

February 2, 2011

## **Memorandum for the Task Force on Military Engagement**

**From: Abraham R. Wagner**

The purpose of this memorandum is to express my strong support for the proposal to "Return the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) to Columbia University's Campus." I appreciate the fact that the University Senate is revisiting the question of ROTC's place at Columbia, and unfortunately will not be in New York at the time of the scheduled hearings to participate personally.

Prior to joining the Columbia University faculty some six years ago as Adjunct Professor of International and Public Affairs I served for over three decades in various positions in the United States Government related to national security. At SIPA I have been teaching two courses related to national security, defense and intelligence. Among my students have been active military, government employees, as well as graduate students seeking jobs in the national security area. While not part of my formal role, I have also served to advise undergraduate students from both Columbia and Barnard working on papers and projects in the national security area.

The question of returning ROTC to Columbia is not simple or easy, and arguments exist on both sides of the matter. On balance, however, I personally believe that the current policy is a legacy of the Vietnam War era long past, and the benefits to the University Community articulated by the student Advocates for Columbia ROTC and Students United for America are well-taken.

In the mid-1990s I served as a Visiting Professor of International Relations at the University of Southern California which had an active ROTC program in place. My experience with students at USC, a number of who were enrolled in the ROTC program is that the benefits described by the Columbia student group are real - not illusory. I fully expect that such benefits would be realized at Columbia as well. In this regard, I find a few points to be most compelling:

First, as we are all aware, the cost of attending Columbia is substantial and indeed daunting for many students and their families, even with the myriad of financial aid programs available. Without question the ROTC program enables a broader spectrum of students to attend Columbia than would otherwise be possible, and provides Columbia with a more diverse student body.

It also provides the ROTC students ready access to employment in an economy where jobs are not as readily available as in times past.

Second, from the Government's perspective, we need students with the type of education that Columbia affords. I can offer two examples from my own experience. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) which gave rise to the Internet and a host of other new technologies is staffed in large part by uniformed military, many with advanced professional degrees. The Intelligence Community, which now includes some 16 separate agencies, is also staffed in large part by uniformed military.

In its "best days" the CIA depended heavily on some of the best minds drawn from Columbia, Yale and other leading educational institutions. Many of the failures we have experienced in the last several years have been due to a failure to bring in well-educated young people to perform some of the most challenging analytical tasks imaginable. Indeed, much of my own time these days is spend in writing recommendations for my own students seeking work in this critical area. ROTC offers yet another viable path to supporting this critical national interest.

Third, I believe that the changes in the ROTC program since the Vietnam era noted by the students are correct, and my own experience bears this out. The demands now placed on ROTC students are not overly burdensome, particularly in light of the benefits and changes in the program. None of my USC students then enrolled in ROTC saw any significant problems, and I seriously doubt many at Columbia would see these as well.

Finally, I think the various arguments against permitting the ROTC program at Columbia listed by the Advocates for Columbia ROTC are either wrong or simply no longer credible. I see no errors of either fact or law in the student rebuttal and concur in this discussion.

Should the Task Force desire that I provide additional comments or inputs of any type on this important matter, I am at their disposal, and can be contacted most easily by e-mail: [aw2243@columbia.edu](mailto:aw2243@columbia.edu).

Sincerely,

Abraham R. Wagner