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Letter-Writing Campaign Seeks to Persuade Trustees to Open Campuses to Military Recruiters

By [SARA LIPKA](#)

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni announced on Wednesday a campaign to urge trustees to guarantee military recruiters' access to their campuses, even if university officials have sought to block the recruiters.

The law schools at Columbia, Harvard, and Yale Universities, among other institutions, have attempted to bar military recruiters from their campuses on the grounds that the armed forces discriminate against gay men and lesbians, a practice not in keeping with the universities' nondiscrimination policies. The trustee-and-alumni group called the universities "hypocritical" for still accepting hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and contracts from government agencies.

"These elite institutions offer a perfect case study in Hypocrisy 101. Either they should reject federal money because of their convictions, or let recruiters on campus, now and forever," Anne D. Neal, president of the group, said in a [written statement](#). Administrators' decisions to limit the access of military recruiters is a form of "political activism," she said.

The question of whether colleges may ban recruiters without risking their federal funds is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court. The justices will hear arguments on December 6 in a case that pits the Defense Department against the Forum for Academic and Institutional Rights, whose members include various law schools and faculties ([The Chronicle](#), _____ May 3).

Last November the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit declared unconstitutional the 1994 law that gives federal agencies the power to withhold funds from colleges that restrict military recruiters' access to their students ([The Chronicle](#), _____ December 10, 2004).

Regardless of the Supreme Court's decision in the case, the access of military recruiters "is an issue that trustees should address seriously because it does directly implicate the rights of students to have information about possible careers" and "to learn to think for themselves," said Ms. Neal in an interview.

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This week her group is sending approximately 50 letters to individual trustees at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Stanford Universities, urging the board members to ensure equal access for all recruiters, "whether or not employers' policies mirror those of the university."

Kent Greenfield, a professor of law at Boston College and founder of the Forum for Academic and Institutional Rights, which brought the lawsuit in the case now before the Supreme Court, said he found it "unfortunate that advocates for universities and institutions of higher learning believe that such institutions ought to be an arm of the federal government."

"Every other academic institution or collective body that has weighed in has weighed in on our side, on the side of the First Amendment," he said, citing supporting briefs filed by the American Association of University Professors as well as various universities and groups of law professors. "It's simply not the law and shouldn't be the law that the government can force people to waive their constitutional rights as a condition of federal funding," he said.

While they await the Supreme Court's decision, many institutions have responded to pressure from federal agencies by allowing military recruiters back on their campuses ([The Chronicle](#), September 23). Just three institutions -- New York Law School, Vermont Law School, and the William Mitchell College of Law -- have stood their ground and lost some federal funds, according to Mr. Greenfield.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni will continue its letter-writing campaign in the following weeks, said Ms. Neal. Her group, which was founded in 1995 by Lynne V. Cheney, the former chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, includes representatives of all of the institutions whose trustees will receive letters, Ms. Neal said.

In her statement, Ms. Neal calls on trustees "to stop administrators and faculty from playing politics and to take a strong stand in favor of access to military recruiters."

Background articles from *The Chronicle*:

- [Harvard Law School Lifts Limits on Military Recruiting After Pentagon Threatens to Cut Off Federal Funds](#)
(9/23/2005)
- [Supreme Court Will Hear Appeal of Case Involving](#)

[Campus Bans on Military Recruiters](#) (5/3/2005)

- [Justice Department to Seek Supreme Court Review of Decision Allowing Bans on Military Recruiters](#) (1/17/2005)
- [Court Upholds Colleges' Bans on Recruiters for Military](#) (12/10/2004)
- [Colleges That Ban Military Recruiters Would Lose Additional Funds Under New Legislation](#) (10/11/2004)
- [Military Recruiting Goes to Court](#) (12/12/2003)

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