

The History and Impact of Army ROTC at SUNY College at Brockport

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The History and Impact of ROTC at SUNY College at Brockport

The Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) was a program designed to give the Army a new source of educated leaders to become officers. Based on similar programs and ideas since the Civil War, ROTC evolved into the primary source of officers for all branches of the military. Army ROTC is located at about 270 colleges in the country. At SUNY Brockport, ROTC came in a gradual process, stemming from a cross enrollment with RIT starting in 1975.

By 1982 all dependence was broken off with RIT and Brockport became a host detachment of ROTC. During this process, there were some people against the military coming to campus due to the recent memories of the Vietnam War and the skepticism of the military. However, after important figures on campus, such as Dr. Walter Boston, lobbied for the program, it was widely accepted.

The Stylus was a primary source that showed how ROTC developed and how the campus felt during the 1980's. Many of the articles served as information for the students on campus, describing the arrival of camouflage-clad students walking around and conducting exercises in the woods. *The Stylus* also served as a way for ROTC to advertise itself, possibly interesting students enough to try it out.

Overall, the history of ROTC was very unique and the program appealed to many students. The personal commitment of many has kept ROTC working. ROTC has worked well at SUNY Brockport and the relationship remains to be strong.

In the summer of 2002, Major William Mandrick, a Brockport ROTC graduate, was in Afghanistan where he met eight other Brockport graduates who had also gone through ROTC. Unexpectedly they ran into each other in the mess hall and found out about one another through casual conversation. Is it coincidence that nine men would meet on the far side of the world, in a war torn land, and all come from the same New York State College in the small village of Brockport and not even know each other before? Perhaps, but researching the history of the Army officer-producing program at Brockport, proves that these nine men would share a tradition that has been at Brockport for over two decades.

The Army Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) has been a popular, successful, and key component of SUNY Brockport. In its short two-decade history at the college, ROTC has commissioned 265 students as Second Lieutenants in the United States Army. The history of ROTC at Brockport is unique due to its place and time. ROTC has helped to shape the campus and contribute to the evolution of the school. Students are aware of ROTC activities through the appearance of students in uniform, flag raising, training activities around campus, and from articles in *The Stylus*. The Department of Military Science has given many students the opportunity to face new challenges, learn leadership, and have no obligation to join the military. Overall, ROTC at Brockport has given itself and the school identity that causes many of its graduates to believe it truly is “the best college course you can take.”

Before the Civil War many colleges featured military training. Congressman Justin Morill of Vermont put forth a bill to Congress that military training on college

Campuses be accepted and promoted. The Morrill Act included the “land grant” college act of 1862 that required engineering, agriculture, and military training at the colleges created by the proposed Federal grants.

The Reserve Officer Training Corps was created after General Leonard Wood tested a prototype system before World War I: “The first ROTC units appeared in the autumn of 1916 at 46 schools. They registered a combined enrollment of about 40,000. These units were established too late, however, to permit them to exercise a significant impact on American involvement in World War I.”¹ The time between the Great War and World War II was a time for ROTC to grow. Over 93,000 ROTC graduates were called upon to serve in the active duty Army during this time. The true impact of the program was reported by then General of the Army George C. Marshall: “Though ROTC graduates composed 12 percent of war officers, its most important contribution was the immediate availability of its products. Just what we would have done in the first phases of our mobilization and training without these men, I do not know.”²

From this time until the Vietnam War, ROTC was popular despite some scrutiny and financial troubles. The coming of the Vietnam War was controversial for the program. Facilities and institutions that had hosted ROTC had come under attack by protestors and anti-war sentiment. Many colleges questioned their role in supporting the war and having military instruction take place on their grounds. After the war, the government decided to reorganize the program.

During the Vietnam War ROTC was facing massive drops in enrollment. ROTC enrollment plummeted by 75 percent (from 165,430 to 41,294) between school year 1967-1968 and school year 1972-1973. The Army focused on “procurement” instead of training, which

¹ “The Unofficial History of Army ROTC.” <http://www.jhu.edu/~rotc/rotc_history_1.htm> (11 November 2003).

² ROTC Course Handbook, Jan 11 1988

failed. In 1973 Army leaders put into effect a new command structure called Steadfast. The entire system of ROTC was overhauled. New training techniques, an increase in scholarships available to students, more options for specialized training to cadets, and the admission of women were all factors. Most importantly, the command structure of ROTC was changed to give the head of the program operational control over the regions assigned. The process of doing this was task-oriented. This change is significant because the head of the program would now have considerably more power than before.

It was not long after the new command structure was put into effect when the State University of New York at Brockport created a link with the military. In 1975 Army ROTC was introduced by the Rochester Institute of Technology. The two schools did a cross enrollment program, which was hosted by RIT. Brockport students who wished to take part in ROTC were provided transportation to RIT for classes and additional training. The first Brockport graduate was commissioned at RIT in 1977. In 1979 Brockport approved a four-year ROTC academic program that was still to take place at RIT. A year later the department became an official Extension Center of RIT. Later in the year, an application was filed for Brockport to offer academic credit for those in ROTC at RIT. However, “close contact and support was maintained with RIT throughout this time...by 1982 this assistance was no longer needed as Brockport was fully operational.”³

The fact that SUNY Brockport received status as a host institution was not surprising. In the decade after Vietnam, ROTC grew steadily. Over 100 extension centers and 36 host institutions were to be established by the end of 1983. Between 1978 and 1983, the number of ROTC units shot up by 40 percent (from 297 to 416). This growth was attributed to a program

³ ROTC Course Handbook, 1999

called “Expand the Base” where more colleges became institutions of ROTC in order to increase the output of officers.

An interview with Dr. Walter Boston who was Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences in the late 1970’s and early 80’s provided a key view on how ROTC came to Brockport. Dr. Boston lobbied for the program and described the situation with RIT and the cross-enrollment program. The two key figures from RIT who were essential in starting talks with Dr. Boston were Major Robert Sweeny and Captain McAllister. The trio agreed to see what could be done to have Brockport become a host detachment. Dr. Boston then asked who was in charge of such an operation. Major General Sullivan was in charge of ROTC in the region and after getting his contact number Dr. Boston decided to give him a call. Dr. Boston said it was quite ironic because when he called Maj. Gen. Sullivan, his secretary and assistant were not in, so he answered the phone. Otherwise it would have been quite difficult to get in touch with the general. On the phone Dr. Boston invited him to Brockport to attend a military dining in and to discuss the possibility of bringing ROTC to the SUNY College. Dr. Boston called his lobbying to Maj. Gen. Sullivan a “wine and dine” process where he was invited to play handball and visit the campus. Afterwards, when asked about bringing the Army to Brockport, Major General Sullivan had no reason to say no, thus, setting forth the first steps in the proposal to the Army and to the Faculty Senate.

With the Vietnam War in the recent past, it was difficult to understand why a school would bring the military to its campus. This was a problem and people did oppose it according to Dr. John Killigrew who was on the Faculty Senate at the time. Dr. Boston also said that there was some reluctance about this idea. However, Dr. Boston was known for his views and had contacts with Quaker groups and other pacifist groups. Nonetheless, he felt that “his personal

beliefs should not interfere with others' interests." Dr. Boston was not only a lobbyist to Maj. Gen. Sullivan but also other faculty members. According to him, he helped to convince others to accept this. He also felt that if a Brockport graduate was to serve in the military, it was best to do so as an officer. The growing student interest could not be ignored.

The proposal to the Faculty Senate states that Lieutenant Colonel Keefe and Dr. Brown, the President of the College, had discussed ROTC in the fall of 1978. A proposal to the Faculty Senate was discussed to survey the idea of requesting academic credit for military science classes, which would expand the program. Dr. Brown had a personal commitment to this. It gave three reasons to consider the option of ROTC. First, student interest was rising on campus. Secondly, faculty members at least somewhat accepted its desirability. Thirdly, the ROTC program would be established under the sponsorship of the State University of New York at Brockport. These three ideas were presented in the proposal as support for the two fundamental proposals put to the Faculty Senate: to grant credit for ROTC classes and establish Military Science as an academic minor. The rest of the proposal described Army ROTC, the Military Science minor, and the overall program's purpose.

In the proposal ROTC is defined as "an on-campus academic course of instruction which has been in existence since 1916."⁴ The purpose of ROTC is to "provide trained, educated officers to reserve components of the United States Army."⁵ As proof of the quality of the education it stated that "ROTC instructors are active duty commissioned officers that have completed, at a minimum, advanced level military schooling, and possess considerable command and staff experience."⁶

⁴ Proposal to Faculty Senate, 1979

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

The course itself is split up into two levels. The freshman and sophomore courses consist of one credit hour of leadership laboratory. This level also includes four core liberal arts courses to be selected from a proposed list. The junior and senior courses are non-core liberal arts courses taught by Army instructors and three credit hours of academic credit per semester. This structure is important because Brockport is a liberal arts college that would benefit from more students coming to take such classes. The mission of Brockport as a liberal arts college is for the students to be successful in the future and use their education as a means of doing well in the global environment.

The admission process to ROTC is by permission of the ROTC department and standard requirements are equal to those of the regular Army. "Health, academic ability, moral fiber, and age must be met. However, the program would be open to all on complete equal opportunity basis."⁷ Also, students who do not enter the program in their freshman and sophomore years are able to attend a summer camp that takes them to them to the upper level. However, a student who only misses the first year can take the missed courses on a tutorial basis for academic credit.

Not mentioned in the proposal, however, was the ability for students to earn scholarships. Students can win these if they meet requirements by the Army, and if the ROTC detachment has any available to give. Congress decides how many scholarships will be given out to ROTC detachments. Tuition is included in the scholarship. Not all scholarships contained money for room allowances. Also given to the student was a book allowance every semester as well as a monthly stipend. The stipend increased every year for the student. The amount of money allotted to scholarship students for the monthly stipend increased every school year for the cadet. For

⁷ Ibid.

example, in 1971 a student would receive a \$100 monthly allowance and as a sophomore they would receive \$125.

Charles Jenkins, President of the Faculty Senate, presented the formal resolution by the Faculty Senate on April 23, 1979. The resolution passed and became effective on May 24, 1979. This gave academic credit to those who enrolled in the program. In 1981 Brockport submitted the application to the Department of the Army for ROTC host status. In 1982 RIT broke ties and gave Brockport full independence. In the next few years ROTC grew at the SUNY College and the campus became more aware of the new department and program. Today, Brockport is the only SUNY College that hosts Army ROTC. Ten detachments in New York are available with cross-enrollment programs available to students in nearly one hundred other schools, including SUNY and private colleges.

The first information published on campus about ROTC at Brockport was in April 1983 in a two part series of the school newspaper *The Stylus*. Major Robert Sweeny, who was a key member in bringing the program to Brockport, became the head Professor of Military Science. Most importantly, it explains scholarships and that many students do take advantage of the opportunity. Seventy students were enrolled in ROTC at the time, its first full year of operation. Fifteen were female, which was higher than the national average and was parallel to the national increase in attraction to the Army by females. Major Sweeny comments on the program: "I do not push my cadets. It's their decision (whether or not to continue ROTC). Many like it because there is an adventure aspect. It's a chance to do something different."⁸ ROTC was originally located in one room in Holmes Hall. That year it moved into six carpeted rooms in Morgan III.

In another article in April of 1983 numbers are given about ROTC campuses nation wide. Written by the College Press Service, it states that the number of ROTC schools "has grown

⁸ Mann, Phillip. "The ROTC experience at SUNY Brockport." *The Stylus*. 13 April 1983, 17.

from 275 in 1979-80 to 303 in 1981-82 and 315 this year...total enrollment this year is 73,819...up from 41,000 in 1972.”⁹ This not only shows that ROTC came to Brockport due to personal interests but that it was also part of the national movement for ROTC. This is significant because Brockport’s enrollment numbers have decreased at the same time as ROTC enrollment has grown. So it is possible that ROTC was accepted and promoted as part of the solution to the decreased number of students coming to Brockport.

The ROTC program brought new activities to the campus, which gave recognition and promoted the new department. One of the first activities that was noticed by the campus was the daily flag raising ceremony as well as the retreat of the flag at the end of the day. The flags raised by senior ROTC cadets were the US flag, United Nations flag, and the New York State flag. More articles were published in *The Stylus* describing the program and advertising ROTC’s benefits of the program with quotes of the students making it appear that it is the “way to go”. However, in an article in April of 1984 a cadet says, “there are ‘not enough people in the program.’ Captain Markley said ROTC is planning on expanding the program at Brockport and he would ‘like to have 40-50 scholarship students.’”¹⁰

Even though this statement says there is a shortage of cadets, the program was growing. For several years students went to RIT and were invisible on campus. When Brockport students started walking around campus in uniform, reading articles in *The Stylus*, the new program may have appealed to students already at the college. Also, as the leadership qualities become more important in the civilian world to get a job, military training gave the opportunity for students to gain these skills in a more unique way. As John Sinisko says in an October 1985 article, when

⁹ Mann, Phillip. “ROTC students at Brockport: rewards are worth the sweat,” *The Stylus*, 20 April 83, 15.

¹⁰ Bigson, Karla. “Brockport Students involved in ROTC” *The Stylus*, 18 April 1984, 2A.

there were over eighty students involved, “there’s a lot of hands-on practical experience and I’m learning leadership skills.”¹¹

The Military Science Department did undergo some scrutiny in the fall of 1986. An article by the Associate News that was reprinted in *The Stylus* is about the Social Work Department opposing the presence of ROTC and New York State Troopers on campus. The Department submitted a resolution to the Faculty Senate but was voted down. Chair of the department Kenneth Herrmann Jr. says “ ‘we don’t want to train people to be killers, especially under the guise of learning a trade or establishing a career, earning money to go to college, and defending democracy.’ ”¹² He opposed the setting of such training because the school accommodates housing for the troopers and cadets and allows training on campus. The program should be placed off campus he said. The proposal did not pass.

This appeared to have no effect on the program as cadets continued to do very well at the National Advanced Leadership Camp, which cadets must attend and pass between their junior and senior years. Enrollment numbers continued to rise as well. The Vietnam War was also mentioned in an article in 1987 when Major John Consedine says “ ‘there seems to be an overall acceptance of ROTC on campuses nationwide since the turbulent says of Vietnam.’ ”¹³ The same article stated that the number of cadets rose from 88 the year before to 135 in the fall of ’87.

The other major controversy was in 1991 when school President John E. Van de Wetering was questioned in a formal President’s Forum about his view on gays in the military and therefore in ROTC. At the time there was a national movement against the military’s policy and he was a part of this: “Van de Wetering has been actively involved in the issue as a board

¹¹ Hull, David. “Leadership training for ROTC students a valuable experience,” *The Stylus* 9 Oct. 1985, 9.

¹² NiNardo, Doreen. “Department opposes troopers and ROTC on college campus,” *The Stylus*, 10 Dec. 1986, 1-2.

¹³ Wesley, Amie. “Interest in ROTC climbs, so does competition,” *The Stylus* 21 Oct. 1987, 2.

member of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. AASCU drafted a letter to the Secretary of Defense protesting the military's policy of discrimination and asked for change in the policy."¹⁴ However, he was reluctant to make a stand against ROTC on the Brockport campus: " 'I'm hesitant to make a move, nor am I entirely confident with the legal aspects of the whole thing to expel them from the campus...we need to do everything we can do to work it out so they will abandon their discriminatory policy.'"¹⁵

This is a significant issue because the prohibition of gays in the military continues to be an issue and ROTC has not made any changes. However, gays could take part in some of the ROTC programs because it is open to all students. Only when contracted to graduate to get a commission and join the military are they prohibited. The campus was aware of this issue and Van de Wetering was trying to take care of the problem.

Another issue in 1991 was that women were being noticed more frequently on campus in the ROTC uniform. According to *The Stylus* twenty women were in the program in '91. Gender makes no difference in ROTC, and standards are held to the same level for women as men. To this point there have been no women instructors in ROTC but that is not under the control of Brockport ROTC. Women taking part in ROTC reflected becoming more common in the military at the time. It was a way for women to make good career starts with equal opportunities.

Several Military Science Department annual reports were found to have very useful information. For the academic year 1989-1990 the program experienced its first decline in enrollment, closing with 87 students in the program, down 33 the academic year before. However, the chairman of the department, LTC Dane Woytek, said that "the quality of the students now enrolled has increased markedly...of the 23 majors in which our cadets enrolled,

¹⁴ Morgan, Adrienne. "President condemns Nubian speaker," *The Stylus* 30 Oct 1991, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

we found that our cadets GPA's exceed the university average in 14 majors."¹⁶ The most important figure on the progress of the program is that "we have moved from being rated in the bottom 10 of 110 schools in our Region to being rated in the top three of the schools in our Region."¹⁷ The reason for this is not given but inferring from at other articles the staff in the department appears to have been outstanding. Also, the cadets were motivated and worked hard to do well.

These figures show the rapid success of ROTC that has only been in existence for seven years. Enrollment figures increased continuously from the beginning and not until 1989 the figure was down. This can be due to students seeing more of ROTC on campus and therefore becoming aware of it. For example, helicopters arriving on campus for training exercises several times in its history were visual campus-wide events. However, recruiting officers in the Department played a large role in bringing these students to Brockport. It would appear harder for recruiters to bring students to a state college because if tuition and expenses can be paid for, many would possibly go to a private school. In several articles of *The Stylus* ROTC cadets said that people wonder what ROTC is and seem more curious than anything.

Into the 1990's coverage of ROTC was limited in *The Stylus*. Several articles similar to those of the '80s described what ROTC is and how it works. There was a major community service project in the fall of 1995 when cadets worked to restore parts of the Soldiers Memorial Tower outside of Brockport that was built in honor of the 104th New York Infantry Regiment of the Civil War in which many Brockport residents took part. Donations from the public have been made to the cadet fund, and ROTC continues to be noticed in the community of Brockport.

¹⁶ Dept annual report 1989-1990

¹⁷ Ibid.

In conclusion, the history of the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps was unique and the evolution of the program made a direct impact on the campus. The arrival of ROTC onto the Brockport campus occurred at a controversial time with recent memories of the Vietnam War. However, the college's enrollment was declining and it was looking for a way to raise enrollment and ROTC appeared to be a way to remedy the problem somewhat. Personal commitment was also a factor in bringing the Army to campus with the help of school President Dr. Brown and the lobbying of Dr. Boston. ROTC has become a success at Brockport and there is no regret from those involved in bringing the program to SUNY Brockport. The campus has benefited from it as well, and has accepted ROTC as another department of the school. *The Stylus* has been a key part in showing the campus community what ROTC is and how the students are doing in it. However, ROTC does have a unique invisibility on campus. People know who is involved and where it is on campus, but what it is remains a mystery to many.

No doubt someday, somewhere else in world where there is conflict, Brockport ROTC graduates will come together to serve their country. As long as there is ROTC at Brockport, there will be a group of soldiers leaving the college to do their duty and not only making their country proud, but also the college and village of Brockport.

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Bibliographic Essay

Writing an essay about the history and impact of ROTC on the SUNY Brockport campus has been a compelling and very interesting process. I went back and forth with several sources, sometimes finding more information, while other times not. Some attempts to gain more information failed while others proved to be a gold mine of information.

My first step was to find out how many places would have information relevant to my topic. I was not confident at first about getting what I was looking for. First I went to the ROTC office, and searched through the filing cabinets. I was disappointed with what I found because there was limited paperwork from the time and irrelevant paperwork. Some useful information was the official application to the Army for establishing a new ROTC detachment. I then went to the Faculty Senate office where there was record of decisions made by the Senate and paperwork submitted. I did find the proposal for participants in ROTC who were still going to RIT, but attended Brockport for academic credit.

At first glance the College Archives did not have anything useful. After visiting the cabinets again, I found documentation on Brockport becoming a host detachment of ROTC in course handbooks. The most precious material were two years of annual reports by the Department of Military Science which gave enrollment numbers and percentages of how students were doing on the Army Physical Fitness Test as well as GPA averages. I then searched for other department annual reports but was unsuccessful.

I first talked to Dr. John Killigrew about what he remembered from that time period when ROTC was established. He was on the Faculty Senate at the time. Dr. Killigrew testified that there was some Animosity in the Senate when discussing the Army on campus. However, it was passed that students enrolled should receive academic credit. He did not remember too much

from that time he said, but gave me the phone numbers for Dr. William Andrews and Dr. Walter Boston. Dr. Killigrew told me that it would be interesting to hear who takes the most credit for ROTC being a success. After many failed attempts in reaching Dr. Andrews I did speak with Dr. Boston. Dr. Boston was very useful in telling me how ROTC came to Brockport. According to him, he was the lobbyist and the main player in this process. The interview with him was very rewarding to my research.

Major William Mandrick, a Professor of Military Science at Brockport, was also a student and cadet at Brockport. Some small conversations with him did reveal the accepted atmosphere around campus of the program. However, when trying to have a formal interview, times were conflicting and then he had to leave early for a deployment for his National Guard unit. Taking part in recruiting with him, as well as seeing slideshows of his time in Afghanistan where he ran into eight Brockport graduates of ROTC, were helpful in my analysis.

The most worthwhile piece of research was the many articles in The Stylus, especially in the 1980's. These articles showed not only that ROTC was being publicized, but also the activities that the program was up to. Problems the program encountered was very useful.

For others who want to further my research, there may be other places to look for information. I was surprised that I did not find more formal documents, such as annual reports. Thus, a greater effort could be placed on locating them. I felt I exhausted much of the information. However, if someone wanted to go on with this, a study could be done on how Brockport ROTC has done at a national standpoint. Also, contacting alumni would be useful. I received contact addresses too late in my research. Looking into local newspapers, outside of The Stylus, may provide some information.

This project helped me to understand ROTC and enhanced my knowledge of the history. Being enrolled in ROTC helped me because I enjoyed the topic, and was interested in the history. Lessons were learned about how research could be conducted better as well as writing styles. Overall, this was most rewarding and personal.