National Security Concerns for Study Abroad Students
Introduction
In an era of increasing globalization, today’s students will be
embarking on careers in a world that is more interconnected than
ever before. Economic prosperity depends more and more upon
cooperation and understanding between nations. International
educational exchange can go a long way in fostering this pro-
sperity. Study abroad programs have become an integral approach
to ensuring today’s students develop the language, cultural, and
technical skills required for future success. Over the past twenty
two years, there has been a great increase in the number of U.S.
students that recognize the value of international education and
participate in study abroad programs. According to the Institute
of International Education, 289,000 U.S. students studied abroad
for academic credit during the 2012/2013 school year. These stu-
dents are making themselves more marketable for careers in both
private industry and the government. But these same students are
inadvertently making themselves tempting targets for a subtle and
often misunderstood threat—foreign intelligence services.

Multiple universities have established programs in foreign
countries in volatile regions and in locations where the govern-
ments have demonstrated hostilities to U.S. interests. Students
need to be aware that when they go overseas to study, they can be
targeted by foreign intelligence services and recruited for espionage
activities. “The recruitment is going on, don’t fool yourself” said
Glenn Duffie Shriver, a U.S. college student convicted of conspir-
acy to commit espionage in 2012. U.S. students may or may not
have access to sensitive information as students, but many will
get sensitive jobs in the public and private sectors where they do
have access and influence. Foreign intelligence services recognize
this potential and can go to great lengths to recruit and develop
them long before they are in a position to commit espionage. It
is not always easy to recognize an espionage recruitment attempt
since they are by design frequently subtle and non-alerting. Many
recruitment attempts take years to fully play out. Often the target
is unaware of the manipulation until grave damage to career
prospects and national security have occurred. The FBI’s Strategic
Partnership Program has prepared the following report to better
educate administrators and students alike about the dangers facing
study abroad students. With greater awareness, students and
administrators will be in a better position to recognize and thwart
this insidious threat.

Targeting Students in the United States
Foreign governments maintain an intelligence presence under
both official (diplomatic) and non-official cover. These services
have a long history of targeting students for recruitment as col-
lectors and influencers. In addition to identifying candidates for
subornment, certain countries may manipulate students, from the
home country, studying in the United States.

Spotting and Assessing
Foreign intelligence services have traditionally employed
individuals – both recruited U.S. persons as well as foreign
operatives – to spot and assess students who might be vulnerable
to recruitment. The Soviet Union and the services it trained (i.e.
Eastern Bloc and Cuban intelligence) had a lengthy history of
such operations against the United States.

According to intelligence historian Christopher Andrew, writ-
ing with Soviet defector, Vasily Mitrokhin, the KGB participated
in selecting the Soviet students who would participate in academ-
ic exchange programs with the United States. Furthermore, it
provided training to many of these individuals in the activities of
spotting and assessing. Students received direction to seek places
at universities and research institution within easy reach of the

What is an intelligence service?
A foreign intelligence service is an organization, usually part
of the government, whose primary purpose is to gather and
analyze information it deems valuable. Foreign intelligence
services works on behalf of a government, although non-
state actors ranging from terrorists organizations to private
corporations may use intelligence capabilities in furtherance
of their interests. An intelligence service primary purpose is
to gather and analyzes information to support foreign actors’
objectives. Their ultimate goal for collecting this information
is to benefit their own country politically, militarily, and
economically. They are typically willing to use any means
possible to gather information. An intelligence officer is an
employee of an intelligence service who has been specifically
trained on how to collect and analyze information. Another
purpose of an intelligence service is to spread the influence
and ideology of its regime, or damage the claims and image
of another regime. This perception management may be
done openly through propaganda, diplomatic statements,
offers of training, or covertly using rumor, false-news stories,
fabricated studies, and bribery.

Intelligence officers can fit into two basic categories. First,
an intelligence service may act under diplomatic cover.
They are overtly employed in diplomatic establishments like
embassies and consulates and have official roles and titles
i.e. counselor, minister, attaché. Their diplomatic position
serves as cover for their intelligence collection mission. A
second type of intelligence officer consists of individuals
with non-official cover. These people embed themselves into
a society and live seemingly ordinary lives. However, they
have been trained and tasked with the collection objectives
and will gather and send back the desired information to the
host government at opportune times. These individuals are
often called “sleeper agents” or “illegals”.


Soviet intelligence presence at New York (Brooklyn Polytechnic, MIT, Rensselaer Polytechnic, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, NYU, and Princeton), Washington (American, Catholic, Georgetown, George Washington, and UMD) and San Francisco (UC Berkeley, CalTech, USC and Stanford).¹ As a Bureau official testified to Congress in the late 1980s “Soviet foreign exchange students have been involved in meeting with Soviet Intelligence Service officers working in various Soviet establishments in the U.S.”² More recently a Russian “illegal” (not under diplomatic cover) intelligence officer, attending Columbia University, received tasking to find information about students who had applied to or been hired by the Central Intelligence Agency.³ (The “illegal” was arrested and expelled from the United States in 2010.) In early 2015, the FBI released information regarding attempts by the Russian SVR (the KGB’s successor) to recruit Russian-origin individuals affiliated with a major university located in New York.⁴

Soviet students, even though not formal intelligence officers, collected a range of information at Moscow’s behest. Among taskings was the collection of items which could facilitate further targeting including the qualifications and specialties of students being trained and where they were placed after graduation from a university or college and with which government entities institutions of higher education maintained business connections.⁵ Thus, even after the Soviet students had returned to Moscow, their information could help Soviet intelligence to refine its targeting of students with access to sensitive information.

Soviet intelligence professionals, not associated with universities, also attempted to recruit students in the United States. According to testimony that the FBI provided to Congress in the late 1980s, Gennadiy Zakharov was a Soviet national, employed by the United Nations Secretariat, who, through contacts at Queens College, identified a student who had the potential for employment in a sensitive industry, through which the student could obtain classified information, after graduation.⁶ Zakharov requested that the student conduct ‘research’ for him, at ten dollars an hour, but requested that the student keep the arrangement

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**Case Study: Ana Montes**

Ana Montes was a senior analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency that provided classified information to the Cuban Intelligence service for 16 years. She agreed to assist the Cuban Intelligence Service while she was a graduate student pursuing a master’s degree in International Studies from Johns Hopkins University. Upon graduation, she specifically sought and obtained employment where she could acquire info of value to Cuba. She is currently serving a 25 year prison sentence for espionage.
confidential. Zakharov was a KGB Line X (focused on science and technology) officer and his interaction with the student was indoctrination in clandestine tradecraft. Zakharov eventually had the student sign a document which stipulated that, in return for working for the Soviet Union, Moscow would pay for a student’s education and when the student finished his degree he would try to obtain a job in the Defense industry, where he would have access to classified information.¹⁶

Soviet-influenced services of client states historically used similar methods. According to then-Director of the FBI, William H. Webster, speaking in the mid-1980s, a Bulgarian intelligence officer, posted to New York City, used a Bulgarian scholar, studying at Columbia University, as a “spotter.” This spotter identified an American student and tasked the student with research projects in exchange for cash payments.⁹ Similarly, the Cubans recruited a U.S. person, Marta Rita Velasquez, to target, among other individuals, U.S. students, who had the potential for occupying sensitive national security positions. Velasquez met Ana Belen Montes while the latter was studying at Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies and identified Montes’ sympathy for Latin American countries - specifically the Nicaraguan Sandinistas - at odds with the United States. Velasquez ultimately helped Montes obtain a position at DIA, where the latter became an extremely damaging spy who worked clandestinely on behalf of the Cuban government for 16 years.¹⁰ More recently, Carlos Alvarez, a Florida International University psychology professor pled guilty, in 2006, to having worked for nearly 30 years for Cuban intelligence.¹¹ A U.S. Attorney accused Alvarez of leading an exchange program to Cuba which would provide opportunities to “further manipulate and indoctrinate students.”¹² Alvarez also informed Cuban intelligence that one of his students was employed by the FBI.¹³

Use of the Guise of ‘Student’ by Professional Intelligence Officers
During the Cold War, the Soviet Union demonstrated how a foreign government could use an academic institution as a platform from which a professional intelligence could operate. Professors at Leningrad University selected Oleg Kalugin, a 24 year old KGB officer, to study at Columbia University’s school of journalism.¹⁴ FBI testimony to Congress, in the late 1980s, indicates that Kalugin was not alone, since the Bureau alluded to multiple cases, in its use of the plural, when an official noted that Soviet intelligence “placed KGB officers into cover positions as students.”¹⁵

Manipulation of Foreign Students Studying in the United States
Foreign students can easily become coerced by their governments to engage in behavior, on behalf of their home country, while in the United States. Chinese diplomatic establishments allegedly subsidize groups such as the Chinese Student and Scholars Association and provide these organizations with direction.¹⁶ Thus, seemingly innocuous organizations can be co-opted into foreign

The steps of recruitment
An insider is an individual with legitimate access to information that wittingly, or unwittingly, provides that information to a foreign intelligence service. The insider threat is one of the most damaging types of threats to the U.S. and its institutions. The acquisition of an insider is often a gradual process that can take place over an extended period of time. The recruitment process typically consists of the following six steps:

Spotting:
The intelligence officer is continually looking for people that may have influence or access to desired information.

Assessing:
Once a potential recruit is identified, the intelligence officer assesses that person for “vulnerabilities” that can be used to manipulate the person. Such vulnerabilities include greed, family issues, health concerns, ideology, revenge, ego etc.

Developing:
The intelligence officer gradually develops rapport with the potential recruit. Often trivial favors are exchanged for one another. There is often a change in the nature of the relationship i.e. a professional relation becomes personal.

Recruiting:
At the recruitment phase, some threshold with legal or ethical consequences is crossed. Information that should not be shared is passed on. The recruited individual is now under the control, wittingly or unwittingly, of the intelligence service.

Handling:
Handling refers to the day to day operation of the source by the intelligence officer. Frequently, secretive methods of communication and other tradecraft are used. The recruit and the handler often do not meet in person anymore. The recruit is typically asked not to acknowledge or tell others about the relationship.

Termination:
At termination, the relationship between the intelligence officer and the recruit ends or goes dormant. Termination can occur when the recruit loses access to the information or when there is a compromise of security. The relationship can go dormant for long periods of time before being rekindled, sometimes by a new handler.
government appendages. According to a Chinese defector, the Chinese used this organization, in Europe, to maintain contact with Chinese living on the continent.¹⁷

Additionally, foreign students, who are perceived as dissidents by their home countries may be targets of intelligence activities. Following the Tiananmen Square crackdown, Chinese Ministry of State Security officials visited the Chinese embassy in Washington, DC and assigned personnel to target for collection and harassment Chinese students, in the United States, who were reformist or pro-democracy.¹⁸

Studying Abroad

The Soviet Union historically attempted to develop influence over the international student movement, including American participants, during the Cold War. Communists quickly established leadership over the International Union of Students, which was founded in 1946 (a development which prompted the founding of the National Student Association).¹⁹ The KGB was directly responsible for the 1959 Vienna World Festival of Youth and Students.²⁰

There are a variety of academic exchange programs which facilitate U.S. students’ travel to countries that have targeted the academic field. As of 2013 there were more than 40 American study-abroad programs. Increasingly universities have attempted to expand their footprint to foreign countries by establishing satellite campuses in foreign countries. According to a 2014 report by the Institute of International Education (IIE), between 2011 and 2012, 295,000 American college students studied abroad, with 245,549 at the undergraduate level.²¹

While exposure to an international setting is enriching, it can also provide an opportunity for hostile intelligence services to target U.S. students for recruitment. Glenn Duffie Shriver is one example of how a foreign government can exploit a study-abroad experience. Shriver participated in a study abroad program at East China Normal University, in Shanghai. Shortly after graduation he returned to China, taken with its culture. While there, he was approached by Chinese intelligence and agreed to apply for jobs with the U.S. Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency.²²

Study abroad programs offer tremendous opportunities for students to develop and hone language, culture, and technical expertise—skills that are invaluable for their budding careers. The U.S. as a nation can benefit greatly from the experience and expertise acquired by its scholars traveling to foreign lands. Unfortunately, foreign intelligence services and other threat actors can exploit these study abroad programs for unscrupulous purposes and put the students at risk in ways that are frequently underappreciated. All too often, administrators and parents focus entirely on the tremendous benefits of these programs without fully appreciating the potential hazards. It is the aim of this booklet to create greater threat awareness among these students, parents, and program administrators so as to mitigate the risks as much as possible. With greater awareness, come greater security and more rewarding experiences for students. By preserving the safety of our students overseas, we can allow these programs to offer the greatest benefit for not only the students, but the nation.

Case Study: Glenn Duffie Shriver

Glenn Duffie Shriver was a U.S. study abroad student who was arrested for attempting to penetrate the U.S. intelligence community on behalf of the Chinese intelligence service. His ultimate goal was to obtain a position with a federal agency that would afford him access to classified national defense information, which he would then transmit to the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in return for cash. The recruitment of Shriver is an example of a recruitment approach targeting non-ethnic American students who may eventually work in sensitive positions for the U.S. government. Frequently these students receive little counterintelligence awareness training which makes them vulnerable.

Conclusion:

Without proper awareness about the threat posed by foreign intelligence services, U.S. students risk becoming involved in espionage activities. Such activities jeopardize not only national security, but the student’s ability to launch a career and obtain security clearances. Steps that students can take to protect themselves from foreign intelligence services include the following:

**Be skeptical of opportunities** that seem “too good to be true”

**Be cautious of individuals** who offer free favors, especially for those involving government processes such as issuing visas and residence permits

**Minimize personal information** revealed through social media

**Properly report money** or compensation received abroad

**Report suspicious activity** to U.S. embassy, academic program, law enforcement

**Record information** about suspicious encounters such as names, dates, and locations
## Endnotes:

2. Testimony of James H. Geer, Assistant Director, Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 20 and July 13, 1988, Serial No. 123, at 266
5. Testimony of James H. Geer, Assistant Director, Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 20 and July 13, 1988, Serial No. 123, at 261
6. Testimony of James H. Geer, Assistant Director, Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 20 and July 13, 1988, Serial No. 123, at 184
7. Testimony of James H. Geer, Assistant Director, Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 20 and July 13, 1988, Serial No. 123, at 187
8. Testimony of James H. Geer, Assistant Director, Intelligence Division, Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Counterintelligence Visits to Libraries. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, One Hundredth Congress, Second Session, June 20 and July 13, 1988, Serial No. 123, at 187
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FBI Counterintelligence Strategic Partnership

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