

A Strategy for Replacing ROTC on Campus

By Aaron Kreider

Email me with feedback: aaron@campusactivism.org

Copyright 2003. Available online at www.CampusActivism.org.

Introduction

The US military relies upon recruiting officers from colleges and universities (as well as purely military schools like West Point) for it to successfully carry out its mission of invading and occupying foreign nations. For instance, 75% of the Army's officers come from ROTC. If we restrict this supply of officers, the military will be less able to engage in these unjust wars. Challenging a ROTC program is not easy, but this article will discuss ways in which ROTC enrolment can be reduced as a step down the path to eliminating ROTC from campus.

Arguments Against ROTC

The two main arguments for opposing ROTC are that you oppose US foreign policy or you believe that a Military Science department conflicts with academic values like critical thinking. A critique of US foreign policy would take a lot of space, so I suggest consulting books by progressive authors like Noam Chomsky. The latter argument has proven useful in convincing faculty to support ending or reducing the amount of academic credit for ROTC courses. It is important to note that ROTC strongly encourages students to have certain technical majors, thus altering the departmental balance of the university, and it also makes it very difficult for students with ROTC scholarships to change majors thus limiting student freedom.

Arguments for ROTC: Scholarships

Most students join ROTC because it provides a partial or full tuition scholarship. It's all about the money. In 2000, the government spent \$337 million on ROTC (source: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/01statab/educ.pdf>). The maximum scholarship is around \$17,000/year (though most students do not get that much), money for books, plus a monthly subsistence stipend of \$250, \$300, \$350, or \$400 in your first, second, third and fourth years respectively. Scholarships vary in length from two to four years. Winning a longer scholarship requires serving a longer term of military service. A four-year scholarship will typically require four years of active military service, possibly followed by additional years of reserve duty.

It is important to know that students can quit ROTC before their sophomore year without any penalty. If they quit afterwards, they must return their scholarship money.

Anti-ROTC activists need to work to provide ways that low and middle income students can attend college without needing a ROTC scholarship or taking out massive loans. However, one should note that ROTC scholarships are merit based. How likely is it that a student who attended a public inner city school will qualify for a full-tuition scholarship to an elite school (or even a non-elite school)? If ROTC cared about empowering people of color and the working class then it would have scholarships that reflected these values. Unlike JROTC which recruits students to be regular, working class, soldiers, ROTC trains young people to join the privileged officer class (aka management). Military officers are middle or upper-middle class.

Goals

a. Long-Term Goal

While some people might want to reform ROTC so that it does a better job of teaching morality (or Just War Theory), or so that LGBTQ students in ROTC are able to be open about their sexual orientation, I think most readers will want to entirely eliminate their campus's ROTC program and to create an alternative scholarship for students to do a peaceful form of community service.

b. Medium -Term Goals

Before we eliminate ROTC, several interim goals will mark our progress on the path. Here are several possible milestones:

- Reduce ROTC enrolment. Our goal is to have zero ROTC students. By challenging the program, it will become controversial and students will think twice about signing-on for good at the beginning of their sophomore year. We should track ROTC enrollment to try to measure our impact. Note however that participation fluctuates significantly based on national political and economic conditions.
- Eliminate credit for ROTC courses. The amount of credit given for ROTC courses varies substantially by university. Several universities in the past, or currently, do not give any credit for ROTC courses. Do ROTC courses meet the same academic standards that other ones do? What do your faculty, and perhaps your faculty senate, think about this?
- In religious affiliated schools, you might work for a required course for all ROTC students on the teachings of your religion on War and Peace. You might find more support for this, than for ending ROTC. For instance, Students at Notre Dame (a very Catholic school) advocated for a required course and a student newspaper poll found that almost half of the student body supported the course, whereas only 5% wanted the ROTC program eliminated.

- In secular schools, you could try for a required course on war and human rights or something else that would teach critical thinking about US foreign policy and the role of the military.
- Create a nonviolent alternative to ROTC. Students would receive tuition support in exchange for doing peace, justice, religious, or service work upon graduation. This could be created while ROTC still exists, with the goal being to phase out ROTC and replace it with this.
- Get the university administration or the faculty or student government to create a university committee to examine this issue. You might only want to do this if it looks like the committee will give a recommendation in your favor.
- Fight to reduce tuition so that students can attend your school without needing massive scholarships.
- Have your university provide scholarships for ROTC students who become conscientious objectors after enrolling in ROTC, who must then drop out of the program.

c. *Short-Term Goals*

There are too many of these to mention all of them. Most are relatively obvious, like winning votes in various campus bodies, getting a large number of signatures on a petition, getting fifty people to attend a talk, or holding a meeting to form a Replace ROTC coalition.

Building a Replace ROTC Coalition

A. *Your Supporters*

You need to create a widely based “Replace ROTC” coalition that includes as many people as possible if you are going to have a chance at success. A successful coalition will find support among liberals/progressives/radicals who oppose traditional US Foreign Policy (like the War on Iraq and the occupation), pacifists (including many religious pacifists), lgbtq students who are opposed to the discrimination in the military, students of color who recognize that the US military kills people of color (using US people of color to kill other people of color), faculty who dislike the effect of the military on academic values, and people who suffer from the government’s funding cuts of social program to finance the military. Almost everyone is affected by government cuts to education, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare, housing, and other important social programs – thus your potential base of support is very wide.

B. *Your Opponents*

- ROTC students and instructors. You can tone down the student opposition by phasing in the elimination of the program, so that it will not affect current ROTC students personally.
- Alumni military veterans.
- Administrators who support ROTC.
- Conservative students and faculty.
- Department of Defense (and notably their implementation of the Solomon Amendment which will be discussed in detail below)

Target(s)

You need to identify who has the power to end your ROTC program and how you can put pressure on them. Perhaps it is your university president or a board of trustees. While these people are hard to reach directly, you can try to get student government, faculty government and other more democratic bodies on your side providing your cause with legitimacy.

Tactics

You will want to use a wide array of innovative tactics to challenge your ROTC program. While the late Sixties were notable for numerous student attempts and successful arson of ROTC buildings, currently property destruction is likely to end any chance you have of success and also to reduce the chances of campaigns at other schools.

Here are several ideas for tactics:

- Enroll in ROTC for the first-year (you get one-year’s worth of scholarship and monthly stipends!) and then drop out. This is difficult because you need to get high school seniors (perhaps younger brothers and sisters?) to do this.
- Taking ROTC courses without joining the ROTC program. Then raising lots of questions in class from either the perspective of a progressive, a revolutionary-in training - the latter wanting military training to prepare for revolution (You could even show up to class dressed as an anarchist or a future guerilla! Though you should only do this if you think it would help.), or your religion (for religious-affiliated schools). At most universities, ROTC is required to let students who are not enrolled in the ROTC program take ROTC courses.
- Leafleting ROTC class sessions with an alternative take on the day or week’s material.
- Winning student government, graduate student government, and faculty senate votes to replace ROTC.
- Campus referendum.
- If your school has a large ROTC program, it may have ROTC ceremonies at which you could protest. For instance, the Notre Dame president reviews the ROTC troops each year in May and students have often protested at the review (student protest stopped the review for a period in the late Sixties).
- Making ROTC a controversial program, so fewer students join it.
- Host speakers on US Foreign Policy, soldiers who dropped out of the military, religious speakers on Just War Theory.
- Dialogues - speakers on one or both sides, followed by small group discussion.

- Education about nonviolent resistance (activists are also willing to risk injury, jail, and even die for the cause - they're just not willing to kill -- we must show that nonviolent resistance can overthrow tyranny).
- Letters to the Editor of your school and community newspapers.
- Die-ins. Dramatize what it is like for civilians (Iraqi or from another country) to die in war.

The Military and Just War Theory

For many people who are religious, they rationalize their participation in the military by referring to Just War Theory. However, even a liberal definition of Just War Theory (at least in the Catholic tradition) will allow that most recent wars have violated the theory. Thus Pope John Paul II has come out against the US attack on Iraq, that on Afghanistan, and the bombing of Yugoslavia. According to Just War Theory, a soldier must be able to choose before each campaign, each battle, and even each shot fired whether doing so is just and proportionate to the enemy's threat. In the military, it is extremely likely that soldiers follow orders instead of their conscience and thus violate their religious beliefs. The military does not follow Just War Theory and does not allow for selective objection to war (the concept that some wars are just and others are unjust) which is a fundamental tenet of Just War Theory.

The Solomon Amendment

This amendment was passed by Congress in 1995 making it very difficult to end a ROTC program as it will penalize an institution for engaging in "Anti-ROTC" activity. It was enacted as a response to the challenges to ROTC programs from universities and colleges that found ROTC to be in violation of their non-discrimination clause for discriminating against LGBT students. The amendment forces all colleges and universities to permit ROTC recruitment and also allow ROTC to establish a unit on campus, if it so desires. The only exception is for religious schools whose faith is, by tradition, pacifist (Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren). There is also an interesting rule that requires that the university or college release student information to military recruiters (major, year in school, and contact information.)

The original amendment threatened to remove all financial aid and federal research grants from schools that had an anti-ROTC policy. In 1999, the rule was changed (by an amendment of Rep. Barney Frank) so that only federal research grant money will be eliminated. While some of this federal research money is for undesirable defense research, a considerable portion of it is for relatively worthwhile projects and universities will be extremely reluctant to relinquish access to this funding.

I am not aware of any university or college that has been penalized by this amendment. Several schools were in violation when it was introduced, but then complied before having to lose their funding.

It may be possible to engage in activities without triggering the amendment. You could reduce enrolment, create an alternative scholarship program, and perhaps even reduce credit given for ROTC courses without triggering it. Of course one will only know how the DOD will react once students try these things.

The Morrill Act (aka Land Grant Act of 1862)

With this act, Congress gave each state land which it could sell to finance the creation of one or more universities. These are known as Land Grant Universities. One requirement of the act was that the university must include some training on "military tactics." Up until 1916 universities met this requirement without ROTC (because it did not yet exist), using alternative means for providing military training. This act does not require how much military training must be provided, nor what form it must take. While the Morrill Act will make it more difficult to entirely replace a ROTC program, it does not make it impossible.

Strategically Using Defense Build-up/Cut-back Cycles

The size of ROTC has fluctuated greatly over history, generally increasing when the US is at war or in a state of alert ("Unofficial History of Army ROTC" - http://www.jhu.edu/~rotc/rotc_history.htm). Military training at universities first became prominent during the Civil War. Later, ROTC was established during World War I. ROTC participation actually increased during the inter-war period and then dramatically increased during World War II. It declined until the Korean War boom, then declined until the Vietnam War boom, and then declined again until Reagan's military build-up started in 1981. The latest decline came at the end of the Cold War when from 1991-1995 ROTC enrollment was halved. Currently ROTC (and JROTC) enrolment is increased due to Bush's military build-up as a response to the terrorist attacks of September 11.

The general direction of ROTC enrolment directly affects our replace ROTC campaigns. If ROTC enrolment were in decline, the military would be looking to close units and you would be more likely to win an elimination campaign. Whereas, if ROTC enrolment is increasing, many groups will find themselves fighting campaigns to stop the creation of new ROTC units and eliminating an existing unit will be difficult. In fact there are several student groups working to restore ROTC programs to campuses like Yale and Columbia.

Conclusion

While difficult, a strong campaign (and similarly a successful elimination of a unit) against a large ROTC program could attract significant mainstream media coverage and would be a powerful blow to the US government's goal of reshaping the world in its interests. As campus peace groups start challenging ROTC, we will gain experience and be able to discover strategies and tactics that will work on many campuses.

One reason for hope is a recent (Sept. 19, 2003) suit by the Forum for Academic and Institutional Rights, a group of students, faculty a couple law schools, challenging the Department of Defense and the Solomon Amendment for its impact upon law schools. If this suit were succesful it would make challenging ROTC significantly easier.

References

NGLTF's organizing guide, 1995. Chapter 13 is on "Ending ROTC Discrimination"
<http://www.campusactivism.org/displayresource.php?giRid=50&>

A generally useful resource on campus-military ties.
Universities in the Business of Repression. By Jonathan Feldman. South End Press. 1989.

Anti-ROTC page
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2906/>

ROTC and discrimination
<http://qrd.tcp.com/qrd/usa/military/rotc/>

Unofficial History of Army ROTC
http://www.jhu.edu/~rotc/rotc_history.htm

The Struggle against ROTC in Puerto Rico
<http://zena.secureforum.com/Znet/zmagsite/oct2002/activism/boulangger1002.htm>

Solomon Amendment - 1995
<http://clhe.org/mil-recru.htm>

Solomon Amendment – as amended by 2000
<http://www.yalerotc.org/Solomon.html>

The Morrill Act

Article on the struggle against compulsory ROTC at Berkeley
http://www.fsm-a.org/stacks/AP_files/APCompulsROTC.html#2

MIT- Military training is required, but not necessarily ROTC.
<http://www-tech.mit.edu/V110/N46/rotc.46n.html>

The actual act.
<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/27.htm>

AACRAO page on the amendment (a higher education organization)
http://web.aacrao.org/asp_aacrao/govrel/issues.asp#solo

John Kerry's plan to pay for four years of public college tuition in exchange for two years of service (non-military service)
http://www.johnkerry.com/pdf/johnkerry_service_fact_sheet.pdf

My ROTC page with many links
<http://www.nd.edu/~psa/rotc.html>

Active counter-recruitment list.
counter-recruitment-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

AFSC's Youth and Militarism Program
<http://www.youth4peace.org/>

Various Anti-Militarism Organizations

<http://www.comdsd.org/yano.htm>
<http://www.nisbco.org/>
<http://www.objector.org/>
<http://www.comdsd.org/>
<http://www.warresisters.org/Roots/roots.frames.html>

Military Pages

<http://www.afrotc.com/>

<http://www.armyrotc.com>

<https://www.nrotc.navy.mil/>

<http://www.usma.edu/> - US Military Academy at West Point (Trains one fourth of the lieutenants required by the Army)

Pro-ROTC pages

<http://advocatesforrotc.org/columbia/index.html> - Columbia

<http://www.yalerotc.org/> - Yale

<http://advocatesforrotc.org/index.html>

<http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/ReadArticle.asp?ID=7546> (Article about pro-ROTC movement at Columbia)