

By Nathalie Batrville and Alex Lew

From [Yale Daily News](#) | Original article

As early as this April, Yale plans to welcome a training center for interrogators to its campus.

The center's primary goal would be to coach U.S. Special Forces on interviewing tactics designed to detect lies. Charles Morgan III, a professor of psychiatry who will head the project, calls these tactics "people skills." These techniques would be honed using New Haven's immigrant community as subjects. Morgan hopes that by having soldiers practice their newly acquired techniques on "someone they can't necessarily identify with" (read: someone who is not white), they'll be better prepared to do 'the real thing' abroad.

What's the problem here? We see several.

First, intelligence does not exist in a vacuum. It is gathered to support a particular foreign policy agenda, the morality of which is not beyond question.

It seems evident that Yale would not train foreign military operatives to interrogate informants. Yale as an institution does not — cannot — align itself blindly with the goals of other militaries.

But who is to say we should align ourselves with U.S. foreign policy? Though its goals are at times morally defensible, they can also be appalling. The techniques soldiers learn at Yale might be used, for example, to identify candidates for President Obama's "kill list," which is itself unethical and likely illegal. If someone lies to protect their friend from ending up on that kill list, is that a lie it is moral to detect? By training soldiers to perform these interrogations, Yale would be complicit in achieving these goals.

As a university, Yale purpose's is to forge a global community of scholars working together to produce, share, debate, question, challenge and reformulate knowledge. Its purpose is not to promote the agenda of the U.S. political elite.

It might be countered that Yale already collaborates with the military through ROTC. But this center is different. ROTC encourages students to use their broad academic experience and critical thinking skills in a military setting, engaging the military in conversation with the liberal arts.

But this new center could not, by its very nature, create such a dialogue. It simply allocates Yale's resources to do something the military can do on its own: teach soldiers to interrogate.

Second, there is the issue of transparency. As students, we have seen this administration's complete lack of accountability to its constituents. Ignoring widespread student and faculty dissent, the Yale Corporation unflinchingly proceeded with plans to establish Yale-NUS. Ignoring faculty concerns about classroom space and increasing class sizes, it has moved forward to build new residential colleges. In two short months, without any student or worker representation and limited input from faculty, it selected a new president.

Now we learn of Yale's plans to train soldiers in "people skills" on our campus only two months before the center is scheduled to open. There was no conversation with the city about how this might impact its immigrant community. There was no conversation with students and faculty about how it might impact campus culture. And there was no conversation at all about the ethics of a project like this. It's hard to understand where this project came from; the university's motivations are wholly opaque.

Finally, Morgan's research and, by extension, this proposed center target people of color — brown people exclusively. According to a Yale Herald article, Morgan listed "Moroccans, Columbians, Nepalese, Ecuadorians and others." Is there an assumption in Morgan's desire to use more 'authentic,' brown interviewees as test subjects, that brown people lie differently from whites — and even more insidiously, that all brown people must belong to the same "category" of liar?

How might training on lie detection be perceived if it targeted blacks, or if it aimed to answer the question, "How do Jews lie?" That Morgan's test subjects are compensated does not resolve the ethical questions his project raises. In fact, their participation highlights the structural inequality that this research capitalizes on and that the center would ultimately exploit.

As Nathalie was working on this piece, her phone rang. At the other end of the line was her 7-year-old nephew Rocco, who wanted to wish her a happy Valentine's Day and send her many loud kisses. He now lives in Montreal, where Nathalie is from, but until about a year ago, he lived in Haiti.

The U.S.' involvement in Haiti, from its occupation between 1915 and 1934 to its support — financial, logistical (and “moral”) — of François and later Jean-Claude Duvalier's brutal dictatorships in the 60s and 70s, informs much of her outrage surrounding the establishment of this center, and her understanding that people often lie to protect their lives, their families, their country and the very freedom that Americans so dearly cherish.