

## COUNCIL ON COMPETITIVENESS STATEMENT

# Mitigating Foreign Influence in Higher Education Research Collaborations



### *The undersigned members of the Council on Competitiveness...*

...believe that scientific research and the engagement therein of foreign students, faculty and researchers serves the United States national interest both from an economic and national security perspective. And the line between these two interests is increasingly uncertain, as dual-use disruptive technologies—such as quantum computing, gene editing, artificial intelligence, and high-performance computing—come to the forefront of the U.S. research enterprise.

Research into these and other applications is science at the edge, often requiring long-term commitments and global collaboration. Whether pushing the boundaries of what can be seen at vast distances or at quantum scales, new technologies are disrupting industries, jobs and economies across the globe, as well as shaping how humans will progress and how society will advance. They are crucial drivers of productivity and economic growth, altering the patterns of society and many dimensions of everyday life. For academia, companies and countries, the ability to leverage these technologies for economic impact and national security is fundamental to their competitiveness. In addition to their economic potential, these technologies could solve many of the world's critical challenges surrounding areas such as healthcare, energy and sustainability, clean water and the global food supply.

In addition to the research component, universities and colleges are educating and training the next-generation workforce to take advantage of these disruptions. **Enabling the best and brightest from around the world, including through a robust and rational visa system, to collaborate towards mutually beneficial goals must remain central to the U.S. research enterprise.**

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as of July 7, 2021

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## A Real and Evolving Threat to U.S. Research

Federal research and law enforcement agencies and the U.S. Congress have all taken recent actions to highlight significant national and economic security concerns related to undue foreign influence in and appropriation of U.S. research and development. Guidance documents from key funding agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, have sought to clarify the risks both from state actors and individual researchers and students who seek to take advantage of the open nature and transparency of the U.S. research enterprise. These concerns range from failure to disclose foreign government relationships or funding to coordinated foreign military efforts to collect and aggregate research data on critical technologies.

Several high-profile cases in recent years have highlighted the threat and called into question the processes and safeguards currently in place by both federal funding agencies and the schools and laboratories where the research is taking place.

## A Shared Commitment to a More Secure Path Forward

*Organizations that receive federal research funding must ensure the security of the research by taking, at a minimum, the following steps:*

**Transparency:** Disclosure and, when needed, management of relationships and research funding from foreign and domestic sources, including any real or potential conflicts of interest and conflicts of commitment.

**Training and Awareness:** Development of awareness and training programs to ensure faculty and students are familiar with how and why institutions of higher education are targeted and influenced by external entities (foreign and domestic), as well as best practices, organizational policies, and procedures related to managing data and intellectual property.

**Coordination:** Creation of research security working groups or task forces to review and coordinate organizational actions related to cybersecurity, foreign travel security, insider threat awareness and education, export control training and management of intellectual property.

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**Screening:** Put in place a process for the screening through internal or third-party systems of foreign faculty, students and visitors to screen for restricted individuals or associations with restricted entities.

**Agreements:** Put in place a process for reviewing and managing institutional agreements, memorandums of understanding and similar formal contracts with foreign entities.

**Point of Contact:** Identification of a singular point of contact within the organization to be the liaison with federal law enforcement for matters related to foreign influence over the research enterprise.

***A concurrent commitment to research security by the federal government must include:***

**Open Forums:** Facilitation of discussion prior to new or amended regulations.

**Realistic Timeframes:** Adequate notice and implementation time for changes in regulations is critical to minimize confusion among faculty and staff and allow for questions and comments to be resolved.

**Coordination:** Communication and consistency across federal agencies on foreign influence regulations including reporting and enforcement is critical to successful implementation.

**Point of Contact:** A single federal office or point of contact for consultation on complex foreign relationships is needed.

**Prioritization:** Priority in regulations should be given to concerns with undue influence originating from countries identified as security threats.

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