

ROTC policy on gays debated

The Army's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy affects University ROTC cadets

By Erin Snelgrove
Oregon Daily Emerald

People often pretend to be something they are not. They will make up credentials on their resumes, cheat on exams and even lie about their sexual exploits, if by doing so they will benefit in some way. But what if, in order to receive the benefit, they had to deny their identity?

At the University, the Army ROTC often forces homosexuals to think about these questions. To be given leadership training, experience in the armed forces and monetary benefits, gay and lesbian cadets cannot reveal their sexual orientation. To divulge the truth about themselves would break the Department of Defense Homosexual Conduct Policy and would mean expulsion from the program.

According to a memorandum issued July 19, 1993, by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, the military recognizes the contribution gays and lesbians have made to the armed forces, but at the same time homosexual tendencies are counterproductive to the performance of military personnel. Therefore, the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy was adapted.

"The Department of Defense has long held that, as a general rule, homosexuality is incompatible with military service because it interferes with the factors critical to combat effectiveness, including unit morale, unit cohesion and individuals' privacy," Aspin said in the memorandum. "Homosexual orientation is not a bar to service entry or continued service unless manifested by homosexual conduct."

Debate ensues

Heath Hutto, a member of the University Standing Committee on Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns, is against the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. He realizes the doctrine was created by the government and not the ROTC; however, he said the mandate is still judgmental and should not be condoned at this campus.

"The goal of the University is not to teach people how to hide things, to pretend to be something that they aren't," Hutto said. "But the policy that says you can be gay as long as you don't tell anyone does this."

According to the Cadet Enrollment Record, a contract signed by enrolled ROTC students, people who admit to their homosexuality are not permitted into the

program. The military science upper-division courses required for the program are therefore prohibited to openly gay and lesbian individuals because the form must be signed before people can enroll in upper-division ROTC classes.

The ROTC will not ask about a person's sexual orientation, but at the same time, people who break the rule by "engaging in or attempting to engage in homosexual acts" will be expelled, according to the Cadet Enrollment Record. If homosexual individuals receive financial assistance from the ROTC, they could be forced to repay the money.

"If homosexual students received an ROTC scholarship and then decided they couldn't handle pretending to be straight anymore, they couldn't just 'come out,'" Hutto said. "By telling the truth, they would have to repay an inordinate sum."

Capt. Richard Lewis, a courtesy assistant military science professor at the University, said the decision to make students repay ROTC scholarships is made on a case-by-case basis. To the best of his memory, he said he does not remember a cadet ever having to pay back a scholarship while he or she has been in Eugene.

Law or excuse?

Lewis said he does not necessarily agree with the homosexual conduct code, but he must abide by it.

"What people have to understand is that this isn't an ROTC policy, it's the law," Lewis said. "If anything were to change, it would have to come from Congress."

Laying responsibility on the government for discriminating against homosexuals is not an acceptable excuse for many people. By following this law, the military, as a whole, is allowing prejudices to continue, said Stephanie Carnahan, director of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender educational and support service of Student Life. Carnahan said she believes that not every individual associated with the military is homophobic, but the institution as a whole supports homophobia with this rule.

"The ROTC gives the response that it is only following the rules, but any institution that enforces or believes in a homophobic policy is homophobic," Carnahan said.

ROTC students agree that the policy should not be a personal reflection on them.

"If people knew us as individuals, they would know that we aren't homophobic or discriminatory," said Molly Bryan, a ju-

nior cadet in the ROTC. "This policy does not represent who we are or what we believe."

Bryan remembers feeling somewhat surprised when she first heard about the homosexual conduct rule, but she did not hold the ROTC responsible for it.

"When I read the conduct policy, I remember thinking how strange it was," Bryan said. "It was so detailed and explicit about what a person could and couldn't do. But the ROTC didn't make the policy, the government did. Unless the government chooses to change it, there is nothing the ROTC can do."

Change is needed

Hutto refuses to believe that nothing can be done. Although the ROTC may be forced to abide by the policy, he said he sees no reason why advanced military science courses are closed to openly gay and lesbian individuals.

"I'd like an alternative to be looked into where all military science courses would be open to everyone," Hutto said. "If that didn't happen, I'd like for the University to discontinue letting the ROTC use its facilities."

Carnahan said the University recognizes the discrimination the ROTC places on openly gay and lesbian students. However, the administration cannot help to improve the situation.

"The policy is definitely discriminatory," Carnahan said. "We know this but we can't do anything about it. If we did, we'd lose thousands and thousands of dollars in federal funding."

According to the ROTC Access to Campuses Act, which was made effective March 29, 1997, any institution of higher education that has an "anti-ROTC policy" will no longer receive funding from the government.

Hutto is also familiar with the ROTC Access to Campuses Act. He said the mandate is ambiguous and rarely enforced.

"Short of prohibiting students from joining the ROTC, I don't think schools will be in trouble for violating the act," Hutto said. "You'd have to go pretty far to meet the anti-ROTC policy."

Carnahan sympathizes with the concerns of gay and lesbian students, but she maintains that the fight to change the military's homosexual mandate must be taken up in a larger forum. To be effective, people should make an effort to contact their local legislatures to issue a complaint.

"With adequate public pressure, I think the military will do the right thing and lift the ban," Carnahan said. "But, like all things, this will take some time."

Measure reschedules elections

The move responds to a changed OUS deadline for incidental fees

By Sarah Skidmore
Oregon Daily Emerald

Editor's Note: Students will be voting on six measures during the spring elections on April 21 and 22. Each day the Emerald will feature a profile of each measure.

The fourth of six measures to appear on the spring ballot will, if approved, alter the ASUO Constitution to move back the mandatory dates of the spring election. The measure was referred to the ballot by the ASUO Executive.

The measure proposes to alter Rule 12.1 of the ASUO Constitution, which provides for a window to hold the elections between April 1 and May 1. If the measure passes, the elections must be held between February 15 and April 1.

ASUO President Geneva Wortman said the measure was submitted because the Oregon University System changed the deadline for submission of University incidental fees. The OUS deadline is now April 1.

"This will allow us to get more funding issues done," Wortman said.

Today's events

Friday, April 16

The Museum of Art will be hosting a lecture by Masami Teraoko from 5 to 7 p.m. in 138 Gilbert.

The Oregon Ballroom Dance Club is hosting a ballroom dance from 7:30 to 11:30 p.m. in 220 Gerlinger.

The Coalition to Boycott Gardener/FLAV-R-PAC is hosting a benefit show to support Oregon Farmworkers. The party starts at 9 p.m. on Saturday at the Lorax at 1648 Alder St. There is a sliding-scale \$3-7 donation.

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