

THE RETURN OF ROTC

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American Association of University Professors

Good morning, I am Michael Poliakoff, Vice President of Policy for the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is honored to be here at AAUP's 2011 Annual Meeting. I am personally grateful that ACTA's presentations at the past two annual meetings and at the conference on shared governance last November were so warmly received. AAUP is very gracious to invite us back again.

A word about the American Council of Trustees and Alumni: ACTA has the straightforward mission of the three "A's": academic standards, academic freedom, and accountability. We work with governing boards, public and private, around the nation, as well as policymakers, administrators, and faculty in advancing this mission. We are in our 15th year, and, as a sidebar, we were delighted to award our annual prize this year to Benno Schmidt, former president of Yale University and chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees, noting his unflagging devotion to academic excellence and academic freedom.

Our topic today is ROTC on college and university campuses. ACTA has addressed the issue of ROTC since its founding in 1995, maintaining that ROTC is a valuable opportunity for students and that faculty, administrators, and trustees need to find ways to integrate it appropriately into academic and campus life. We have been in steady contact over the years with universities that had not yet taken steps to restore its presence – Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Brown in particular, and we are heartened by the recent movement on those campuses to give official recognition and support for ROTC.

The return of ROTC to Columbia University is an event of the highest significance. It drew the attention of such distinguished faculty as Jacques Barzun, Columbia's former Provost and Professor of History, now in his 104th year, and continuing to produce scholarly studies. I have provided you with copies of his recent op-ed in the Wall Street Journal. Our panel will begin today with an examination of the events surrounding the return of ROTC to Columbia, after which we will look at the ROTC issue on other campuses. We will leave plenty of time for discussion with the audience.

In his 2010 State of the Union Address, President Obama declared: "I call on all of our college campuses to open their doors to our military recruiters and the ROTC. It is time to leave behind the divisive battles of the past. It is time to move forward as one nation." During the Presidential campaign, both Senator Obama and Senator McCain called for the restoration of ROTC to college campuses.

That process is now underway. On December 22, 2010, President Obama placed his signature on the repeal of the military Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, removing the primary stated objection to the return of ROTC to campus.

I will primarily focus on the campuses that have resisted the restoration of ROTC units, but it is important to note that in general, ROTC has been thriving at American colleges and universities. The Los Angeles Times (June 1, 2011) reported a 27% increase in participation over the past four years, with 56,757 men and women participating. Over 1000 colleges and universities have an ROTC program. And this during a time of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. ACTA president Anne Neal has written to numerous trustees noting the danger of the increasing divide between the military and civil society: clearly many students are eager to contribute military service to the nation, and campuses that restrict that opportunity are in danger of alienating themselves from the public. 60% of Columbia's students supported a return of ROTC. In May 2009, a survey of over 1,700 Harvard undergraduates, showed that 62% of the respondents supported official recognition of ROTC. And this, when the repeal of DADT was far from certain. Of the respondents, 54% self-reported as Democrats, 27% independents, 19% Republicans. Even allowing for some element of self-selection bias in a poll conducted by the Harvard Republican Club, these 2009 findings are a significant sign of a shift in campus climate.

Harvard University's relationship to ROTC was emblematic of the tensions between the U.S. military and elite universities. Understanding that tension can help chart a course for a productive new relationship. In 1969 the Harvard faculty voted to remove academic credit from ROTC courses and deny faculty status to ROTC instructors. Since Congress had passed in 1964 the ROTC Revitalization Act, which required professorial status for the ROTC officer in charge and academic credit for the program, the vote of the Harvard faculty meant the termination of the program, which the Department of Defense made official in the following two years. That is to say, ROTC ultimately left Harvard, and Harvard shut the door quite tightly for the next four decades. The tiny handful of students who take ROTC training must do that coursework at MIT. Up until now, at Harvard the expenses of the ROTC unit were paid by private donors, and had those donors not stepped in, students would have had to pay for transportation to MIT and other expenses out of their own pockets to participate in ROTC. The ROTC courses Harvard students take at MIT are not listed with grades on their transcripts. Moreover, ROTC scholarships act as an offset to the College's aid-based grants, rather than a supplement. Most discouraging for students interested in attending Harvard and participating in ROTC is the campus climate that inevitably surrounded participation in ROTC. Kevin Cullen, a columnist for the *Boston Globe* recounts that in his human rights class at the Kennedy School were two army captains in uniform. According to Cullen, they were hissed or mocked whenever they spoke in class. At Harvard's Center for Public Interest Careers, according to Paul Mawn, Harvard alumnus and retired Navy captain, military careers are not mentioned, since the center does not deem that to be a public service. A recent Harvard ROTC graduate and commissioned officer noted the recent history: "Just this year we had 3 freshmen sign up for Army ROTC. Two of them have since dropped the program. The year before we had four freshmen in September and zero by May."

There were better solutions available even in the turbulent times of the 1960's and 70's. MIT kept its ROTC program by appointing ROTC faculty as visiting professors, thus satisfying the 1964 law and the procedures of its faculty. Princeton created an extra-curricular program that provided access to classrooms, an administrative office, office equipment and storage space.

Now that Harvard has officially recognized ROTC, and signed an agreement with the Navy that includes appointing a director and ensuring a physical presence for the unit on campus, the issue becomes one in which the faculty role is paramount: how will new ROTC programs be integrated into campus academic life. There are challenges and opportunities and an imperative to do things better this time. Faculties have the opportunity to craft a genuine ROTC-plus, concentrating on topics in diplomacy, public policy, history, and anthropology crucial for a successful 21st century military. Issues of faculty appointment and course credit should be addressed not with rigidity that made the 1964 ROTC Revitalization Act prelude to a stormy divorce. Instead, higher education and the Department of Defense need to come to the table with an understanding that liberally trained officers - who learn military science while wrestling with sophisticated complexities of the liberal arts - are more likely to make wise and humane decisions that benefit America and the world. An ROTC-plus program can lead to academic renewal as well. At Harvard today, a catalog review shows there are 48 history faculty members, including visiting faculty, but none are explicitly focused on foreign policy, diplomatic history, or military history. An ROTC program could be the opportunity for curricular growth and new faculty specializations.

Harvard's governing board and administration need to take corrective action on the campus climate toward the military, and there are excellent resources at hand. The Post 9-11 GI Bill will pay tuition for veterans at a public or private college up to the cost of the in-state undergraduate tuition at the most expensive public university in a state. For students who chose to attend an elite private institution, that leaves a very hefty tuition bill. However, the Yellow Ribbon Supplement will match dollar for dollar an institution's scholarship to pay tuition and fees that remain unpaid by the GI Bill. University of Pennsylvania, Columbia, Dartmouth, Cornell, Brown, Rice, Carnegie Mellon, and Notre Dame fully cover the tuition and fees of their veterans through this program. Harvard will contribute only up to \$3,000, leaving a very hefty balance for the returning veteran to absorb.

Turning to other institutions, much has changed in the past few weeks. As noted earlier in this panel, Columbia has restored ROTC with an agreement signed May 27 with the Navy. The Stanford faculty senate voted to restore ROTC; Yale's trustees, the Yale Corporation, voted on May 24 for the return of ROTC, following a faculty vote at which a significant majority approved the return of ROTC. Yale's decision was comprehensive, granting academic rank to ROTC instructors according to their qualifications and ensuring appropriate facilities for the unit.

Why does this matter? It matters for the nation to have an officer corps that includes leaders whose education and development represents a broad mix of academic disciplines and the competing ideas and traditions of a free society. It matters because ROTC is a gateway for many outstanding young people, who want an education at a highly competitive academic institution as well as a career in military service. I will close with the words of Colin Powell. "It was only once I was in college, about six months into college when I found something that I liked, and that was ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps in the military. And I not only liked it, but I was pretty good at it. That's what you really have to look for in life, something that you like, and something that you think you're pretty good at. And if you can put those two things together, then you're on the right track, and just drive on." I am optimistic that the institutions that

hitherto shunned ROTC are finding the right track as well. The faculty role is full of opportunity for creating programs of the highest caliber. It is a very promising moment.