

Dept. of Education investigates PEER

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staff writer

The Department of Education has made Emerson College a subject of inquiry for using Federal Work Study allocations to support alien abduction research.

"All appropriate steps are being taken to look into this," Jane Glickman, public affairs spokesperson for the department, said. "Information has been forwarded to the regional office." Glickman could not elaborate further on the investigation.

The federal money subsidized for alien abduction research came as a surprise to Glickman. For the past two years, Federal Work Study students representing Emerson College, Harvard University, Simmons College, Tufts University, and U-Mass have worked for the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research (PEER), a non-profit organization that counsels individuals who claim to have encounters with aliens and UFO's. PEER's founder is John E. Mack, the eclectic Harvard psychiatrist who last year wrote the best-selling book "Abductions."

When asked to comment, Director of College Communications, Burt Peretsky, insisted the Department of Education had no concern with Emerson College. But when pressed further, Peretsky conceded that he failed to contact the department. Instead, Peretsky issued this statement: "It is the position of this college that Emerson meet all requirements set forth in Federal Work Study guidelines."

The issue of compliance with Federal Work Study guidelines is

exactly what the department seeks to resolve. Regulations stipulate that work performed by the students must serve "national or community welfare." In documents sent to financial aid offices, PEER claims to foster a "deeper understanding

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of the varieties of extraordinary experience, to support individuals having such experiences, and to the education of the general public."

Yet the professional tone of these words grossly understate Mack's beliefs. Using interviews with patients as evidence, Mack has concluded that aliens are abducting people in order to form a hybrid human/alien race. Abductees describe sexual encounters with aliens, while others claim to have sperm or eggs stolen from

their bodies. Another reason aliens are visiting earth: the human propensity for self-annihilation. Mack believes the mission of the aliens is to save the human race from ecological disaster.

The Department of Education will have to determine whether this is sufficient to meet the "national or community welfare" standard.

Colleges, however, may be spared from charges of fraudulent use of Federal Work Study funds if they were unaware of Mack's unsavory reputation. PEER's purpose was misrepresented, as well as its affiliation with Harvard University.

Emily Baldwin, Federal Work Study Coordinator at Emerson, previously said that it was PEER's connection to Harvard that relieved doubts about the organization's integrity. But in September, Harvard Medical School Dean, Daniel Tosteson, reprimanded Mack for his use of the Harvard insignia to promote PEER, which is not affiliated with the university.

Mack was the subject of a year-long investigation by Harvard Medical School, which found his research methods and accounting practices to be questionable. Mack has also been attacked by critics in the media who questioned his departure from scientific method. Psychologists charge Mack is misusing the techniques of hypnosis, shaping his patients' memories while endangering their emotional health.

Mack has yet to publish his work in PEER-reviewed journals; others in the field have not been able to duplicate his work.
