

Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University Statement of the Student Senate Executive Committee

We, the Executive Committee of the Student Senate of Union Theological Seminary, strongly oppose ROTC's return to Columbia University. We believe ROTC's war-making and policy against homosexuals are violations of the sacredness of human life. While the current debate in Columbia's Senate has focused almost exclusively on ROTC's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, the rationale provided below pays particular attention to the violence of militarism.

As a recruiting arm of the U.S. Army, ROTC participates in predatory recruitment practices that offer financial incentives to the poor and people of color to participate in military activities for which few U.S. Americans, including our policymakers, are personally willing to sacrifice their lives or take the lives of others. We reject such solutions to systemic injustices and support more equitable and life giving programs to address the severe economic and educational disparities in our country.

As members of the Morningside Heights community, we do not wish to have further military presence in our neighborhood than already exists through Columbia's numerous departmental contracts with defense and intelligence agencies; furthermore, we urge Columbia to sever its ties with such agencies until drastic democratic reforms are made to US foreign and domestic policy.

The military's discriminatory policies against gays and lesbians are not only deeply damaging to gays and lesbians serving in the military, but further instill homophobic views in heterosexual soldiers. Given that these soldiers are necessarily trained to be violent and are put in high-pressure situations in which moral judgment is often compromised, we consider this institutionalized homophobia a safety issue for gay and lesbian civilians in the US and in countries where there is US military presence.

We also note that the US military's treatment of rampant and much more harmful "deviant" sexual behavior within its ranks, including rape, is treated lightly, if at all.

We invoke the spirit of justice and peace that led to Columbia's banning of ROTC during the Vietnam War. We question why ROTC should be allowed to return to the campus during a similarly unpopular war.

The Solomon Amendment that economically punishes universities who will not accept ROTC onto their campuses exposes an attempt by the US government to further entrench its vision of a militarized country. We call on Columbia University not to surrender to such coercive pressure but to use the substantial intellectual resources at its disposal to dispute and reject the amendment.

Some of us are pacifists and others of us simply reject the US military in its current manifestation. We urge Columbia to reject ROTC at least until the military has made major reforms in the areas of human rights training, counseling, health and support services for soldiers and veterans, and in its treatment of women and homosexuals. Statistics for domestic abuse, suicide, homicide, and other violent behavior in active-duty soldiers and veterans are unacceptably high.

Our rejection of ROTC and the US Army does not imply a rejection of the inherent worth and goodwill of the enlisted men and women themselves. It is largely because of our concern for their physical and psychological well-being that we call on Columbia to withhold its support for ROTC until guarantees are made that Army recruits will be better supported within the military institution, and until US foreign and domestic policies better reflect the enormous potential for just, visionary, and democratic policies that remain untapped in our society.

Signed on this 14th day of April, 2005,

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