Daniel Golden's *Spy Schools*: How the CIA, FBI, and foreign intelligence secretly exploit America's universities

By Clara Weiss
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Daniel Golden: Spy Schools: How the CIA, FBI, and Foreign Intelligence Secretly Exploit America's Universities, *New York: Henry Holt and Company 2017.*

Spy Schools, the new book by Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Daniel Golden, sheds light on how intelligence agencies, particularly those of the United States, manipulate and use academia for their purposes. It is an important contribution toward understanding the military-intelligence-university complex in the US.

Basing himself on extensive journalistic research, Golden shows that the lines between US academia and the state are often so blurred as to be non-existent. While the collaboration between US academia and the state has a long history, its current scale has not been seen since the 1950s and 60s, and surpasses perhaps even that period. In Golden's words, the CIA has come to penetrate "higher education more deeply than ever."

The case that led Golden to further investigate the ties between universities and the intelligence agencies was that of Dajin Peng, who teaches international relations at the Confucius Institute of the University of South Florida, Tampa. She was pressured into spying on China for the FBI after being accused of sexual harassment, labor rights violations and the misappropriation of funds.

Yet Peng's case proved to be symptomatic of a much larger process. In 2015, *Vice News* counted the USF among the United States' 100 most militarized universities (it is ranked 24th). Tampa is home to the US Central Command and US Special Operations Command, which are both located at MacDill Air Force Base. The local military industry is worth no less than $14 billion, and nine of the top ten US defense contractors have plants in the Tampa Bay area.

USF has been closely integrated into the military-industrial complex. In 2009, the university hired a retired Marine Corps three-star general, Martin R. Stelle, to promote military partnerships. In 2011, a memorandum of understanding was signed with the US Central Command to collaborate on "activities of mutual value." That same year, USF also became one of 20 universities designated by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence as "Intelligence Community Centers of Academic Excellence." As Golden's book shows, the conditions at USF are symptomatic of a much broader process.

In the first part of the book, Golden illustrates with several case studies how Chinese, Cuban and Russian intelligence agencies try to recruit among or spy on American academia, especially at Ivy League schools such as Harvard, Columbia and Princeton. Under conditions of growing military tensions, especially with China and Russia—a political context which Golden, unfortunately, hardly addresses—the universities have become a primary battleground for counter-intelligence.

In the stronger, second part of the book, Golden details the CIA's penetration of US academia. Historically, the CIA and the upper echelons of American universities have had a close relationship. McGeorge Bundy, who was an intelligence officer during World War II and then became the national security adviser to both Kennedy and Johnson, described the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the predecessor of the CIA, as "half cops-and-robbers and half faculty meeting." The OSS was, in Golden's words, "largely an Ivy League bastion." In the decades to come, the typical CIA officer would be educated at Ivy League institutions before or while working for the agency.

Following the anti-war movement of the 1960s, there was a pushback against the CIA's involvement on campus, but it did not last long. By the late 1970s and the 1980s, the CIA had taken numerous successful steps toward mending its ties with the academy. In 1977, the CIA launched the "scholars-in-residence" program. Participating professors were given contracts to advise CIA analysts during their sabbaticals, and were given access to classified information. In 1985, the "officers-in-residence" component was added, placing intelligence officers close to retirement at universities. Many other programs, including the Boren scholarship for students studying the languages of countries deemed potential threats to US national security—including Persian, Russian, Turkish and Chinese—were set up with funding by the CIA.

Like the FBI, the CIA has been trying to aggressively recruit from academia—both faculty and students, and international students in particular. In one poll cited by Golden, 31 percent of professors indicated that the FBI had visited students within the past year—and this only reflects the cases of which the professors were aware.

Today, there is little to no line between the universities, especially in political science and international relations departments, and the CIA.

As Golden points out, this is not just because of efforts by the CIA. A new generation of professors has emerged who not only make no effort to conceal their ties to the CIA and national security apparatus, but, actually brag about them. As an example, Golden names Barbara Walter, professor of political sciences at the University of California, San Diego, who "considers it a public service to educate the CIA." She provides "unpaid presentations on her specialty, civil wars, at think tanks fronting for the agency, sometimes for audiences whose name tags carry only first names. When CIA recruiters have visited UCSD, she has helped them organize daylong simulations of foreign policy crises to measure graduate students' analytic abilities—and even role-played a CIA official."

Golden also goes into the case of Graham Spanier, the former president of Penn State University, who took the initiative to form the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board (NSHEAB) in 2005 to foster "dialogue" between the agencies and universities. Before that, he had already introduced an "open door" policy for all US intelligence agencies at Penn State, and gave FBI-sponsored seminars for administrators at MIT, Michigan State and other universities. He was chair of the NSHEAB

for several years and was awarded medals by both the FBI and the CIA. In 2007-2008, he headed the Association of American Universities. In 2011, he was forced to step down as president of Penn State in 2011 because of the child sex abuse scandal involving assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky.

In 2015, *Vice News* ranked Penn State University as the 15th most militarized university in the United States. It ranks number three in national security funding, participates as one of three schools in the National Nuclear Security Administration graduate-level program in nuclear security, and has an on campus-facility at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego.

Golden details how the CIA regularly organizes conferences on foreign policy issues, so that officers and analysts can easily learn from scholars. In his words, "With scholarly presentations followed by questions and answers, the sessions are like those at any academic meeting, except that many attendees—presumably, CIA analysts—wear name tags with only their first names."

One of the largest CIA front organizations for this purpose is Centra. While everyone in academia and the intelligence community knows that Centra means CIA, it is designed as a "thin cover" that the CIA recognizes as "useful…for some academics," according to Robert Jervis, a longtime CIA consultant. Since its establishment in 1997, Centra has received government contracts worth over $200 million, including at least $40 million that came directly from the CIA.

At the same time, intelligence officers are sent to conferences both abroad and in the US, in order to spy on and recruit professors. Particularly extensive in this regard were the efforts of the CIA to recruit Iranian scholars and physicists. Golden describes the CIA's procedure as follows:

> "Because it was hard to approach the scientists in Iran, the CIA enticed them to academic conferences in friendly or neutral countries, a former intelligence officer familiar with the operation told me. In consultation with Israel, the agency would choose a prospect. Then it would set up a conference at a prestigious scientific institute through a cutout, typically a businessman, who would underwrite the symposium with $500,000 to $2 million in agency funds. The businessman might own a technology company, or the agency might create a shell company for him, so that his support would seem legitimate to the institute, which was unaware of the CIA's hand."

Typically, the Iranian scientists would be offered a Green Card and refuge for their families in exchange for his work for the CIA. If they refuse, the CIA threatened them. Numerous scientists who refused to cooperate with the CIA were assassinated, four between 2010 and 2012 alone.

This is one of the few places in the book where the reader gets a glimpse of the murderous implications of the collaboration between academia and the military and intelligence agencies. In fact, even though Golden does not spell it out, the processes he describes mean that substantial sections of university circles have become supporters of and participants in the preparation and execution of the massive criminal operations and war crimes that have been committed by US imperialism over the past few decades.

The obvious question is, how could things have gone so far?

In the wake of the mass movement against the Vietnam war, ties between academics and the American intelligence agencies were, if not taboo, at least frowned upon. Many departments and universities were reluctant to open their doors for the FBI and the CIA to recruit from their students and spy on them. In 1977, Columbia University saw massive demonstrations by both students and faculty against the appointment of Henry Kissinger, one of the major war criminals in post-World War II US history. At the University of Massachusetts, demonstrations took place as late as 1986 against CIA recruiting on campus.

This has changed, especially after 9/11. Golden cites Austin Long, who teaches security policy at Columbia University: "September 11 led to a quiet reengagement of a lot of the academy with the national security community."

Golden emphasizes that this process was bound up with the massive globalization of higher education, which has included exponentially rising numbers of students studying abroad and international students studying in the US. International students both in America and overseas have become the primary target for foreign intelligence agencies.

Simultaneously, as Golden points out, the privatization of higher education has increased access by both businesses and the state to the universities. With tenured track positions declining, many adjunct teachers and "professors of practice" with government or business backgrounds are hired. Multimillion-dollar contracts are given to universities for conducting research for the US military or spy agencies.

Yet these developments alone do not explain the far-reaching integration of US academia into the state and military apparatus.

According to *Vice News*, a qualitative extension of the ties between the universities and the military-industrial complex occurred not only, as Golden correctly points out, after 9/11, but also especially around 2011/2012—that is, around the time of the invasion of Libya, which was to a significant extent a response by imperialism to the eruption of revolutionary movements by the working class in Egypt and the Middle East, and just after the Obama administration announced the pivot to Asia and started moving toward an aggressive escalation of tensions with Russia.

It is since then that multiple universities have set up NSA-approved cybersecurity programs to do research and train personnel on behalf of the US state. (Between 2013 and 2018, 19 schools ran NSA-approved cybersecurity programs on either the undergraduate or graduate levels, among them New York University, the University of New Orleans, several campuses in the University of Texas system, the University of Nebraska, and Northeastern University.) By now, according to the website gradschools.com, there are over 50 universities offering graduate programs in national defense and homeland security, including universities in Australia and Europe.

Unfortunately, Golden hardly goes into the political context of the collaboration between academia and the spy agencies. A political explanation of this process requires not only an understanding of the explosion of US militarism and its preparations for a major war with nuclear-armed powers, but also of the collapse of the petty-bourgeois left which dominated the 1960s anti-war movement and had a substantial constituency within the universities.

The upper layers of the academic intelligentsia have entered the top ten percent of the income bracket under conditions of the growing impoverishment of ever-broader layers of the working class and lower middle classes. 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.

It is noteworthy that in the ranking of the 100 most militarized US universities that *Vice News* compiled in 2015, only a handful are 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, offer national defense and homeland security master's programs which are approved by the

Department of Homeland Security and the NSA, and so on.

In other words, substantial sections of academia, including its supposedly “left wing,” have been integrated into the US war machine, which is now preparing for a military confrontation with other nuclear-armed powers.