Congress-CIA relation examined

By David Dunford

It was not a Sherman Scholesy exposé of CIA involvement in the Kennedy assassination, big oil deals, and the sack of Baghdad. Wednesday’s CIS seminar was a serious academic attempt to examine the relationship between the CIA and the congressional committees of both houses which are supposed to monitor it.

The seminar, held in the Millikun room, was conducted by Michael McNamee ’76, Norman Sandler ’75 and David Tenenbaum ’74. The three political science students spent over a week in Washington during March investigating the CIA and its relationship to the Congress. They reported that, rather than having an overbalance toward operations of the agency.

Out of the poorly defined $5 to $7 billion annual combined budget of the nine agencies, including the CIA, which make up the intelligence community, the students reported that expenditures of less than $10,000 are usually not reviewed by any of the monitoring committees of the executive branch.

McNamee said that the Appropriations and the Armed Services Committees of both houses of Congress which are to oversee the intelligence community are often opposed by the CIA. “The committees are definitely stacked,” said McNamee. In terms of the highly defense-oriented American Security Index, he described the committees as “such a collection of 100%’s as you have never seen.”

According to the group, a serious academic attempt to a more active role in its accountability for anything that happens in the intelligence community. Successes usually have people accountable for them, but responsibility for failures is obscure.”

“The CIA is a very large bureaucracy,” said Sandler. “Consisting of four directorates: intelligence, operations, support, and science and technology.”

McNamee said that despite its size, “The intelligence community and the intelligence community is a very tight knit thing. Everybody knows everybody else.”

Sandler noted that their investigation revealed an ongoing debate within the CIA concerning which directorates should have higher priority. Suggesting an overbalance toward operations, Sandler said, “There are railroad cab full of raw information that is not being evaluated.”

Further, he said that seven tons of secret papers come in daily to the CIA, while the shedding and incinerating capacity is only four tons per day. Sandler suggested, “They could perhaps tie their line printer directly into their shredder and maintain the same level of effectiveness.”

The group’s more serious suggestions included increasing the level of accountability within the CIA and getting Congress to take a more active role in its oversight.

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