

CIA expands its Signature School program to University of Illinois Chicago

By George Gallanis and Kristina Betinis
4 May 2018

At the end of February, the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) announced a new partnership in the CIA's Signature Schools program.

The CIA is targeting UIC in the name of "diversity." Its large student population of more than 30,000, drawn from many national and racial backgrounds, and located in the center of the city of Chicago, has attracted the agency's attention. In the words of Maja Lehnus, CIA associate director for "talent" recruitment, the "CIA is committed to building a diverse workforce that has a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, language expertise, and educational and life experiences to ensure diversity of thought and the ability to operate effectively worldwide."

In 2016 under the Obama administration, John Brennan, then head of the CIA, announced its Diversity & Inclusion Strategy, with Lehnus at the helm.

In 2016, UIC reported 15 percent of all students enrolled were international students, coming from more than 100 countries. The university reported international students made up more than a third (34.5 percent) of graduate and professional students that year.

In that same year, the CIA launched its Signature Schools program. UIC is now fourth to join the program, which includes Baruch College of the City University of New York, the University of New Mexico, and Florida International University. All the institutions have large minority student populations, or majority minority student bodies, as well as large numbers of international students.

The program is reported to permit the CIA, the arm of the US intelligence apparatus also known as "Murder, Inc.," to have a regular recruiting presence in order to "build relationships" and "sustain contact with qualified student applicants" through on-campus interviews, workshops, presentations and seminars on "the business of intelligence," and other activities with CIA personnel, according to the joint press release.

It is not clear, based on the reports of the CIA and the universities, what specific activities the spy agency will

engage in on campus. It would be naïve to assume, however, that it will not engage in espionage against campus opponents of its murderous operations all over the world. International students will be particularly vulnerable.

The CIA is a violent and shadowy arm of American imperialism. It is richly documented that the agency has established "black sites" prisons, carried out coups, assassinations, "extraordinary rendition" kidnappings, torture, drone executions, misinformation campaigns, and dirty wars, and has sponsored the murderous activities of numerous puppet regimes.

In an economic environment where good-paying jobs are scarce and students leave college with tens of thousands of dollars of debt, UIC administrators are emphasizing the job opportunities the program opens up to students. Announcing the program, UIC Chancellor Michael Amiridis stated, "The Signature School Program will provide UIC students with direct access to careers and internships within the agency for many years to come. It's a win-win situation for both of us."

In 2016, Emile Nakhleh, former CIA intelligence officer and Director of University of New Mexico's Global and National Security Policy Institute, used nearly identical language in announcing the program: "It's win-win for our students and faculty because the program will strengthen the students' competitive edge in their search for careers in the federal government and in global and national companies and organizations."

University leaders are well-compensated for their work in establishing such relationships. Amiridis, a chemical engineering professor, came on as UIC chancellor in 2015 amid several scandals in the Illinois university system, which included fat compensation packages for top administrators. In a token sacrifice, Amiridis gave up his \$50,000 per year housing allowance, but has still managed to take in a salary of \$400,000 per year, in addition to bonuses of \$75,000 per year in 2016 and 2017.

Efforts to transform colleges and universities into centers of military-intelligence activity have been reenergized, with

recent research indicating they are operating at an intensity not seen since the Cold War.

Certainly, after September 11, 2001, military and intelligence agencies ramped up recruitment efforts on college and university campuses, as detailed in the book *Spy Schools*, by Daniel Golden. In the opening chapter, Golden quotes Austin Long, professor of security policy at Columbia University, “September 11 led to a quiet reengagement of a lot of the academy with the national security community.” The US-NATO war against Libya in 2011 opened a period of further infiltration of spy agencies on campuses, according to Golden.

Collaboration between academia and the military-intelligence apparatus was not always so easy. Golden writes that the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s and ’70s, meant ties between academics and the American intelligence agencies were frowned upon, and departments and universities were reluctant to allow the FBI and the CIA to recruit from their students.

There is a history of student protest against the CIA at UIC. Ami Chen Mills, in her *CIA Off Campus*, relates a number of protests in the 1980s at UIC against CIA recruitment that included active student-faculty campaigns.

“Students at the University of Illinois at Chicago sent flyers out to all UIC faculty and staff requesting donations for an anti-CIA speaker,” she writes. In the wake of an arrest of a student protester, “UIC professors formed a faculty solidarity group in the student’s defense that raised over \$500. The group also complained to the university chancellor and sent letters to the university president demanding that charges be dropped.”

Now, the CIA, FBI, and other security agencies have, in the words of Golden, “returned in force, forging a tenuous alliance of spies and scholars.”

In 2015, when VICE News reported a top 100 list of most militarized universities, it was notable that only a handful were considered traditionally conservative. Many, including the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor (number 70 on the list), and New York University (91) advertise themselves as “progressive,” “diverse,” and “liberal” universities. Yet they have extensive contracts for research on behalf of the military-industrial complex and offer national defense and homeland security master’s programs, which are approved by the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency.

Why does the military-intelligence apparatus find fertile ground at such institutions of higher learning, places that were once associated with the antiwar movement? There is, of course, the direct payout of many millions of dollars to colleges, which are used to fatten the paychecks of administrators like Amiridis. There are also political factors.

In recent decades, the upper reaches of the academic intelligentsia—the elite tenured professors as well as proliferating ranks of low-level administrators—have entered the top 10 percent of the income bracket. The rightward shift that has accompanied this process has been stunning, transforming this layer into a new constituency for US war policies, both at home and abroad, and one that specializes in providing a “human rights,” “democratic” and “diverse” veneer to the operations of American imperialism.

The US has been continuously at war for more than 25 years, longer than most high school and college students remember, with no end in sight. Last year the US Senate voted 89 to 9 to authorize \$700 billion in spending for the military and intelligence agencies, which is \$80 billion more than the 2016 budget, and \$26 billion more than President Trump had requested. These figures dwarf the paltry funding allocated for higher education.

Far from opposing mass spying and war, the Democrats are currently fielding candidates in the 2018 midterm elections who come directly from the CIA and the Pentagon. The WSWS has published a three-part report on the 221 military-intelligence candidates for Democratic nomination in 102 districts this year. The drive to war against Russia, China and Iran, a conspiracy of the capitalist elites, orchestrated by the highest levels of government, the military-intelligence apparatus, the corporate-financial oligarchy and a corrupted right-wing media, is rolling forward without even the pretext of democratic debate.

No doubt the CIA operations at UIC and other campuses will have as a central aim the recruitment of a new generation of “diverse” College Democrats who can be used to populate state agencies and NGOs in the future.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) at UIC is the only organization on campus organizing student opposition to the presence of the CIA and other military-intelligence agencies, in opposition to the Democratic and Republican parties, and fighting for the building a revolutionary party of the working class.

We call on students to take up the fight for socialism and join the IYSSE.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>