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STANFORD

M A G A Z I N E

Corps Curriculum

More than three decades after it left campus, ROTC continues to attract Stanford students. Some of them wonder if they're getting the credit they deserve.

by Joshua Davis

Photography by Glenn Matsumura



ON A SUNDAY MORNING in October, while many Stanford students sleep off the excesses of Saturday night, Andrew Obara stands at attention near a garbage dumpster in a narrow, puddled service road behind the French House, practicing salutes. The only sounds are the rustle of his crisp blue Navy uniform and the occasional clacking of his black shoes on the pavement, echoing off the nearby buildings. With him are two other Stanford freshmen, Chris Pratt and Silvia Cruz, of the Navy's Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Obara and his mates aren't hiding, exactly, but the fact that they have chosen this out-of-the-way place to practice seems somehow appropriate. Eighty-five years after it was established at Stanford, and more than 30 years after it left campus during a spasm of antiwar fervor, ROTC survives at the margins, kept alive by a handful of determined students. This year, 29 Stanford students are enrolled in ROTC, representing three branches of the Armed Services.

In many ways, they are like any other students. They wear sandals and shorts, and in class or at the dining hall, they'd be nearly impossible to pick out of a crowd. But for several hours each week, Stanford's ROTC students

study a parallel curriculum, with subjects like naval systems and military leadership, and perform training exercises in full military dress. None of which is done at Stanford.

To fulfill their ROTC obligation, these students drive to UC-Berkeley, San Jose State or Santa Clara University to participate in the Navy, Air Force or Army programs, respectively. On a recent Wednesday at Santa Clara, six students from the Farm joined 40 other fatigued-clad trainees at Moffett Field. Bayonets unsheathed, they wielded M-16 rifles during a series of weapons drills under the watchful eye of an Army sergeant. Simulating a search for a concealed enemy, they stabbed a pile of hay. Later, standing near a stack of tires, they carefully lifted one tire off the one below, using their bayonets as levers. Their movements were crisp and deliberate, their bearing professional. Were it not for the traffic on the nearby road, one could imagine them crouched on a battlefield, weapons at the ready. They looked and acted like soldiers.

Back on campus, they seek each other out for support and encouragement. ROTC students say they are virtually invisible at Stanford. "A lot of people didn't even know I was part of the military," recalls Lt. Lore Aguayo, '93. "I didn't have to wear my uniform on campus, and our activities took place in Berkeley, so there was no way for people to make the connection."



WAR GAMES: Freshman Grant Lee commutes to Santa Clara for his ROTC training.

This dual existence doesn't leave much time for regular college stuff, says Obara. "I have my normal schoolwork, ROTC homework and marching practice, not to mention the time it takes to commute to Berkeley every week. I can't participate in other extracurricular activities, which is definitely frustrating."

And ask an officer trainee what he or she thinks of the University's policy regarding ROTC, and you probably will get the same irritated response: Stanford is out of step.

They chafe at the fact that their counterparts at other universities earn academic credit for their ROTC classroom work, while Stanford does not recognize courses in military sciences. The reason traces to a 1969 vote by the Faculty Senate that stripped military instructors of their status as faculty, denied students credit for ROTC courses and prompted the military to move the program off campus. The measure came amid a virulent and sometimes violent antimilitary movement by student activists, and in spite of a student referendum vote favoring ROTC. The Senate declared that its decision was based on academic unsuitability, not antiwar sentiment.

"Basically the curriculum was awful," says Barton Bernstein, a Stanford

history professor who helped lead the 1969 movement against ROTC. "It was on the level of mediocre coursework in high school. The readings were sophomoric. The ROTC faculty were not PhDs. I think it was the case that some [opponents to ROTC] had deeper political purposes, but everybody could agree that it was an intellectual embarrassment."

That decision still determines University policy, although it was revisited a few years ago when every academic department examined ROTC courses to see whether they met Stanford's requirements. In nearly every case, the answer was no.

Some ROTC students see this as a double standard. "I don't see why I can get credit for posture and hip-hop [one-unit courses in athletics] but not military navigation," says Gary Hernandez, a Stanford senior and the executive officer of his Army ROTC battalion.

According to University registrar Roger Printup, Stanford's cross-enrollment agreements with schools that offer ROTC programs allow students to petition for transfer credit. Each course must pass muster for rigor and applicability in an established degree program. "We evaluate them just as we would any other transcript from another school," he says.

The ROTC curriculum is still found in the *Stanford Bulletin*. Some examples from the course catalog: Foundations of the United States Air Force; Troop Leading Procedures/U.S. Army; Sea Power and Maritime Affairs. "Most of those courses, in our view, are not applicable to be used toward a Stanford degree," says Printup.

There is another impediment to earning academic credit. Because the courses reside at other schools, students would have to pay those schools to have the credits transferred. "ROTC students from Stanford would have to pay thousands of dollars for credits they had earned at Santa Clara," says Printup. "Honestly, I don't know why they would do it."

During World War II, an estimated 50 percent of undergraduate men at Stanford participated in ROTC. The postwar pinnacle was in 1956, when 1,100 students were officer trainees. The ranks gradually began to thin, and by the time the Senate acted 13 years later, ROTC numbers had shrunk to a few dozen.

"In 1968 and '69, there was a complete metamorphosis in the way ROTC was viewed," says Barry Hennings, '70, MBA '72, an ROTC graduate who participated in the program from 1966 to 1970. "In 1966, the Armed Services were given time during orientation to pitch the merits of ROTC. Two years later, antiwar protesters burned down the Navy ROTC building, and we were being physically attacked on campus."



ON BOARD: Freshman Alex Pagon is one of 24 Stanford students in ROTC.

Although under duress at other area schools as well, ROTC lived on at taxpayer-supported universities, such as UC-Berkeley and San Jose State, which were legally bound to house the program.

Despite their low profile, lack of campus support and inconvenient weekly commute, a few Stanford men and women have been enrolled in ROTC every year since the program left the Farm. Today's trainees profess the same motivation that drew earlier generations to the program—a sense of duty, patriotism, and a tuition-free college education.

Midshipman Steve Young recalls the day he received a letter and a facsimile check from the Navy when he was a high school senior. "The letter said, 'Stanford costs a hundred thousand dollars; ROTC will pay for it,'" says Young, '03. In return, Young agreed to an eight-year military commitment, including four years immediately following graduation.

All the Stanford ROTC students interviewed for this story acknowledged that the money was an important incentive, but said they would not have chosen ROTC if they hadn't felt drawn to military service.

"I believe in honor and duty," says junior Melissa Corley, an Air Force cadet. "And I feel that being involved in something big will give me a much broader opportunity to make a difference."

To Gary Hernandez, the military is a unique opportunity. He says that when he receives his officer's commission upon graduation, he is likely to be put in charge of 40 enlisted men and millions of dollars' worth of military equipment. "There is nowhere else in our society where you can get that much responsibility at 22," he says.

"Stanford ROTC students aren't the types who want to live in the mud and kill people," adds Hernandez. "We want to be the people making plans, building stuff and using our brains to make the world safer."

Among Stanford's peer schools, Princeton and MIT still have accredited ROTC programs on campus. At Harvard, which eliminated its onsite ROTC program in 1969, a group of alumni and donors has petitioned the university to reinstate it.

There is no such effort under way at Stanford. If there were, it would face significant opposition from several quarters. "ROTC represents a group of pseudo-faculty preparing students for war and training them to kill, and that

is fundamentally unacceptable at a university," says Bernstein.

"I understand that there are times when society wants militaristic approaches to problems, but I don't think it's the place of first-rate universities to feed those desires," says Cecilia Ridgeway, a professor of sociology and a Faculty Senate member. "Universities are about solving problems through discussion, not military approaches."

Some supporters of gay rights say allowing ROTC back on campus would violate the University's own antidiscrimination rules. "The events of September 11 do not change the fundamental fact that Stanford's nondiscrimination policy directly contradicts the military's 'don't ask, don't tell' policy," says C. Dixon Osburn, '87, executive director of Servicemembers Legal Defense, an advocacy group for gays in the military.



For its part, the military believes that Stanford has an obligation to reconsider. "I think Stanford has a responsibility not only to support the career choices of its students, but also to [support] society at large," says Col. Gus Anderson, department chair of the Army ROTC program. "When you look at the national budget, the largest item is the military. If we don't use that money intelligently and have really smart people managing it, we could screw things up pretty badly."

ROTC students echo Anderson's sentiments, but not all of their arguments are philosophical. "In a lot of ways, it's fun," says Hernandez of his service. "So what if I miss a frat party because of the Army: I'm out shooting an M-16. You don't get to do that every day."

Joshua Davis, '96, is a writer and filmmaker in San Francisco.
