



October 19, 2011

Dear Members of the Brown University Community:

As you know, the Committee on the ROTC, led by Dean Katherine Bergeron, released its report on June 30, 2011. That report has been widely circulated, is available on line, and has been the subject of many follow-up discussions on the campus. Most recently, at the October 2011 Faculty Meeting, in light of the centrality of the faculty resolutions in the consideration of the place of ROTC at Brown, I invited faculty comments on the Committee's recommendations.

Those recommendations can be summarized as follows: 1) that the 1969 resolutions determining that ROTC should be considered an extra-curricular program and that military officers teaching in an ROTC program should not be given faculty status based solely on their role in ROTC remain sound today and should continue to govern reconsideration of and decisions about the status of ROTC at Brown; 2) that Brown should continue its cross-institutional arrangement with the Army ROTC program at Providence College; 3) that I "engage in conversations with the Department of Defense" to learn how Brown students might participate in off-campus Naval or Air Force ROTC programs not currently available to them; and 4) that any proposal to expand ROTC opportunities be brought back to the faculty. Subsequent to the issuance of the Committee's report, some members of the ROTC Committee submitted to me a letter opposing consideration of expanding ROTC offerings. Later, the group agreed to make their letter public and it is now also available on the ROTC Committee Report website.

The difficulty of the ROTC Committee in reaching agreement on all its findings and recommendations is symptomatic of the difficulty the Brown community as a whole has encountered in considering the appropriate status for ROTC today. The reasons given by some for opposing reconsideration of Brown policy on ROTC are, among others:

- Concerns about existing discrimination by the military (especially with regard to transgender individuals who are still not permitted to serve);
- Opposition to recent wars undertaken by the country and to military solutions to world problems; and
- A belief that the hierarchical approach of the military is antithetical to Brown's open approach to learning, teaching and research.

Those who argue in favor of ROTC on campus do so on the basis of various arguments such as:

- The majority at Brown is open to a return of ROTC to campus but the University is permitting a vocal political minority to deny this opportunity to students;
- The presence of ROTC on campus would make Brown more politically diverse;
- Brown should participate in developing excellent leaders for the military and help to reduce the perceived divide between military and civilian culture;
- Allowing ROTC on campus is consistent with the centrality of choice in a Brown student's education – they should be able to choose to participate in ROTC if they wish; and
- ROTC scholarships would make more financial aid available for worthy students.

As is apparent in the diversity of opinions expressed, the relationship of citizens to the military is at times ambivalent. On the one hand, most recognize the importance of having an effective military that protects the country and rescues innocents from unjust acts. Even those who generally oppose military action and ROTC units on campus may find themselves calling for military intervention in instances in which it appears that only such intervention can stop genocide, massive human rights violations, civil instability and the chaos that often follows natural disasters. Then, too, those who favor ROTC often find themselves critical of specific military actions and policies such as the war in Afghanistan, "Don't ask, don't tell," or forms of institutionalized and de facto discrimination.

If we were to base our conclusion on ROTC purely on the perceived majority consensus expressed in the Committee report, we would either step up our participation in ROTC or bring ROTC back to campus. The Committee states that most in the Brown community do not agree with a narrow position that Brown should have no involvement with ROTC under any circumstances.¹ They can contemplate a course in which we both protect the rights of students to choose whether to enroll in military officer training and, at the same time, protect the values that almost all in the community cherish: advocacy for and protection of civil rights, independence of the faculty in making judgments about the curriculum and faculty appointments, and the right of community members to voice their views about the military, whatever those views might be.

However, to situate the debate, not in the context of the national debate about the military or about the relationship of the military to universities, we should return to more fundamental questions about who we are and what we value overall. As noted in the Committee report, the faculty resolutions of 1969 were and still remain essential to what we are and seek to be as a university. The fact that these policies were clarified in the context of a debate about ROTC does not lessen in any way the relevance or virtue of what they expressed. That is, the setting of the curriculum, the determination of academic requirements, and the matter of what courses are given University credit properly reside with the faculty and not with national policy, student interest, administration pressure, outside intervention, or political winds. The protection afforded the faculty in setting such standards underpins the very quality of the education that we offer.

The charge that, as long as the military discriminates against transgender persons, neither students at Brown nor the University should have any relationship with the military was thoroughly debated and considered. Of course, discrimination against different individuals and groups has been a significant dimension of the history of the U.S. military. Improper practices have included segregating units by race; limiting opportunities for the full participation of women, minorities, gays and lesbians; and defining eligibility for certain combat roles on the basis of social, gender and racial conventions. It has taken many decades for minorities to be fully integrated at every level of military service and throughout the service branches; some would say that full equality is still a work in progress as it is in society generally, particularly in view of the disproportionate number of minorities that now make up the military. The recent change in reference to “Don’t ask, don’t tell” is another indication of the long, unfinished struggle for equal rights and equal treatment in the military. Today, as Committee members and the Report rightly noted, transgender individuals have yet to be accorded equal treatment and access to military service.

Many other institutions have had a similar history of discrimination. Over time, with the help of enlightened activists, many, including Brown, have transformed into fairer and more open communities. Brown’s well-established and deeply valued progressive tradition has led to a formal policy reflecting a strong commitment to non-discrimination. Yet, some would say that the University falls short in some ways of full enactment of and commitment to that policy. Eliminating discrimination remains an active concern of most institutions.

Discrimination against transgender individuals has not received as much broad attention as that against other affected groups such as ethnic and religious minorities, women, the disabled, and gays and lesbians. But concerted efforts to confront the legacy of discrimination against transgender individuals are certain to result in overturning discrimination against this group as well. The question is what is the appropriate strategic and ethical approach to tackling this important question?

One obvious way to bring attention to and attempt to change the military’s policy is to boycott the military because of this issue. Some therefore urge that ROTC be barred from campus until the military changes its policy on transgender individuals serving in the military. However, this approach belies the fact that the University has partnerships with a wide variety of programs, institutions and entities that do not meet our institutional standards for anti-discrimination. For example, students are permitted to study in countries whose practices fall far short of our anti-discrimination policy. Shall we bar academic opportunities in those countries? Further, since the military is a branch of the U.S. government, should the University refuse to accept any funding from a government that permits its military to have policies such as “Don’t ask, don’t tell,” or that discriminate against transgender individuals? If we did so, the loss of federal financial aid would greatly diminish the opportunity for many students to enroll at Brown and the loss of federal research funds would cause many faculty to lose research support that enables extraordinary advances for society.

¹ The minority opinion supplementing the Committee Report, however, asserts that the use of “unscientific opt-in polls” lacks the validity of more methodologically sound social science surveys. Their statement warns that these should be taken as “expressions of sentiment” rather than conclusive evidence of strong agreement that argues for bringing ROTC back to campus.

This is one of the dilemmas of civil society. Our compact to work together to advance our collective well being is at times a great challenge when we disagree about our collectively designed policies, practices and privileges. The civil rights movement was an object lesson in the benefit of confronting discrimination by insistent involvement and purposeful and ethical engagement with opponents of fairness and equality. For the most part, women and minorities have gained greater equality and advancement by engaging discriminatory institutions, casting light on unfair practices, and steadfastly insisting on change. One could certainly argue that engaging with the military, rather than isolating it, would be a valid approach to ending forms of discrimination.

In my view, while there are many varying perspectives on ROTC and on Brown's engagement with the military, two aspects of this debate emerge clearly. The first is that, consistent with its stated policy of anti-discrimination, Brown should take a stand against discrimination against transgender individuals by the military. It should do so in all the long-tested and well-recognized forms available in matters of advocacy. In that regard, it is appropriate and necessary to advance the University's position on this issue as soon as possible. At the same time, it is just as essential that Brown recognize and accept its responsibility to support and serve the country by educating leaders for the military who understand the importance of such values to a nation that can only be held together by mutual respect and persistent attention to matters of justice and equality.

Where then do these dual responsibilities lead us?

The question of whether there must be an ROTC unit on the campus is, in my view, less the nub of the question than whether the University understands and acknowledges its role as a national university in participating in the development of leaders for the country, including its military. Brown should not isolate itself by barring or denigrating participation in ROTC programs or the military. It is entirely appropriate, though, for Brown to determine what types of programs are suited to its academic culture and campus goals. The presence or not of an ROTC unit on the campus is not a litmus test for Brown's commitment to serve the country loyally and honorably. The Committee having concluded that the cross-institutional option is workable, desirable and compatible with faculty policy, I see no reason to insist on on-campus units, particularly in view of the military's expressed preference for cross-institutional programs. In that regard, it is appropriate to explore whether a naval or Air Force ROTC program might be available to complement the existing program at Providence College.

I therefore endorse the recommendations and majority position of the Committee that we should explore with the Department of Defense whether, *under existing academic policies at Brown*, opportunities may be created for Brown students to participate in additional cross-institutional ROTC programs elsewhere. A nearby Rhode Island institution has approached Brown about participating in a Navy ROTC program that it may seek to establish; this opportunity would offer Brown students a new possibility for officer training. In keeping with University practice, the faculty should examine any terms under which this might be done to assure that our participation does not violate the 1969 resolutions concerning credit, requirements, and faculty appointments.

I return to the question of how to deal with the matter of discrimination against transgender individuals. **We must do all in our power as an institution to carry the message to Congress, the executive branch, and the military establishment that the policy barring transgender individuals from military service must be changed. We have the capacity to mount the arguments, to influence others to assist in bringing the case forward, and to persist with this struggle until the proper ends are achieved. To do this would be entirely consistent with the tradition of the University, a tradition that saw students at Brown calling for the abolition of slavery in the earliest days of the University. Courage has never been in short supply at Brown and it will not be in this instance. Many speak about the importance of service to the nation through the military and they are correct. However, to root out the manifestation and vestiges of discrimination from our national life is an equally important dimension of serving the nation.**

Therefore, I believe that we should proceed to explore the possibilities for Brown students to participate in cross-institutional Naval or Air Force ROTC programs housed on other campuses. In addition, we should commit to helping to arouse greater national attention to the discrimination of the military and others against transgender individuals.

Ruth J. Simmons