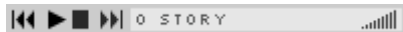




Inland News

Cal State program wanes after Cold War, gains after Sept. 11



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By JANET ZIMMERMAN
The Press-Enterprise

Operating almost as quietly as the spy agencies that recruit on its campus, Cal State San Bernardino is grooming analysts to track terrorist funding, gauge the threat of nuclear attack and analyze weapons of mass destruction.

While far from a household name, the university's national security studies master's program is fielding recruits for the CIA, FBI and others in the intelligence-gathering community.

The program is adding staff to accommodate more students, expanding expertise to include East Asia and counterterrorism, and drawing on a recent \$3 million government grant aimed at broadening the pool of potential agents with a focus on foreign languages and cultures.

The grant helps seven Cal State campuses expand undergraduate classes in computer science, geology, world religions and other areas that give students a solid background for the master's program as well as funding study abroad.

"If students can come to us with this exposure, it makes them more competitive," said Lenora Peters Gant of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which oversees 16 agencies. "We're trying to cast a wider net."

The program, which now has 90 students, began with 10 in 1985. It was started by a retired Navy commander who linked up with local military bases to bring students into the program.

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Professor William C. Green works with his students in Cal State San Bernardino's national security studies program. Green says what sets the program apart is its approach. Other programs look at how the world works; it looks at how the United States deals with the world.

Enrollment surged to 140 in 1989 before languishing in the post-Cold War years. The so-called "peace dividend" that led to the shuttering or downsizing of numerous U.S. military installations in the 1990s, including three Air Force bases in the Inland area, also helped to dry up the pool of military personnel that previously had fed the intelligence community.

The turn in world events since 2001 has fueled national pride and interest in government service, pumping enrollment to its highest level in 15 years, said Mark Clark, a Marine veteran who oversees national security studies at Cal State. The number of students is now nearly double what it was when the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks occurred.

While some applicants are making mid-career changes, most are civilians born near the end of the Cold War and cite the terrorist attacks as a life-changing moment that made them interested in government service.

National security studies is one of three such programs in the country. The others are at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and a satellite campus of Missouri State University that is in Fairfax, Va.

Local classes include military theory and strategy, military geography, operations analysis and strategic weapons and proliferation, with an emphasis on quality writing and presentations.

In addition to jobs in intelligence, students have gone on to work as legislative analysts for members of Congress or for the Senate Armed Services Committee or the Army's budget office.

What makes the Cal State program unique among such programs is its narrow focus: How the United States deals with the rest of the world, said professor William C. Green, a Navy reservist and former Russian interpreter.

The more numerous international relations programs at other universities, which also supply spy agencies, focus on how the world system works, with little direct reference to the United States, he said.

West Coast Handicap

Brad Thayer, an associate professor of defense and strategic studies at Missouri State who visited Cal State recently to evaluate the program for the university provost, praised the program for its development of critical-thinking skills among students.

"It's a program that fights above its weight class," he said. "If the intelligence community were not getting something out of it, they would not be there."

Story continues below



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A poster of President John F. Kennedy, a prominent figure in Cold War history, hangs at the back of a Cal State classroom where professor William C. Green teaches national security studies students.

What works against the national security studies program is its distance from Washington, he said. The Missouri satellite campus, because of its proximity to the center of government, regularly has senior government officials as guest speakers, offers year-round internships in government and at think tanks and has a larger adjunct faculty of defense contractors and Pentagon workers who give seminars.

Green, who used to teach at Boston University, said professors in the local program spend more time correcting a lack of basic social niceties -- things that many East Coast graduate students already know. Students are coached on everything from how to properly dress for interviews to knowing "that 'dude' is not an acceptable way to address someone," he said.

"We work with rough diamonds, and we work with rebels, people who come up through California education and don't know much in the world but Southern California. But they're really bright people," Green said. "We're ... making them real players at the national level."

Green likes to tell his students that when they get to the orientation briefing at their first job, there will be a Harvard graduate to their right, a Yale graduate to their left, and they will be equally competitive.

Air Force Col. Vic Kuchar, a 1990 graduate, is chief of field operations at the Pentagon. He recently returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, where he worked with multinational security forces and NATO on day-to-day operations and long-term strategy.

Kuchar, now 56, entered the program in the late 1980s while doing ballistic missile research at what was then Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino. He figured it would help him think more strategically and be a better officer.

It worked. His degree, and an earlier master's in cartography and satellite imaging, got him noticed by Gen. Colin Powell, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who tapped Kuchar as his geopolitical adviser. Kuchar went on to develop the maps used in the Dayton Peace Agreement on Bosnia-Herzegovina.

"You have to have some understanding of how these political relationships exist and how we can work around those and play with those sensitivities and at the end of the day get the mission done, which is what it's all about," Kuchar said.

Where to Look

Chino Hills native Chris Rasmussen, a 2002 graduate, was recruited on campus by the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which analyzes imagery, maps, charts and environmental data from other countries with an eye on nuclear weapons development and other threats.

In his five years there, Rasmussen has led a move to coordinate field agents and analysts online to freely exchange information. In the past, employees of intelligence agencies were bogged down following the chain of command and making sure the agency they worked for got credit for the information it provided, he said.

That way of thinking limited the free flow of information and was a factor in the failure of U.S. agencies to predict the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, according to the 9/11 Commission report, which urged sweeping structural changes in the way intelligence is gathered and shared.

Rasmussen, 32, has been instrumental in forming Intellipedia -- a wiki for spies that includes chat rooms, blogs and links for instant background, research and opinions on working cases.

The speed of Intellipedia was demonstrated last year when a small plane crashed into a Manhattan high-rise apartment building, prompting fears of terrorism. Within 20 minutes of the crash, 80 employees in nine spy agencies had posted information to a Web page on the topic -- a quicker exchange that included far more participants than the traditional system of e-mails and meetings, Rasmussen said.

It was quickly determined that the plane belonged to Yankees pitcher Cory Lidle, who was with his flight instructor. Fighter aircraft launched as a precaution over U.S. cities were recalled.

Rasmussen's specialty is "open source information" -- that gleaned from public documents, databases, blogs, videos, radio broadcasts, newspapers and discussion boards in foreign countries.

The work is similar to what Rasmussen did at Cal State, where he studied 150 library databases for information -- more than three times what intelligence analysts had access to when he arrived at the agency.

"Secrets are still important, but they're not what they used to be," he said. "If you're talking about terrorism, those people love to talk about how much they want to kill everybody ... and they brag about it. They tell people what they're doing and where they're going. It's wide out in the open. You just have to know where to look."

FBI Recruiting Stop

Cal State is a regular recruiting stop for the FBI, spokesman Kenneth Smith said. While bureau recruiters visit

lots of colleges, including UC Riverside, and look at students from all majors, national security studies gives them a leg up, he said.

"Those people can pretty much write their own ticket," he said.

Student Corey Washington scored an internship last summer with the CIA, where he analyzed terrorist weaponry.

Working with the counterterrorism team, he used imagery and field reports to determine how terrorists and insurgents were acquiring weapons used against U.S. personnel and how they were used. He briefed supervisors the way he learned in class.

"The program really prepared me for a lot," Washington said.

Graduating this month, he has applied to the FBI and Secret Service.

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Spy school

Enrollment in the national security studies master's program at Cal State San Bernardino fluctuates in reaction to world events, said Mark Clark, its director. The current geopolitical climate has sparked an increase in applications.

1985: The national security studies program is started with 10 students in the final decade of the Cold War, a period of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective groups of allies that stretched from the end of World War II until 1989.

1989: The program's enrollment peaks at 140 students as the Berlin Wall is being dismantled. Erected in 1961, the barrier separating East and West Berlin became a symbol of the Cold War.

1990: The program's enrollment declines to 120 students; East and West Germany reunify.

1991: 100 students; the Soviet Union is dissolved.

1992: 90 students; George Air Force Base in Victorville closes.

1994: 60 students; Norton Air Force Base in San Bernardino closes.

1996: 30 students; March Air Force Base in Moreno Valley downsizes.

1998: 40 students; the program experiences a resurgence as people realize the end of economic benefits from decreased defense spending.

2001: 50 students; terrorists hijack domestic airliners and fly them into the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

2004: 60 students; an intelligence community report recommends a restructuring of intelligence gathering and sharing among U.S. agencies.

2007: 90 students; the federal government provides a five-year, \$3 million grant to develop an intelligence training program at seven Cal State campuses.

Source: National security studies, Cal State San Bernardino
