



Repressing ROTC

By Christina Hoff Sommers

The distaste of top-tier schools for the military is powerfully demonstrated when faculties deny the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) access to the campus. Most privately funded institutions receive substantial funds from the federal government, and the government is under no moral or legal obligation to continue subsidizing institutions that create hostile environments for the nation's cadets, soldiers, and veterans. Liberal arts colleges should be presented with the choice of lifting the ban on ROTC or losing government support.

Our soldiers deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom have stirred the country with their courage, proficiency, patriotism, and decency. These young men and women come from diverse ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. Many have gone to college.

But the colleges they attended are not Harvard, Yale, or Stanford. America's elite schools tend to regard the military as morally suspect. Students soon get the message that a career in the armed forces is unworthy of their consideration.

The distaste of top-tier schools for the military is powerfully demonstrated when faculties deny the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) access to the campus. Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Brown, and Columbia, for example, have not allowed it in thirty years.

The ban discourages some of the country's best students from volunteering for military service. The nation, in turn, is deprived of their skills, talent, and imagination.

Inhospitable Attitudes

ROTC was founded in 1916 to bring well-educated young men into the military. In

Christina Hoff Sommers is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. A version of this article appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 10, 2003.

exchange for scholarship support, students undergo officer training and agree to serve for some years in the armed forces after graduation. All sides benefit. During the Vietnam War, however, the military became increasingly unpopular, and many campuses targeted ROTC for elimination. At Stanford, ROTC headquarters were torched by an angry mob, and cadets were physically attacked. Since then, it has never been invited back.

A student who is attending a college that has banned ROTC and who wants to become a military officer has to travel, sometimes long distances, to some other schools that have accepted the program. In most cases, such students receive no credit for ROTC course work. Stanford ROTC students, for example, take courses in military science and national defense at Berkeley or Santa Clara, yet receive no credit for them at their home institution. Stanford's registrar, Roger Printup, justifies this policy on the grounds that "the courses just don't fit into a degree program here at Stanford." Which courses do fit in? Yoga, Hip-Hop, and "Girls on Film" (a class that explores the image of teenage girls in the pop culture of the 1990s) are offered for credit.

The school's inhospitality to the military has dramatic consequences. In 1956 some 1,100 Stanford students were enrolled in ROTC; today there are just twenty-nine—all being trained off campus.

At some of our top-ranked universities, patriotism itself is disdained. According to University of Chicago ethics professor Martha Nussbaum, “Pride in a specifically American identity” is “morally dangerous.” Barton Bernstein, professor of history at Stanford, speaks for many of his peers when he reproaches ROTC for “preparing students for war and training them to kill, and that is fundamentally unacceptable at a university.” Cecilia Ridgeway, a sociologist and member of the Stanford Faculty Senate, adds that “first-rate universities” should not feed “militaristic approaches to problems.” Nussbaum, Bernstein, and Ridgeway seem unimpressed by the fact that the free and democratic way of life Americans enjoy is ultimately protected by an effective military.

These professors and those who agree with them may be far outside the mainstream of American opinion, but on campus they have the power to make life difficult for undergraduates who wish to prepare to serve their country.

Privately funded institutions can make their own rules of course. But most receive substantial funds from the federal government, and the government is under no moral or legal obligation to continue subsidizing institutions that create hostile environments for the nation’s cadets, soldiers, and veterans.

Moreover, the law requires institutions of higher learning—including the top-tier schools—to offer a more accepting environment.

Boosting ROTC

In the mid-1990s, a law was enacted that prohibits colleges and universities from receiving federal funds if they fail to permit military recruiters or ROTC units on campus.

Subsequent revisions and clarifications of the original provision, known as the Solomon Amendment, have strengthened it to stipulate that if any school within a university denies access to recruiters or bans ROTC, the entire institution could lose its federal funding.

The Air Force recently used the Solomon Amendment to gain access to law school job fairs. Until last year, many law schools barred military recruiters from their campuses. But the Air Force sent them letters warning them that by blacklisting the military, they were violating the law and risked losing all government subsidies. Law professors were apoplectic. There were frantic meetings, rallies, and threats of lawsuits. Protesters disrupted Air Force interviews with students. “It’s essentially blackmail,” said a stunned Harvard Law School professor, Heather Gerken. But law schools such as Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Georgetown have quietly complied.

What worked for the law schools will work for liberal arts colleges. They should be presented with the choice of lifting the ban on ROTC or losing government support.