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National Intelligence University’s Role in Interagency Research

Recommendations from the Intelligence Community

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Summary

NIU’s Interagency Research Challenge

NIU and CSIR have institutional and IC responsibilities with regard to research. As an accredited institution of higher learning, NIU has an obligation to support faculty and student research. As the national intelligence university, it has an obligation to foster collaborative research to support all the agencies of the IC. Additionally, NIU is the result of an evolution of ideas in the IC and among its leaders about what a national intelligence university should be. This process began with the formation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) as a requirement of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (IRTPA).

The official formation of a national intelligence university began in 2006, as noted in IC Directive (ICD) 1. Prior to February 2011, NIU had at least three different leaders, was considered a “virtual” institution, and was chiefly focused on the human capital aspect of intelligence analysis. In addition, from 2006–2011, NIU was besieged by a number of controversial issues and lost a great deal of credibility across the IC. In spite of this, a number of ICDs state the role of NIU in ensuring that IC members are trained on the topics contained in the directives. For example, ICD 501 orders that the NIU, “in collaboration with IC elements, develop community-level information-

1 Intelligence Community Directive 1, Policy Directive for Intelligence Community Leadership, May 1, 2006.
sharing training to promote understanding and individual responsibilities with regard to this directive.” The current manifestation of the national intelligence university was officially established in February 2011, when the former National Defense Intelligence College (NDIC) was changed to NIU. Interestingly, this change came via Department of Defense Instruction 3305-1. CSIR was originally a component of NDIC and was part of the transfer from NDIC to NIU.

The evolution of NIU resulted in two major institutional challenges: the need to change perceptions within the IC, and the need to establish NIU’s role and responsibilities within the IC. Although NIU has a 50-year history of exclusively military intelligence education, it is now committed to educational excellence for the entire IC. Additionally, NIU awards master’s degrees every year to students who have completed thesis research. Currently, these students work with CSIR and NIU faculty to determine research topics and locations in the IC where they can conduct their thesis research. There are no formally established collaborative relationships for this purpose.

To help NIU and CSIR address their charge of conducting interagency research, we conducted a survey of entities within the IC that either produce or consume research to gain insight into where collaboration activities might take place, what types of collaboration would be feasible, and what the potential topics for research are. Within the agencies of the IC, there are a number of what we have termed research entities—offices, divisions, units, or groups that conduct research. (Appendix B offers a list and descriptions of these entities.) Because research is the primary focus of these entities (although some are responsible for additional mission tasks in analysis, operations, support, etc.) we

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2 Intelligence Community Directive 501, Discovery and Dissemination or Retrieval of Information Within the Intelligence Community, January 21, 2009.

3 The Defense Intelligence School was established in 1962. It was renamed the Defense Intelligence College in 1983, and civilians were included as students. In 1993, the institution was renamed the Joint Military Intelligence College, devoted solely to intelligence education and research (no training courses). In 2006, the institution’s name was changed to the NDIC.
determined that concentrating on these entities would yield meaningful information with regard to interagency research collaboration.

**Our Methodology**

We determined that data collection should involve interviews with a purposive sample of representatives who lead or manage the IC research entities related to intelligence analysis topics. With CSIR, we identified potential candidate entities and representatives. We conducted the interviews using a semistructured instrument developed with assistance from RAND’s Survey Research Group. We used thematic analysis, a qualitative method, to determine themes and patterns in the interview responses. We also consulted the literature on industry-academic partnerships to identify best practices and lessons learned that would inform our results and recommendations.

**Findings**

Our findings were based on interview feedback from representatives of nine of the 13 possible research entities within the IC, including members of the NIU faculty and leadership. The interview data were analyzed in terms of the four major constructs included in the interview instrument: the research entity’s context, the research entity’s needs, the research entity’s perception of NIU’s role, and the research entity’s suggestions for NIU regarding collaborative activities. We use these categories as a framework for our discussion of findings and recommendations.

*Research Entity Context.* We found that the majority of the research entities are small (less than 10 full-time staff); have a number of responsibilities, with longer-term analysis and research being secondary to short-term analytic responses; and have tasks and production requirements that can vary from the identification of emerging trends and threats to knowledge management to planning and hosting conferences intended to build relationships with experts outside the IC. The
competing needs of long- and short-term research represent a resource gap that might be addressed by NIU student or faculty researchers.

**Research Entity Needs.** The research entities, faced with the competing demands of many critical, time-sensitive tasks, small staffs, and limited resources, stated the need for more opportunities to conduct longer-term, strategic research and analysis. Interview participants suggested that NIU should investigate and implement research plans that complement IC goals and requirements (i.e., topics that are before the National Intelligence Managers [NIMs] and the National Intelligence Council (NIC) and are aligned with national priorities). The participants were also interested in having more access to NIU research products that might complement the research being conducted by their entity.

**Research Entity Perceptions of NIU’s Role.** The responses of the participants indicated that they still perceive NIU as a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA)/military intelligence institution. The participants were cautious about accepting NIU as the IC’s educational institution because of NIU’s history and evolution (prior to February 2011), and because official guidance has been unclear about NIU’s role, particularly regarding authority and the schoolhouses that exist in most of the agencies.

**Research Entity Suggestions for NIU Regarding Collaborative Activities.** The participants did support the notion of a national intelligence university and were willing to provide limited support for a number of academic activities (e.g., guest lectures, student mentoring, providing potential thesis research topics). However, they also had expectations of what NIU should provide to the IC. They felt that NIU should take the lead in facilitating research collaboration across the IC and between the IC and academia. They were also interested in being able to access more of NIU’s research. Finally, the participants stated that NIU should cultivate a more diverse student population, especially in terms of the ability to do strategic analysis, which was seen as a future need of the IC.

**Themes Across Responses.** In addition to the findings above, we looked at themes across the participants’ responses to identify potential root issues. We found a major theme regarding the perceived rela-
tionship between NIU and the research entities, particularly regarding collaboration efforts and determining research topics/agendas. The research entities believed that NIU should be responsible for selecting research topics for its students and faculty that are relevant to the IC (particularly the research entities) and that NIU should take the lead in establishing and maintaining collaborative activities with the IC research entities. NIU, on the other hand, has a responsibility to its students and faculty to support their research interests and allow for academic freedom. As such, NIU needs to have control over shaping its research agenda, which is not exactly compatible with determining research topics based on other entities’ preferences. This conflict regarding the perceived direction of power and responsibility (i.e., who should identify topics, who should be accountable for collaborative activities) is at the heart of the challenges NIU faces in executing its research role across the IC.

Recommendations

As a new “version” of NIU emerges, opportunities exist to create and execute actions and processes that will align its image to its vision, particularly regarding interagency research collaboration. Our recommendations focus on key actions and processes that should be part of such an effort as based on our interview findings and literature review. We provide these recommendations in the framework of the four major constructs presented above.

Research Entity Context. NIU and CSIR should use a systematic approach to identify potential collaborators based on student/faculty interest and what is known about the research entity’s interests and motivation.

Research Entity Needs. NIU should investigate and implement strategic research plans that represent NIU’s vision and the research interests of faculty and students. Additionally, the research plan should complement IC interests, particularly those topics that are before the NIMs and the NIC and are aligned with national priorities.
Research Entity Perceptions of NIU’s role. NIU should increase and maintain awareness of community-wide access to NIU research resources.

NIU should formalize its enterprise-wide outreach programs and familiarize each agency with NIU’s mission, needs, and resources.

We also recommend strengthening communication and collaboration efforts outside of student research that will aide in clarifying NIU’s identity and begin to change perceptions of NIU within the IC to the benefit of all.

Research Entity Suggestions for NIU Regarding Collaborative Activities. Create opportunities for representatives of the schoolhouses and research entities to regularly come together to discuss IC education and training needs and facility collaboration, and consider exploring ways to reduce redundancy in currently overlapping areas.

Themes Across Responses. In our analysis of the interview data regarding NIU and collaborative research, we saw that the IC participants believed NIU should continue to have a passive role in the development of a research program. Participants stated that NIU students and faculty should select research topics based on what is important to the IC, including the research entities.

We recommend that NIU and CSIR adopt an active role in setting NIU’s research agenda that is driven by faculty research interests and that may complement priorities and strategic topics of interest at the national level. Adopting an active role—directing the research agenda—will help NIU meet its institutional goals while also allowing it to target and plan relationship development and collaboration activities.

We also recommend that NIU and CSIR develop a framework and methods for formalizing relationships with IC entities that outline the specific roles and responsibilities of the parties involved. Formalizing relationships (e.g., through a memorandum of agreement or memorandum of understanding) will ensure that NIU’s and CSIR’s requirements are met, as well as manage the expectations of those involved.