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Key documents missing

CIA-Nassau files: A lo

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A 17-month search of Central Intelligence Agency files for information on CIA activities at Princeton University has produced 47 documents that reveal almost nothing about the agency's relationship to Princeton students, faculty or the university itself.

The packet of documents, mailed last week in response to a September 1978 request under the Freedom of Information Act, even fails to include information on CIA activities at Princeton that have already been confirmed by the agency.

Missing, for example, are documents that describe payments to two unnamed persons at Princeton in the 1950s for work on projects related to MKULTRA, the "mind control" research sponsored by the CIA. Those documents, which the CIA released to the university in 1977, spurred modification of the university's faculty research guidelines.

Missing also is documentation of any one of numerous reports of contact between the CIA and Princeton students and staff members that have circulated on campus during the past few years. Some of those accounts involved administrators serving as recruiting contacts. There were other stories about professors who were experts on overseas areas and provided information on them to the CIA.

THE 47 DOCUMENTS that were sent included a 1979 Cornell Daily Sun article about a lecture given by a CIA official, a copy of a 1973 contract for translation of material written in Romanian, Hungarian, Chinese and Japanese and a 1956 memo noting that the American Whig-Cliosophic Society had invited Alger Hiss to speak on campus.

Also included were letters and memoes written in 1971, 1973, 1976 and 1978, detailing attempts by the CIA's Office of Economic Research to recruit economics graduates students for jobs.

A few routine Freedom of Information requests for information on CIA activities on some college campuses have produced indications of patterns of cooperation between the CIA and the colleges involved. The release of those documents has produced storms of controversy at those institutions.

In general, however, the request for information on CIA activities at Princeton is typical of the way the agency has handled Freedom of Information matters. A long delay was followed by a packet of documents that reveal almost nothing. "A lot of people who have filed Freedom of Information requests have been really disappointed because the stuff is not very sexy. There's really nothing that would make a good story," said Don McGrew, a CIA official.

A staff member at the Campaign for Political Rights, which has studied the CIA in depth, put it differently. "They hold back all they can," she said.

CIA OFFICIALS, however, have long complained that the Freedom of Information Act makes it difficult for the agency to conducts its business. The officials claim, for example, that some foreign security agencies are reluctant to cooperate with the CIA because they fear that sensitive information will be revealed through Freedom of Information requests.

Thus Sen. Daniel Moynihan, D-N.Y., and a bipartisan group of senators introduced legislation last week that would exempt the CIA from complying with requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, except in cases where individuals ask for data from their personal files. The legislation was introduced in reaction to President Carter's State of the Union address last week, in which he said the U.S. "must tighten our controls on sensitive intelligence information and we need to remove unwarranted restraints on America's ability to collect intelligence."

any way to contractual arrangements and formal or informal relationships between the CIA and Princeton University itself, or Princeton students or staff.

The CIA responded at the time that a similar request had already been filed. The Trenton Times, the agency promised, would be sent "all the materials, if any, that may be released as a result of the Agency's current processing" of the previous request.

When those materials were finally released, the MKULTRA documents were not included, a CIA information and privacy officer explained in a telephone interview last week, because "they're in the public domain and are available at Princeton University."

PRINCETON administrators had, in fact, asked the CIA for copies of documents related to MKULTRA activities at Princeton in 1977, after the university was notified by the agency that it had been one of 86 institutions involved in some portion of the "mind control" research in the 1950s and 1960s.

Two researchers affiliated with the university, it turned out, had received payments totalling $4,075 for analyzing the mind-orienting chemicals present in morning glory seeds and for preparing packets of reading material on social character in the U.S. and another, unnamed culture.

McGrew, the agency employee who actually searched files for the Princeton information, was then asked if other material on CIA activities at the university had also been omitted from the packet. He said, "We're 99 percent sure that we've got everything on Princeton University" in the 47-document packet.

Everything, that is, that's "releasable." The Freedom of Information Act has applied to the CIA ever since it was approved by Congress in 1966, but the courts have generally upheld the agency's right to withold material in order "to protect sources and methods."