

Research universities play a major role in national security

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The United States' preoccupation with national security, including counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and cyber security, is also a concern of higher education, according to Graham Spanier, president of Penn State University.

Spanier, who chairs the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board (NSHEAB), addressed attendees today (Feb. 18) at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, D.C., stressing that higher education is part of the national security solution.

"The National Security Higher Education Advisory Board consists of 20 research university presidents and the heads of two higher education associations in cooperation with many federal agencies," said Spanier. "We serve as a collaborative group that can foster communications and cooperation through research, education and public awareness to further aid our nation's security interests."

Created in 2005, NSHEAB discusses issues of [national security](#) to promote understanding between higher education, the FBI and other federal agencies, such as the Department of Commerce, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and intelligence agencies. The NSHEAB is administered by the FBI.

Spanier noted that universities like Penn State – which enrolls more than 97,000 students -- host a large number of foreign students and academic

visitors, as well as high profile national and international visitors.

Universities also frequently have high concentrations of people in limited spaces. During many Saturdays each fall, Penn State becomes the third largest city in Pennsylvania when it hosts football games in Beaver Stadium, something that heightens concerns about security. Universities have also been targets for ecoterrorists and animal rights terrorists. Awareness, vigilance, and a spirit of cooperation with local, state, and federal agencies are necessary for the success and safety of a research university.

The NSHEAB tries to help federal agencies better understand the unique culture, traditions and practices of [higher education](#), including the culture of openness and academic freedom and the importance of international collaboration.

While universities may be concerned about their own security, they also produce vast amounts of research for the agencies involved in protecting the country. The relatively new area of cyber security includes everything from viruses, worms and trojans to identity theft, denial of service, hacking and cracking. Universities are sometimes conduits for these attacks, but their faculty researchers and information technology staff are also working to prevent these attacks. From research in [cyber security](#) to non-lethal weapons, forensics applications and devices to sniff out explosives, universities supply the agencies that protect the nation with the methods they need to meet current threats.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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