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STUDENTS, ACTIVISTS TO PROTEST NORTHEASTERN'S CONTRACT WITH ICE

By Chris Triunfo

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, JULY 9, 2018....Northeastern University is facing backlash from students, alumni and community members because of its \$7.8 million research contract with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, also known as ICE.

On June 30, thousands marched on Boston Common to protest the separation of families crossing the border from Mexico to the United States, a policy that the Trump administration says it has reversed with an executive order, and to call for the abolition of ICE.

Student organizers plan a protest at the university on Wednesday, after 2,000 people signed an online petition asking the university to cut all ties with the agency.

The professor conducting research with the funds, Glenn Pierce, told the News Service his work analyzes data on "dual-use technologies" that are exported from the United States. The technologies are products that could be used for common tasks, like machine repair, but can double as parts in the construction of a weapon. Pierce looks into cases in which this technology is exported to countries or companies the U.S. government finds to be questionable.

"The contract is with ICE because they are the agency that is responsible for collecting data on exported goods," Pierce said. "We're discussing something that has no overlap with [the protestors'] concerns."

In a public statement, Northeastern has defended the contract and argued that professors have the academic freedom to perform this kind of research.

"Our commitment to academic freedom goes beyond protecting what professors say; it also means allowing faculty members to freely pursue researching funding in their fields of expertise," the statement said. "Efforts to restrict which federal agencies a faculty member can approach for research funding are antithetical to academic freedom."

According to contract details, the study was meant to continue until 2021 and \$2.7 million has been obligated to date. Now, only two years into the research, it will be coming to an end, according to Pierce and Northeastern. Neither the university nor ICE have explained the premature end to the study.

Evan Greer, a local activist who started the petition to push for the end of the contract, said that Wednesday's protest echoes the voices of many students.

"The protest is an escalation, echoing the demands of an open letter that has been signed by nearly 2,000 Northeastern students, alumni, faculty, staff, and nearby community members," Greer said in a statement. "We are calling on the university to immediately cancel its contract amid widespread reports of human rights violations carried out by the agency."

Dr. Mary Annas, an English Professor at Northeastern who also teaches refugees at Boston Medical Center, added, "I believe that any connection to ICE, however tenuous, after their participation in separating families at the border, amounts to collusion with their human rights violations."

The protest will begin at noon on the university's campus, on Krentzman Quadrangle. About 200 are expected to attend.

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07/09/2018

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