

By Julia Zorthian

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Following a flurry of media attention concerning a possible military training center at the Yale School of Medicine, the University issued a statement Tuesday afternoon maintaining that the potential program would meet appropriate academic standards but also denying that it has yet been formally proposed.

School of Medicine psychiatry professor Charles Morgan told the News in January that he hopes to propose the creation of a center at the Medical School in cooperation with the U.S. Army Special Operations Forces called the U.S. Special Operations Command Center of Excellence for Operational Neuroscience, which would teach soldiers interview techniques. Yale's statement said the School of Medicine has not formally proposed opening the center, and denied media reports that the training facility will teach interrogation tactics and that the research will take advantage of minority populations in New Haven.

Michael Siegel MED '90, a donor for the Medical School, criticized the center in an open letter to Medical School Dean Robert Alpern on Monday morning, arguing that the center will violate the mission of the School of Medicine by fulfilling military objectives, and the letter grabbed the attention of the national media.

"In short, the center, if established, would be designed in the best traditions of Yale research and scholarship," the Office of Public Affairs and Communications said in the release. "Public reports stating otherwise are premature and based on speculation and incomplete information."

Morgan would direct the proposed center, using a \$1.8-million grant from the Department of Defense. The center would ultimately function to teach Army soldiers interviewing techniques Morgan developed, he said in January.

Morgan also told the News in January that the Yale Office of Grant and Contract Administration is working with the Psychiatry Department to finish paperwork securing the grant funding, which was delayed due to both congressional budget issues and the need for more time to work out funding for administrative expenses. Morgan declined to comment for this article.

“No matter what I say, it doesn’t seem to quell rumors,” Morgan added.

Alpern told the News that the public would normally not know about ideas at the phase of development before a formal proposal but exposure from a Jan. 7 New Yorker Magazine article profiling a possible instructor for the center, theatrical pickpocket Apollo Robbins, exposed the plan to national attention.

Siegel said he sent the open letter to Alpern after learning about the proposed center on Monday, and he followed up with a second letter after speaking with Morgan Tuesday morning. He will stop donating to the Medical School, he said, because the proposed center’s goal of furthering military objectives contradicts the Medical School’s mission to improve health and further medical research. In addition, Siegel described the center as unethical because it will allow soldiers to practice interview techniques on New Haven immigrants — information that Siegel said he found in the Yale Herald.

But the statement declares that the interviewing techniques envisioned for the center are both central to the psychiatry discipline and part of medical student and resident education. According to the University, interviewees will be volunteers from diverse ethnic groups and will be protected by oversight from Yale’s Human Research Protection Program.

Alpern said he finds the center to be ethical because it will help the armed forces by building on research from within the Medical School.

Siegel said his donations to the Medical School “don’t amount to a lot of money.” His intentions, he added, were not to use wealth to make a point, but to show the School of Medicine that alumni may feel alienated by the decision to open the center.

The proposed center has also incited an online petition, titled “Don’t Open a Department of Defense Training Center at Yale,” criticizing the University for housing the center. As of press time, the petition had 396 signatures.

University President Richard Levin declined to comment about the center beyond the statement OPAC released.

The proposed U.S. Special Operations Command Center of Excellence for Operational Neuroscience would break the year into trimesters, teaching up to 20 soldiers per session.