

Terror institute to start journal of student work

By Julia Zhou
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Engineering and Wharton professors working together to study vaccines. Experts in history and real estate -- plus a handful of students -- researching security issues in the former Soviet Union.

This is exactly the kind of unexpected collaboration that the Institute for Strategic Threat Analysis and Response, a research organization created in the spring of 2002 in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, encourages. This year, among continuing projects, ISTAR is launching a new journal that will feature student work.

Faculty will choose student pieces to be published in *The Journal of Strategic Threats Analysis and Response*, and each chosen author will win a \$50 prize.

That initiative is one of the many hopes of the institute's leaders that will foster one of their key objectives -- interdisciplinary cooperation.

"ISTAR is filling a new role at the University," said Chris Beals, the organization's project manager. "The mission is to bridge the research between schools."

Faculty from all 12 schools at Penn are involved with ISTAR, and "every faculty member is invited," stressed Director and Medical School Professor Harvey Rubin.

"We're deliberately inclusive... the 'one university' [that Penn promotes itself as] -- we really believe in that."

A large part of what the organization does is allocate seed grants, initial funding with a maximum value of \$25,000 for a duration of one year.

As their name suggests, the purpose of these grants is to help a project grow to the point of self-sufficiency. And in keeping with ISTAR's philosophy, any project proposal must involve interdisciplinary faculty teams.

According to Rubin, these grants have been a success.

"Just about every one has been the source of a larger grant," Rubin said.

One of the projects funded by a seed grant is the vaccine modeling project to develop different strategies for vaccination, spearheaded by Michael Kearns of the Engineering School and Howard Kunreuther of the Wharton School.

Another is the Eurasian Sandtable Project, in which Arthur Waldron of the History Department and Real Estate professor Susan Wachter study "what if?" situations -- examining potential causes of instability in the former Soviet states.

The Eurasian Sandtable Project also involves six to seven students, both graduate and undergraduate.

Aside from distributing seed grants, ISTAR will continue to run monthly faculty seminars on issues related to strategic threats.

In addition to expanding at Penn, ISTAR may also be expanding outside of the University. The institution is currently collaborating with Columbia University, as well as organizations in Washington, D.C., on projects.

Overall, those at the helm of ISTAR are optimistic about how far the institution has come, and where it will go in the future.

"What we've set out to do we've done. The first year has been very successful," Beals said.

He continued, "The administration has been extremely supportive... and we have a strong base of faculty support."