

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Harry Press  
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STANFORD - What is research?

What is classified research?

What is the morality of doing research which might lead to the development of a war weapon?

How can an academic community learn what kind of research is being conducted on the campus?

Who should determine the answers to these questions?

These were the difficult but vital points raised and discussed today (Monday, April 14) in a two and a half hour open hearing conducted by the University Committee on Research Policy and attended by 250 students and faculty. It was a preliminary to a long-scheduled meeting of the committee on the subject of classified research, to be held tomorrow.

This, in turn, will be followed tomorrow night by a special meeting of the Academic Senate on the same subject.

All the meetings are being held as a sit-in by students continues in the Applied Electronics Laboratory, to protest war-related research both at Stanford and Stanford Research Institute.

The over-riding problem facing scientists and everyone concerned with the issues developed early in the hearing, when Physics Prof. Arthur Schawlow, co-developer of the laser, said that when pure research is begun, "one can't predict what's good and what's bad.

"I worked on lasers, and newspapers immediately talked about 'death rays.' Ten years later, we have no death rays. The first use of the laser was to repair detached retinas, and I'd never heard of detached retinas when I began.

"You can't tell what's coming out when you start."

The question Schawlow was answering was posed by a chemistry professor, Hans Andersen, who asked, "What control does the scientific community have over research done by that community? It's difficult for scientists to be objective about their own work."

Committee Chairman William F. Baxter, professor of law, noted that the community has "two shots" at such control.

"Pure research can be controlled at the start," he said, "but it shouldn't.

"Secondly, the community can attempt to control the uses to which such research is put, and the community should do a better job than it has in the past. It involves the entire community, and we have to work harder at the general political processes."

Stanford, Baxter noted, has strict policies relating to classified research, and the committee, which must approve new classified contracts, "takes a sharp distinction between the interests of the researcher and his work, and the interests of the sponsor; we lean toward the researcher.

"If the notion is that no research should be done here that enhances the ability of the U.S. to wage war, then the range of research would run far beyond classified research, which would be only an infinitesimal part of it."

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To Robert J. Moffat, professor of mechanical engineering, what is done with new knowledge is even more important than what can be done with it.

"The output of research in the physical sciences is not dangerous or immoral," Moffat said. "It's how it's used. Ideas are likely to be more dangerous than hardware.

"Research into ideologies and political philosophies may lead to the application of physical sciences in warfare. These may make them more dangerous. What is proper and moral should be expanded to ideas."

Many of the students' questions related to an apparent change of title in a research project. They charged the change was made to hide what they called the project's true purpose--war research. How, they asked, could the University community discover what sort of research was going on?

"Why," asked graduate student Richard Sack, "was the title changed--and who changed it--from 'Applied Research in Electronic Warfare Techniques' to 'Applied Research, Electromagnetics'?"

Baxter said he had applied the latter title because at the time, "I didn't have and never had the formal contract with me. I was not aware of the formal title. Are you suggesting a deliberate attempt to confuse the community?" demanded Baxter.

A loud "yes" came from students in the audience.

"There were two pages of detailed data available, and the title is more accurate," Baxter said. "The suggestion is bizarre."

Prof. Pierre Noyes of the committee commented that he didn't think the change was deliberate, but that it was "misleading not to indicate the area of military application, for the benefit of non-technical readers."

Prof. H. Bruce Franklin commented that "electromagnetic" is a confusing term and too broad, and that the project "clearly" was electronic warfare.

What the group "really should be discussing," said Prof. Hubert Heffner, physics and electrical engineering, is "the morality" of research.

"That name change is partly a red herring," said Senior Norton Batkin. "But the University should be concerned about the potential applications of research, and these should be mentioned on contracts."

An Air Force contract called "Laboratory consultation on Air Force electronic systems and electronic techniques problems," was raised by Sophomore Marc Weiss, who asked how it "contributed to human knowledge," adding that it was "basically military."

Baxter replied that its main purpose was "development of techniques for sampling the electromagnetic spectrum--for example, monitoring broadcasting traffic. You can't talk about the purpose of research, only the purpose of people."

"Then why is the Air Force sponsoring it?" snapped Weiss. "Why do you consider it suitable for an academic atmosphere?"

"It had a wide variety of applications, and there was no mystery about it to anyone," said Baxter.

Joseph Pettit, dean of the School of Engineering, said "You cannot legislate or coerce morality. It is clear that in these changing times, particularly the last 12 months, that individuals in the academic community are alienated by policies in Washington and are choosing to work on other things.

"We won't solve it by talking about academic purity; neutrality is useful to no one. If we can make an impact on Washington to get more money in urban problems and transportation, we want to help."

"Institutions shouldn't try to coerce individuals," said Baxter. "There's a difference between institutional and individual neutrality."

"Institutional neutrality is dead," said Senior Michael Sweeney. "We have to do our best. Coercion shouldn't take place, but with institutions as with individuals, something has to be done." ###