

Foreign Talent Recruitment Programs in U.S. Higher Education

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American colleges and universities are infected with the cancer of malign influence of foreign recruitment programs; like the deadliest of diseases, most unsuspecting educational establishments do not even know they are ill. Known as “foreign talent recruitment programs,” these scholastic viruses present themselves innocuously and hide in plain sight. Without confronting this sickness, wrought by foreign money and influence, U.S. institutions of higher learning are unwittingly becoming weapons in the war between free democratic societies and rogue nations intent on harming our country and its institutions.

The term “foreign talent recruitment program” may seem benign, but the aim of these nefarious programs is to usurp American academic prowess, intellectual property, trade secrets, research and national intelligence for the sole purpose of dominating our nation and undermining our competitive and strategic advantages. The United States government defines a talent recruitment program as “any foreign-state-sponsored attempt to acquire US scientific-funded research or technology through foreign government-run or funded recruitment programs that target scientists, engineers, academics, researchers, and entrepreneurs of all nationalities working or educated in the United States” (Doe.gov 2019).

However, instead of using weapons of traditional war to steal what is rightfully ours, these nations, specifically China, weaponize human capital in the form of students, professors, academics and researchers.

Almost one-third of all international students in American colleges and universities come from China (Seldin 2019). While this is an attractive revenue stream for universities, many are not equipped to deal with the fact that Chinese intelligence is using these students as pawns to steal U.S. research and technological advances, some of which are funded by the Pentagon and other U.S. intelligence services (Brooks 2018; Seldin 2019). Golden (2017) stresses that presently Chinese funded foreign intelligence services have penetrated higher education more deeply, and are more hidden, than ever before. These foreign programs shrewdly use the concept of academic freedom as a sword to inflict their harm and as a shield to protect themselves from the consequences of that harm. When all goes according to plan, foreign talent programs produce academic double agents that become one of many needles in a haystack which are difficult, but not impossible, to weed out.

Despite the foregoing diagnosis, there is an antidote to the toxic influence of foreign talent recruitment programs. However, like most remedies, there is not a one dose solution to this pandemic. Instead, our colleges and universities have to be willing to build systems of safeguards, checks and balances that will be ubiquitously and habitually applied in order to protect our universities, and the intellectual property and capital they produce. In addition to academic freedom, foreign talent programs prey upon other sensitivities within our nation in order to shield themselves and cover their actions. For instance, our nation's academic

institutions pride themselves on cultural diversity, but the increased vetting of foreign researchers and foreign investment into American universities could bring with it cries of anti-intellectualism, xenophobia and racism. But to allow this foreign recruitment contagion to proliferate, for fear of universities being labeled culturally insensitive, is exactly what these reprobate nations are counting on. While schools worry about false accusation, foreign recruitment programs will continue to use their educational Trojan Horses to funnel their influence into, and syphon our assets out of, our colleges and universities.

However, we cannot allow mitigation of potential threats to be seen as objectification of persons. Just as it is appropriate to provide passports to customs officials, show driver's licenses when using credit cards, and list charities given to in order to receive tax benefits, so too should it be seen as appropriate to take suitable measures to ensure our colleges and universities are protected from academic espionage. Such reasonable steps would include proper vetting of, and required disclosures for, all professors and researchers, including increased scrutiny of students from foreign nations that traditionally have an adversarial relationship with the United States, for example China, Iran, North Korea and Russia.

Opponents of the foregoing suggestions claim that such scrutiny will lead to divestment of foreign research dollars from our nation's schools. However, this pales in comparison to the costs associated with losing decades' worth of

research, intellectual property and trade secrets, with no hope of recompense for the same. Instead only to have what was stolen implemented in foreign countries and ultimately weaponized against our own nation. Consider the Chinese graduate student that stole invisibility research from his Duke University lab, which he then used to fund a competing lab in China, he is now a billionaire and Duke has nothing to show for it (Golden 2017). At present, the annual cost to the U.S. economy of pirated software, counterfeit goods and theft of trade secrets is estimated to be between \$225 to \$600 million (Fbi.gov 2019). In sum, America's universities cannot afford to sit idly by while hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of research slips out their collective back doors in exchange for tuition bills that are paid-in-full by foreign governments.

The forthcoming report will provide a literature review on foreign talent recruitment programs that detail how these programs are being used as weapons of modern academic warfare in U.S. institutions of higher education. The scope of these programs, from elementary schools to colleges and beyond, will be also be explored in addition to the processes these programs use to inoculate the public against their perceived threat while seamlessly integrating their programs within our society. Moreover, the report will discuss the damage already incurred as a result of these decades long programs, in addition to future ramifications for our educational system, and ultimately our national security, should they go

unchecked. Lastly, explicit recommendations meant to curb, and ultimately thwart, the hegemonic ambitions of these programs will be provided.

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