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UCI center to take scholarly approach to war on terrorism // The Unconventional Security Affairs unit aims to lead the way in an emerging field.

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By BILL RAMS , The Orange County Register

A new research center at UCI will study security at the ports, coach local schools on how to respond to changes in national terrorist-threat levels, and brief businesses on ways to protect themselves from hackers. And that's only the beginning.

The Center for Unconventional Security Affairs at the University of California, Irvine, hopes to lead the way in the emerging field of security studies. It is the first effort of its kind in California -- and perhaps the nation -- to team scholars with business leaders and public- safety workers to devise ways to keep the nation safe. "We want to open the ivory tower to a larger population," said UCI associate professor Richard Matthew, who is heading the effort. "Our hope is that centers like ours will develop across the country."

Orange County business leaders will work as partners with professors and graduate students to come up with technology and other products to protect citizens. Students will attend lectures on bioterrorism. The university will help schools address SARS threats.

An expert in terrorism, global environmental change, land mines and other transnational security issues, Matthew already has recruited 35 business leaders, scholars and military and terrorism experts to assist him. The list includes a retired Marine brigadier general who reported to Gen. Tommy Franks during the war in Afghanistan.

It also includes the Centers for Disease Control deputy terrorism-response director, an Army War College Center for Strategic Leadership director and Conexant Systems' chief executive officer. Matthew said the center's start-up isn't costing the university anything extra. Some \$30,000 in donations has been raised, and the center will apply for grants. The hope is to raise \$6 million in three years.

"This is a unique effort," said D.J. Peterson, a political scientist with Rand, the Santa Monica think tank. "They are trying to marry traditional research and development with your day-to-day applied knowledge and the technological needs of police and firefighters." Peterson said police and fire agencies are often too busy, in cases related to terrorism, answering questions like: "How do we deal with the immediate threat?" Researchers have time to ponder long-term questions, such as: "Where is the threat coming from?" he said. "It's been a trend over the past 20 years for universities to develop closer ties to government," he said. "But I don't think it's been attempted so far in this area of security in the post-Cold War era."

The idea for the center came shortly after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. UCI officials wanted to open facilities where experts on issues like bioterrorism could share security ideas with professors from other disciplines.

Think tanks like Rand and other universities across the nation are studying terrorism and sharing their findings with the public in a similar way.

UCI hopes to take it to the next level by branching out -- like inviting retired Marine Corps Reserve Brig. Gen. Frank Quinlan, now a Newport Beach attorney, to work directly with them.

"Here's the bottom line: National security is the concern of the soccer mom now," Quinlan said. "We all have to think about ways to improve. When a school takes the lead like this, you can only thank them."

Among the new center's initiatives:

Develop a graduate program to train security specialists.

Make policy recommendations to county, state and federal legislators on security issues.

Work with Southern California agencies to improve public health and infrastructure.

Work with local businesses to develop security products that help protect citizens.

Matthew said the success of the center's research, education and community service will be measured in traditional ways, including public interest in the center and the salaries graduates earn.

But what about its effort to develop products and services with businesses to reduce threats?

"This is a pioneering effort," Matthew said. "Standards do not exist."

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