foreign research. This blasé attitude concerning the collateral damage of hapless academic bystanders will win Roberts no friends in the academy as the damage from such actions can be widespread.

But beyond Roberts’ reassuring words on the propriety of secretly sending intelligence agents to our classrooms, there is a quiet enthusiasm for the first cloned offspring of PRISP. And like its progenitor PRISP, this new program was birthed in an atmosphere of public silence.

In late December congress approved the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (S. 2845), which established a Director of National Intelligence. The 244-page act granted the new Intelligence Panjandrum many yet-to-be-examined powers, one of which is to oversee a new scholarship program known as the Intelligence Community Scholars Program (ICSP). Though modeled after PRISP, the similarities and differences between these two programs reveal emerging trends not only in intelligence funding, but in the intelligence apparatus’s new expectations for outcome-based funding in higher education.

The Director of National Intelligence is responsible for determining which specific fields and subjects of study will be funded under ICSP. Like the Roberts Program, the ICSP authorizes directors of various unnamed intelligence agencies, “to enter into contractual agreements with individual” students. But unlike the Roberts Program, these ICSP students receive unspecified levels of funding for up to four-years of university training. Congress specifies that ICSP participants owe two years of intelligence agency work for every year of funded education, with a ceiling of four years of study allowed unless overridden by the Director of National Intelligence.

But unlike previous intelligence-linked scholarship programs, the ICSP does not specifically limit the expenses incurred by participants. But given that the National Security Education Program current authorization of over \$40,000 of annual “academic” expenses for students, it is reasonable to assume that the ICSP will likewise allow over \$160,000 of ex-

penses over a four-year period.

One reason why intelligence agencies are so interested in recruiting social sciences and area studies students in the early stages of their education addresses the age-old urge for early indoctrination concerning the culture and history they will study. Regardless of such efforts to select and shape these individuals it seems inevitable that at least some will develop more critical attitudes towards these agencies as a result of their education or experiences with these agencies. But suppose a few ICSP students’ studies in a university history class lead them to read works like Philip Agee’s *Inside the Company* or John Stockwell’s *In Search of Enemies* and they decide they made a mistake in enrolling in the ICSP? If so, they will face serious penalties.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act states that if ICSP recipients decline to work for their sponsoring intelligence agency upon completing of their education, then the student “shall be liable to the United States for an amount equal to the total amount of the scholarships received...[and], the interest on the amounts of such awards which would be payable if at the time the awards were received they were loans bearing interest at the maximum legal prevailing rate, as determined by the Treasurer of the United States, *multiplied by three*.” In other words, spy or have a lousy credit rating for the rest of your life.

Such penalties are routine boilerplate language used in other “payback”-based federal scholarship legislation. But the CIA, NSA, FBI and other intelligence agencies are not like the Department of Education, the NSF, or other mundane federal agencies. After all, CIA lawyers who argue that “water-boarding,” intense shaking, *shabah*-posturing, and prolonged-hooding do not constitute illegal torture, might just as easily argue that the “maximum legal prevailing” in-  
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terest rate is that established by the payday loan industry, not to mention ordinary banks levying bounced checks charges at rates that top 800 per cent on an annualized basis.

Thus, the Director of National Intelligence could determine that ICSP drop-outs should be hit with interest penalties of 2,400 per cent. While the NSF or Department of Education has never taken such tactics against drop-out scholarship recipients, the CIA plays for keeps and has an appetite for playing rough with those who don't play along. The threats of Sallie Mae to late-paying grads could seem like child's play when compared with John Negroponte acting as debt collector to disillusioned would-be intelligence dropouts.

But the most significant difference in ICSP and PRISP is that while legislation authorizing PRISP earmarked four million dollars for the pilot program, ICSP's legislation does not disclose anything about the program's funding level, funding source or even the size of the program. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that if the ICSP funded 300 scholarships each year the cost of the program might be about six million dollars a year, totaling \$30 million during the 2005-2009 period. But these figures are only estimates by CBO staff and there is nothing in the actual legislation that limits the range of funding for the ICSP. The ICSP can now be funded through the Black Budget at levels to be determined by John Negroponte as he tests the reach and lack of oversight of his panoptic throne.

But the troubling elements of ICSP are those indicating how academia is increasingly being tethered to hidden patrons and clients. If you connect the dots from "non-payback" programs like Fulbright and Title VI to "payback" programs like the National Security Education Program (NSEP), PRISP and then ICSP, the changes in these funding programs suggest directional changes and likely reiterations to come.

While the shift from non-ideological programs like Title VI (or even NSEP to some degree) to intelligence-agency-linked programs indicates an obvious change, the subtle variations between PRISP and ICSP may indicate future funding developments. From this vantage the National Security Education Program (which mandates post-graduate

"payback" employment at undesignated agencies, but does not connect students to specific policy or intelligence agencies until after graduation) appears to be an unstable transitional evolutionary form. The transient independence of NSEP students during their studies is not to the liking of intelligence agencies, and PRISP and ICSP take direct steps to tie students to specific agencies increasingly early, also irrevocably. Changes in the evolution of specific "payback" requirements from NSEP to PRISP to ICSP also indicate an escalation in mandatory employment periods. In a budgetary world of zero sum gains, both PRISP and ICSP bring a growth of intelligence-linked scholarships in a time when traditional independent academic funding programs face cutbacks, and these conditions of scarcity will draw students to these "payback" programs.

Both PRISP and ICSP secretly place students employed by intelligence agencies in university classrooms. Both PRISP and ICSP conduct background in-

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## ***The new spook grants take direct steps to tie students to specific agencies increasingly early, also irrevocably.***

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vestigations of students before they are awarded scholarships. Both programs recruit intelligence employees at the front end of the process, but the ICSP legislation adds increased penalties for those who would later reconsider their obligation.

While PRISP and ICSP are transforming aspects of higher education without the consent of the universities, many institutions are cultivating closer relations with intelligence agencies. New campus intelligence consortia are forming. Most of these are organizations like the National Academic Consortium for Homeland Security (did they really think we wouldn't call it: NACHoS?) which aligns research and teaching at member institutions with the require-

ments of Bush's war on terror. But NACHoS is more of a programmatic loyalty marker than it is a key to inner sanctum funding. Member institutions range from Clackamas Community College to MIT. Interestingly, some of the universities that one might suspect would be NACHoS apex institutions (Harvard, Yale, Chicago etc.) are missing from the rolls.

The 251 universities in the consortium (see: [www.homelandsecurity.osu.edu](http://www.homelandsecurity.osu.edu)) have firmly declared their vague commitment to studying national security issues, antiterrorism, developing new Homeland Security technologies and to "educate and train the people required by governmental and non-governmental organizations, to effectively accomplish international and homeland security roles and responsibilities". While such proclamations may sound like advertisements for a left-handed monkey wrench, they can function as welcome mats or hobo signs for students secretly holding PRISP or ICSP funding as they shop around for spook-friendly campuses.

From one perspective the changes brought by PRISP, ICSP or NACHoS to university campuses are changes of degree, not of kind. There is little new in the purpose of such funding programs other than their sheer nakedness and impatience of intent. Throughout the Cold War federal funding produced hordes of scholars and highly educated functionaries happy, willing and capable of carrying out the desires of state. The number of dissident scholars is easily exaggerated, but the impacts have mattered. As the American intelligence and diplomatic apparatus come to increasingly rely on raw ideology over informed intelligence they cannot entrust these tasks to those pursuing independent inquiry. The needs of the Bush Doctrine require pre-loyalty before future analysts can be trained in the arts of "free" inquiry. Establishing these chokeholds on university funding may well be an effective means towards this end. CP

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