

Experts Urge Exchange of Scientific Talent

THE NEW YORK TIMES

October 19, 2007

By REUTERS

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 (Reuters) — The federal government should create a commission to promote the free flow of scientific knowledge and researchers from other countries while balancing the threat from enemies, an expert panel said Thursday.

The panel, appointed by the National Research Council, which provides advice to American policymakers, said colleges and research institutions must continue to bring in foreign science and engineering students. “The global scientific enterprise thrives on the movement of students and scholars across borders and among institutions,” it said in a report.

“For more than 50 years,” the report says, “U.S. research universities, the envy of the world, have welcomed and fostered the talents of both foreign-born and U.S. students in the service of national and economic security.”

With fewer American students choosing careers in science and engineering, the American research and development effort cannot be sustained without a significant and steady infusion of foreign participants, the committee said.

But the panel said safeguards are needed to ensure that important research does not fall into the wrong hands. It recommended creating a standing government commission “to address ongoing shared concerns of the security and academic research communities,” including export and visa policies and participation of foreigners in research.

The commission should be led by the president’s national security adviser and the director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and include representatives from academic research institutions and national security agencies, the panel recommended.

Forming this commission, the panel said, should allow the government to strike a balance between science and security.

Jacques Gansler of the University of Maryland, a former Pentagon official who is co-chairman of the committee, said research institutions have taken steps since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, to address security concerns.

“However, both the security and scientific communities agree that losing our leading edge in science and technology is one of the greatest threats to national security,” Dr. Gansler said in a statement. “Unnecessary or ill-conceived restrictions could jeopardize the scientific and technical progress that our nation depends upon.”