



Homeland
Security

November 14, 2023

MEMORANDUM FOR: Elisa Villanueva Beard
Chair, Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council

CC: Dr. Walter Bumphus
Vice Chair, Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council

FROM: Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Secretary, United States Department of Homeland Security

SUBJECT: **Formation of a New Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council Subcommittee and Tasking it to Provide Recommendations Regarding Foreign Malign Influence in Higher Education**

I greatly appreciated our inaugural meeting on September 6, 2023. As I noted during our discussion, I request that the Homeland Security Academic Partnership Council (HSAPC) form a subcommittee to evaluate and provide recommendations around foreign malign influence in higher education institutions.

I request that the HSAPC submit its findings and key recommendations to me no later than 150 days from the date of this memorandum, consistent with applicable rules and regulations.

Foreign Malign Influence in Higher Education

Academic partners provide valuable insights into the Department of Homeland Security's most pressing issues, including domestic violent extremism, transnational criminal organizations, cybersecurity, and the homeland security implications of climate change. As the threat environment the nation faces continues to evolve, the Department must consider how to better leverage the insights and research capabilities of U.S. academic partners to help address emerging and evolving threats.

Foreign malign influence is a threat to our national security, and is particularly concerning at our nation's colleges and universities when it involves intellectual property theft and transnational repression. Foreign adversaries are increasingly seeking to exploit our higher education institutions as platforms for their own gain at home and abroad.

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Malign actors at times may perceive colleges and universities and their inherent promotion of academic freedom and openness as a threat to their own national interests and policies. The colleges and universities may also be seen as a forum to promote the malign actors' ideologies or to suppress opposing worldviews. In addition, accessing higher education institutions presents an opportunity to steal research and technology for the malign actors' own aims.

Malign actors employ various tactics to achieve foreign malign influence, including monitoring, intimidating, and threatening students on U.S. campuses—or targeting the overseas families of international students attending U.S. institutions—to silence dissenting views; persuading or pressuring academics to self-censor views they might oppose; influencing publications they view as denigrating to their own interests or views; funding research and academic programs, both overt and undisclosed, that promote their own favorable views or outcomes; and stealing the resources, expertise, and products of academic research conducted at colleges and universities. This infiltration undermines the trust and transparency essential to maintaining the integrity of our education system. This jeopardizes U.S. national security and the free exchange of ideas.

DHS reporting has illuminated the evolving risk of foreign malign influence in higher education institutions. One such example is the Chinese Government's efforts to regain influence in U.S. universities by concealing its connection to Confucius Institutes. These institutions were rebranded as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 2020 following accusations that they suppressed academic freedom and promoted Chinese Government propaganda. The NGO status was used to undermine transparency in international collaborations, including clear disclosure of funding sources and rigorous vetting of foreign partners, and complicated the ability of higher education institutions and the U.S. Government to identify, track, and address potential risks.

Foreign malign influence at universities is not unique to the United States, and our allies and partners have developed their own guidance to address this challenge. For example, in 2019, the Australian Government developed *Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector* that promote frameworks and policies to identify and mitigate threats of foreign interference and to promote, support, and strengthen the resilience of higher education institutions.

Given the need to accelerate and further enhance U.S. academic resilience in the face of this evolving threat, I request that the HSAPC form a subcommittee to review and provide recommendations for mitigating foreign malign influence at our colleges and universities, taking into account existing prevention frameworks and models from the public and private sectors. Specifically, the review and recommendations should include:

- Guidelines and best practices for higher education institutions to reduce the risk of and counter foreign malign influence;
- Consideration of a public-private partnership to enhance collaboration and information sharing on foreign malign influence; and

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- An assessment of how the U.S. Government can enhance its internal operations and posture to effectively coordinate and address foreign malign influence-related national security risks posed to higher education institutions.