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Howard, Va. Tech Join U.S. Intelligence Program

By Walter Pincus
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Howard University and Virginia Tech have joined forces in a \$2.5 million academic program funded by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence designed to teach undergraduates skills that are critically needed by the nation's intelligence agencies.

The aim of the program receiving the five-year grant is to develop a pipeline of graduates "who will come to work for us," said Ronald Sanders, the chief human capital officer for the intelligence community.

This will not be novel on the campuses of the two schools because both have ROTC programs. Howard has Army and Air Force units, and Virginia Tech has units from all three services.

The grant was announced last week by Director of National Intelligence [Dennis C. Blair](#) at the national annual conference of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Blair said two other historically black colleges in addition to Howard were joining the intelligence program for the first time: Florida A&M University and Miles College, near Birmingham, Ala.

Speaking to an audience that included a large number of black educators, Blair said intelligence agencies are recruiting on campuses of all black colleges and universities. He called on those present, whether in the intelligence program or not, "to encourage your best graduates to come think about us when they're thinking about where they go in their professions."

Howard and Virginia Tech join 19 other colleges and universities in the [DNI's Centers of Academic Excellence program](#) aimed at developing national security studies that support critical skills needed by intelligence agencies. Begun in 2004, it provides grants to institutions that agree to design, develop or reshape their curricula with courses that teach competence in regional and international issues, cultural awareness and languages needed by intelligence specialists.

The DNI grants last five years, but part of joining the program is a commitment by the institutions involved to continue the national security courses after the money ends.

Lenora Peters Gant, who founded and directs the DNI centers program, said in an interview that the Howard-Virginia Tech program would focus on engineering and science, with some of the new courses held through video conferencing that would reach students at both schools.

One element of the program is a special overseas experience for so-called intelligence community scholars who take the national security courses at the colleges.

It involves a 10-to-14-day stay in a foreign country with an itinerary worked out by the scholar's home university. Although the overseas program might involve getting assistance from U.S. embassies abroad, the intelligence community plays no part, Sanders said. Recent intelligence community scholars traveled to China, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, South Africa and Turkey, according to Blair.

Sanders said there have been 600 intelligence community scholars selected to date, some of whom have received scholarships to aid in covering their college expenses.

"It seems to be working," he said. However, he added, the amount of money in the program and the rate of placement of participants in the agency are classified.

Both the House and Senate have approved language in the fiscal 2010 Defense authorization bill that would establish an Intelligence Reserve Officers Training program, much like those in the military.

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