

Classified Research Town Hall Meeting Summary

Faculty from across the university met November 30 in a town hall meeting to discuss classified research at Vanderbilt in a forum sponsored by the Faculty Senate's Task Force on Classified Research

Five faculty members with varying views on classified research began the forum with a brief presentation of the core issues. During the open discussion that followed, faculty members in the audience continued and expanded that discussion.

Senate Chair Robert Thompson, professor of law, welcomed participants and gave a brief synopsis of the Senate's involvement with this discussion.

Task Force chair Dan Fleetwood, chair of Electrical Engineering, described the history of classified research at Vanderbilt. Specifically, he referred to chapter 5 of The Faculty Manual which prohibits classified sponsored research at Vanderbilt, but allows proprietary research under administrative control. He further explained that some Vanderbilt faculty members already hold security clearances and participate in classified research elsewhere. The task force which he heads has prepared an interim report, on the web at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/facultysenate/files/classifiedresearchdraft.pdf>, which provided the basis for much of the discussion.

Jason Morrow, chair of the Senate APS committee and a member of the task force, moderated the discussion. He explained the format of the presentation, and added that priority would be given to Vanderbilt university faculty, staff, and students during the feedback portion of the presentation.

Janos Sztipanovits, professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering, began the discussion by describing a project that the Institute for Software Integrated Systems (ISIS) (<http://www.isis.vanderbilt.edu/>) had developed for the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA). He added that he believes strongly in the need to give back to the community in terms of national defense.

Mark Denison, associate professor of Pediatric Genetic Diseases, described his work on non-classified research with others in the Southeast Regional Center of Excellence in Emerging Infections and Biodefense (SERCEB). He raised concerns about Vanderbilt's relationship with the community and about the institution's liability as it relates to classified research. He also described the Sunshine project (<http://www.sunshine-project.org>) and identified where classified research is being done under government auspices.

Larry Churchill, professor of Medical Ethics, addressed philosophical issues and stated that this is not an issue that can be settled on principle. He asked the community to think of those issues that have not been raised to date. As an alternative to the current ban on classified research, he suggested having a prohibition in place with certain exceptions for classified research instead.

Colleen Conway-Welch, dean of the School of Nursing, described possible grants that the Nursing School has discussed last year that would involve training health care workers dealing with detainees--work that wouldn't include classified knowledge in the training but might include classified knowledge in what was said during the training. She said if another similar \$5 million grant comes to Vanderbilt, she would like to be able to accept it.

Dennis Hall, associate provost for research, shared recent discussions of the graduate council on students' possible involvement in classified research. He also addressed the pragmatics of the issue of having classified research conducted on Vanderbilt's campus. He sought to focus attention on "mission creep" and asked the audience to consider the rationale for spending Vanderbilt's resources on classified research.

Comments for faculty addressed several areas including

--how classified research and human subject review would fit

--philosophical questions concerning whether this fits with the university mission

--the extent to which participation in classified research is necessary for scholars to be at the cutting edge of research in a discipline

--protecting the university from liability from conducting classified research

--the faculty's creativity to address the various organizational barriers that might arise if classified research would be permitted and the faculty's creativity to find ways to interact with classified research even if the University's policy does not change.

--other institutions' responses to this issue.

Link to story in Vanderbilt Register:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/register/articles?id=15934>

Link to interim report from Senate task force on Classified Research:

<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/facultysenate/files/classifiedresearchdraft.pdf>