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Academic freedom

CIA links to U.S. campuses will be carefully watched

After years of exile from American campuses, the CIA has been found lurking in the shadows of academia again. Its presence — this time not so covert — is being rightly suspected as a threat to the freedoms of the nation's scholars.

The move is a regression for those freedoms — one scholars, students, the Reagan administration and Congress need to be ready to combat.

It is the responsibility of the intelligence agency to be mindful of how much it asks of researchers. It must be especially heedful not to lapse into its '60s mode, when it was shunned from U.S. campuses because of improprieties during anti-government protests over Vietnam.

Yet already the CIA is giving cause for concern. At Harvard University, the CIA is being accused of controlling the work of Nadav Safran, a professor who has resigned as head of the Center of Middle Eastern Studies. In a university report released this month, Safran is said to have violated Harvard's rule of disclosing the source of contributions. According to a New York Times story, the CIA financed an Islamic fundamentalism conference, run by Safran, at Harvard last year. The CIA also gave Safran a \$107,000 grant for his latest book. His contract with the CIA gave the agency the right to review the manuscript and stop it from being published.

That is just one example. The Times story also

said the CIA has been the host of 75 conferences a year since 1982.

A fourth of the agency's intelligence estimates are being reviewed in draft form by professors or other outside experts. It is important for the U.S. government to ask the country's "best minds" for analytical advice in its dealings with foreign governments. Academia has much to offer the CIA; warnings from scholars that the Shah of Iran was in trouble were ignored by the agency.

Perhaps the CIA is learning from past mistakes. But keeping up on scholarly information is a different thing from secretly financing research and controlling the dissemination of information. Scholars need to share their research with their peers in an open environment.

Conscious of the dangers the CIA poses with its contracts with professors, Rep. Don Edwards, D-Calif., says the agency should disclose all of its contracts. Perhaps that is the only way to ensure that the agency is not suppressing work or pressuring professors for changes.

Threatening the independence of scholars will only push those universities to banish the CIA once again. The restoration of ties to academia must be only to gain knowledge and points of view.

If not, the CIA should know that everyone is watching, so it should watch its step.