

Brown University Faculty Forum
Subject: ROTC

April 13, 2011
4:30-6:00 p.m.

Stephen Foley (English), Acting Chair of the Faculty Forum

Members of the Brown Committee on ROTC:

Katherine Bergeron (Dean of the College, Chair), Leslie Bostrom (Visual Art), Andrew Campbell, (Molecular, Microbiology & Immunology), Catherine Lutz (Anthropology), Kenneth Miller (Biology), Robert Pelcovits (Physics), Philip Rosen (Modern Culture & Media), Thomas Webster (Engineering), Stephen Lassonde (Deputy Dean of the College)

Chaney Harrison, '11.5

Samuel Howard, '14

Sean Dinces, Graduate Student

The Acting Chair of the Faculty Forum, Stephen Foley (English), opened the forum at 4:30 p.m. He reminded those present that the forum would discuss the work to date of the Committee on ROTC. Before opening the floor to questions, he asked Katherine Bergeron to address those in attendance on the subject of the committee's work and progress on that work thus far.

Dean Bergeron first expressed thanks to the FEC and the members of the ROTC committee who had worked to research past and current questions related to ROTC at Brown. She reviewed the origins of the committee, noting that its formation dates from the Congressional vote in late 2010 to repeal "don't ask don't tell," (DADT) and explained that the committee, which includes seven faculty, three students and one staff member, was formed at the request of President Simmons to take a fresh look at the issue at Brown and peer institutions.

Among the questions the Committee must answer, said Dean Bergeron, is whether a unit at Brown is possible. She noted that some of Brown's sibling campuses have taken a more "top-down" approach to the issue and the decision process; here it is the reverse of that. There have been 15 meetings of the committee since it was formed, and Dean Bergeron introduced the members of the Committee.

Robert Pelcovits (Physics / Committee on ROTC) presented the arguments for and against ROTC at Brown that had been encountered in the course of members' work. Arguments made in favor of bringing ROTC back:

- it would enhance campus diversity (by increasing appeal to more conservative students)
- it would reduce a culture gap between those at elite institutions and those who tend to serve in the military

- it would address the inherent classism of the army
- Brown students may bring to military service an increased commitment to social justice, thus potentially effecting change in the military from within
- the US military does not set its own agenda and is civilian led

Arguments the Committee had encountered against bringing ROTC back:

- DADT's repeal has had no effect on policy about transgender, thus potentially a return could mean discrimination that would conflict with University anti-discrimination policy
- given a high number of sexual assaults within the service branches, the military is a sexist and dangerous environment for women who serve
- there is no evidence that Brown students serving would have any kind of "liberalizing" effect
- on-campus ROTC would tacitly condone war in Iraq and Afghanistan
- ROTC would lock students in the program into postgraduate military service
- ROTC is incompatible with Brown's educational mission, as it perpetuates a culture emphasizing obeying rules rather than questioning and critical thinking

Stephen Foley, before opening the discussion to all, mentioned several points that might inform the discussion. The current debate, he noted, is about the mission and culture of Brown and its compatibility (or lack thereof) with ROTC policies; it involves an assessment of beliefs and values as well as costs and benefits. He reminded all present that this would be a free and open discussion among colleagues, and with that opened the floor to questions and remarks.

Anthony Lancaster (Professor Emeritus of Economics) was recognized; he stated the reasons for his opposition to ROTC, which he said was not connected to policy about gays serving, nor was it about the status of ROTC faculty or courses. He noted that the military does have its virtues, among them courage, honor, obedience, all essential to a time of military crisis. However, he said, this is not such a time. He juxtaposed to those ideas a set of academic virtues: skepticism, reason, the will to question authority; these, he said, are antithetical to and cannot coexist with a military training school. Moreover, having soldiers on campus arouses the same feelings that having an armed person go about campus would create.

Walter Feldman (Professor Emeritus of Art) rose to disagree with the previous speaker. He first alluded to his own military service, commenting that he believes it is our obligation to be patriotic, regardless of which party controls the government. He noted that in 1970 the faculty did away with ROTC because it did not want the military to regulate courses, nor did it want the colonel in charge of ROTC to be called "professor." He confessed himself bewildered by some of the points made in the arguments against, and had a number of questions. He said he was not sure how a return of ROTC would mean a militarized campus or conflict with the policies on diversity, and he was not sure he agreed that having ROTC would mean locking students into military service or implying tacit support for US military actions.

Steve Rabson (Professor Emeritus of East Asian Studies) disagreed with Professor

Feldman. He noted that he too was a veteran, and recognized there were at least five veterans in the room (including some who were members of the Committee). He began by posing the question of whether the 1969 resolution to get rid of ROTC was still appropriate for Brown, noting that the context at that time was the blunder of the war in Southeast Asia. Currently, he said, our soldiers are in Afghanistan and Iraq, supposedly to protect human rights, but the war has resulted in accidental killings of civilians, and US troops have found themselves reduced to occupying shrinking enclaves. Saying that current soldiers are dying for a mistake, he said that a refusal to reinstate ROTC would send a message of resistance to the Pentagon and White House. He concluded by saying that the University must not support training its students to implement current military policies.

William Simmons (Anthropology) said he had no quarrel with the military per se, but had questions about how ROTC's return might affect issues of funding and governance at Brown. How might it affect the research agenda, or whether government funds would or would not be awarded here? How would the fact of ROTC affect Corporation decision-making, if at all? In short, what would be the range of constraints, effects and obligations for the University in the event of ROTC's return?

Gregory Elliott (Sociology) was recognized and read from the memo he had written to the Committee. He opposed the return of ROTC, considering it impossible for it to conform to basic educational principles in the liberal arts, which presuppose a search for knowledge and learning; the training of ROTC would be more like indoctrination, with no professional academic training. Further, he defined what he saw as the purpose of the military as training to kill without compunction; if Brown strives for students' intellectual growth by exposing them to myriad experiences, how can we give legitimacy to an organization that would deny that? He noted that he does not advocate denying any student's right to do ROTC (with Providence College), but he is against academic accreditation through Brown, giving the instructor any Brown faculty status, giving the ROTC courses any semblance of academic legitimacy, or using Brown resources toward the existence of the course.

Ann Dill (Sociology) said she requested that the Committee gather more specific information, in particular about the precise content of the military science courses. Would such courses as are in existence represent diverse views? Are there different incarnations of them? She noted that for her it was not a question of whether or not the faculty "supported or did not support a war," but of Brown's educational mission and military leadership training. Her supposition was that existing courses on that topic (leadership training) on campus were not focused in a way the military would find appropriate.

Susan Smulyan (American Civilization) noted that it seemed that Brown's sibling universities were going about the process differently. In particular, they were not as concerned with courses per se. If there were an ROTC presence on campus but with no courses or Brown academic credit, how would that affect opposition? For herself she noted that whether she was for or against the purpose or activities of an organization

(citing as examples Goldman Sachs and Planned Parenthood) was immaterial—neither of them, in her view, should be allowed to come on campus and institute a training program, and allowing the military to do that was equally incorrect. She asked Dean Bergeron to specify how the process of debating and deciding policy will work.

Dean Bergeron responded that the Committee's charge was to become as informed as possible and report to President Simmons. Today's meeting is one of several occasions for faculty to express their views, which need to come in a form other than only a poll. The Faculty Meeting of May 3 will continue the process. She noted that there have been 870 responses from alumni to date, and faculty feedback plus alumni and other information the Committee has gathered will be conveyed to the President after the May 3th meeting. The Committee may make one recommendation to the President, or it may have several recommendations.

Walter Feldman, Susan Smulyan and Gregory Elliott asked at this point for Dean Bergeron to clarify whether that meant the ultimate decision would rest with President Simmons rather than the faculty, and whether a faculty vote would be required for anything to change.

Dean Bergeron reminded those present that in June of 1972 the Corporation had voted on a resolution concerning Naval ROTC, which a faculty vote of several weeks earlier had declared should be discontinued. The Corporation in 1972 had acknowledged the faculty vote, and said that the faculty was acting within its proper traditional purview to "scrutinize and recommend all formal courses and curricular modifications..." The Corporation document was at pains to point out, however, that the final authority in such matters was in fact the Board of Fellows, and that the faculty had "exceeded its proper role in admonishing the president not to negotiate further" with NROTC. Dean Bergeron commented that it was the power of the president to determine the path of the University; at the same time anything relating to the status of instruction was a faculty concern. In any event, said Dean Bergeron, she could not imagine a process on this issue that would not go through faculty procedures.

Kenneth Miller (Biology / Committee on ROTC) assured those with questions that the fact of the Committee's existence and work does not mean any kind of attempt to get around faculty rules or procedures. The Committee does not know the outcome, and President Simmons will hear the report and decide what she will recommend. He recalled being at Brown as an undergraduate in the early 1970s, noting that at that time a leading role was played by faculty, and he expected that would be the case once again.

Susan Smulyan asked the Committee about a possible loophole: could ROTC be brought back without classes or faculty status? Doing so could be interpreted as making the return not a faculty issue. She expressed her disagreement with this idea, stating that the presence of ROTC on campus is issue requiring faculty involvement, and wanted to be sure the faculty would all have a chance to vote on it.

Dean Bergeron said that a voting opportunity would come sometime after the May 3 Faculty Meeting.

Reid Cooper (Geological Sciences / FEC) asked whether the faculty have standing for voting on extra-curricular matters and activities.

Michael Rosen (Professor Emeritus of Mathematics) voiced opposition to the return of ROTC. He remembered that in the early 1970s the faculty had looked in detail at the content of the ROTC courses and found them unsatisfactory. He asked what the arrangements are to be at the sibling institutions that are returning ROTC to campus.

Dean Bergeron answered that at Columbia there is a more “top-down” approach, noting that governance is by a smaller body, a faculty senate. There have been three town hall meetings and a poll of students. The recommendation there was to invite further inquiry, so Columbia is now at the beginning of a process that will determine the nature of the relationship with ROTC.

At Harvard, Dean Bergeron said, President Drew Faust said she was prepared to bring ROTC back, and the administration has begun speaking directly with the Secretary of the Navy about a “crosstown plus” arrangement that would be different from what is currently in place. Dean Bergeron’s understanding was that the “plus” means that there would be an ROTC representative from the MIT-hosted consortium on campus, possibly with activities taking place on the Harvard fields.

Gregory Elliott (Sociology) asked what the contents were of textbooks for ROTC courses. He asked if the Committee could obtain samples of materials to see what is being taught.

William Simmons (Anthropology) asked if the Committee had thought about how having ROTC might change the working of the University. Asked by Dean Bergeron to clarify what he meant, he responded that that could be, for example, an attempt to get the University to reconsider its own allocations of funds, as any funding source is a source of influence, constraint and obligation. It might affect things like the direction of certain kinds of research. It raises the question of how independent the University would be of a constituency within it. He mentioned the Solomon Amendment as an example; if we refused ROTC, could we lose federal funding?

Dean Bergeron said that, according to Clyde Bryant, Solomon hasn’t affected many campuses, only two: Vermont Law School and one other. We need to find out what the other one was.

Chaney Harrison (’11.5 / Committee on ROTC) answered that Brown has not lost funding because Brown *has* ROTC and has done so since 1951. If we were to pull out of the relationship with Providence College we would be in violation of it, but as it stands Brown does have ROTC and has never **not** had it since the 1940s.

Steve Rabson asked about the content of the ROTC course material and curriculum, noting that it is troubling if the purpose is “indoctrination.”

Sean Dinces (Graduate Student / Committee on ROTC) commented that there was an assumption that faculty would want to see what ROTC students were studying, but the Providence College ROTC director, Lt. Col. McKinley, has so far not shared the materials.

Dean Bergeron’s interpretation was that if it were an important question for faculty at Brown, she did not see why Providence College would not share the materials in the end.

Gregory Elliott said that if officer development programs differ by campus, he would want to see them all, and found the refusal objectionable.

Andrew Campbell (MMI / Committee on ROTC) commented that his take was that the Committee would be able to get materials and any other information it needed.

Susan Smulyan said it was vital for the Committee to see materials from ROTC courses, not just from PC’s course, for both the Committee and the faculty to be able to make an informed decision. She added that she assumed ROTC would want to teach its own course, not use an existing course already being given on campus for credit.

Leslie Bostrom (Visual Arts / Committee on ROTC) noted that currently no Ivy League university gives credit for ROTC courses; they are all done as extra-curriculars.

Professor Foley thanked all those in attendance for their participation, and adjourned the forum at 5:50.

Respectfully submitted,
Lynne deBenedette (Slavic Languages)
Secretary of the Faculty Forum