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Only in The World-Herald - Military contract could pay off handsomely for NU - The StratCom deal will mean millions of dollars and a higher research profile.

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Author: Matthew Hansen, WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

University of Nebraska leaders have signed a multimillion-dollar contract to do research for the U.S. military, a deal that could turbocharge efforts to make NU a national player in scientific and medical research.

The agreement, known as a University Affiliated Research Center, or UARC, comes with secrecy uncommon on a college campus.

For the first time, several NU campuses will house classified military documents, a designation meaning that parts of one or several buildings may have to be remodeled and sealed off from students.

But university leaders have decided such trade-offs are worth the trouble. The UARC, awarded to NU by the Bellevue-based U.S. Strategic Command, should bring tens of millions of dollars in military research funding to the university's four campuses. Those campuses could haul in exponentially more money for related and spin-off research in the decades to come, university officials say.

And the agreement promises prestige, too: Only 13 other universities in the country have a UARC, a list that includes heavyweights like Johns Hopkins University, the University of Texas and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The research agreement is expected to be unveiled by NU President J.B. Milliken and Gen. Robert Kehler, StratCom's commander, at a press conference this morning.

University and military leaders have declined to publicly discuss the agreement until then. NU sent out a brief email on Wednesday announcing a press conference on a "major university-wide research initiative focused on defense and national security."

But interviews with nearly a dozen officials with knowledge of the agreement, as well as a review of public documents, suggest that NU is about to embark on a long and lucrative

partnership with StratCom, which has its headquarters at Offutt Air Force Base and oversees the nation's nuclear weapons.

StratCom released what the military calls a "sources sought announcement" a year ago, seeking universities to perform research and development in a number of areas.

The five-year contract calls for research into better detection of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. University researchers also will work on protecting American troops against weapons of mass destruction, and on legal issues related to space, cyberspace and telecommunications, according to the military announcement.

Several high-profile NU programs align nicely with the research StratCom seeks.

The University of Nebraska College of Law boasts one of the country's only space law programs and is nationally known for studying legal issues related to military and commercial satellites in space.

The Peter Kiewit Institute on the University of Nebraska at Omaha campus employs several experts in emergency management and military-related research.

And NU's Center for Biosecurity, housed at the NU Medical Center, has already done work for the Department of Defense on chemical and biological threats.

Officials familiar with the agreement, who agreed to speak only on condition of anonymity, said the importance of NU nabbing a UARC goes far beyond the initial five-year contract.

Each NU campus should be able to build up the research areas being funded by the agreement, either by attracting other federal grants or partnering with other universities who already have a UARC.

Currently, the Army and the Navy each fund research centers at five universities. The National Security Agency has two such agreements with universities, and NASA and the Missile Defense Agency each have one. Penn State University is the only other Big Ten school with a UARC.

If history is a guide, the five-year agreement between NU and StratCom will last decades or longer.

Johns Hopkins, for example, has worked with the Navy under a similar agreement since the end of World War II.

"This is part of a larger University of Nebraska effort to up its game," said a university official. "This will help."

Contact the writer:

402-444-1064, matthew.hansen@owh.com

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