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Psychology Professor Calls Attention to ROTC Discrimination

Albert Lott

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UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

TO: Robert Carothers
President

Barbara Luebke, Chairperson
Faculty Senate

FROM: Albert Lott
Professor

DATE: February 28, 1994

SUBJECT: Abolition of the ROTC Program at URI

I should like to inquire about the status of action on Faculty Senate Bill #90-91--25, "The Abolition Of The ROTC Program If The Department Of Defense Does Not Change Its Policy With Regard To Sexual Orientation By May 1994," that was approved by the Board of Governors for Higher Education on December 3, 1993.

The bill lists a series of steps to be taken by the University if the Department of Defense does not change its policy by May 1994. The first two action steps are scheduled for implementation by May 1994 and specify:

1. That admissions to the ROTC Program be stopped effective fall 1995 if there is no change in the Department of Defense policy by May 1994. Prospective students will be notified in the 1994-1995 UNDERGRADUATE BULLETIN.

2. That the President notify the Department of Defense in May 1994 that no new students will be admitted into the ROTC Program as of the fall 1995.

I assume that those responsible for revising the Undergraduate Bulletin will make the indicated changes and that President Carothers will notify the Department of Defense about the termination of student admissions into our ROTC Program as of fall 1995.

I know, of course, that President Clinton has modified the ban on gays in the military and that this might introduce some ambiguity into URI's approach to implementing the Senate's and Board's policy. However, I firmly believe that the Clinton plan falls far short of the intent of the Senate legislation and does
not reflect the tenor of the extensive debate on the Senate floor. In fact, President Clinton's new policy changes little and may make life in the armed services significantly more precarious for lesbians and gay men, including our ROTC graduates who serve in the military. Let me briefly list some objections to the new Clinton policy that I believe demonstrate that the Clinton plan has failed to forthrightly lift the ban and therefore meets neither the letter nor spirit of the Faculty Senate bill.

Although gay applicants for military service (including ROTC) will not be directly asked to reveal their sexual orientation, once they are in the service their personal lives become corrosively closeted and fraught with danger. They must remain silent about their sexual orientation. If gay or lesbian service members inadvertently reveal their sexual orientation to their commanding officer, they are required to appear before an administrative discharge board to be evaluated for retention or discharge. They must agree to be celibate, or lie about the fact that they are or may become sexually active. If applicants for military service reveal they are lesbian or gay, they will not be accepted unless they convince the recruiting official that they do not and will not engage in sexual behavior. In sum, the Clinton plan is a jumble of halfhearted deceptive rules for human conduct that foolishly try to micromanage complex human behavior.

This confusing state of affairs, together with the fact that the new policy violates free speech provisions of the First Amendment (to talk about our sexual orientation, gay or straight), should embolden us to stick with URI's original plan to phase-out ROTC.

There is one additional issue that is particularly germane to university students enrolling in ROTC. Suppose students enroll in ROTC before they are sure of their sexual orientation and they discover later on that they are homosexual. To whom do they turn? What happens to their military career if they tell the head of our ROTC program? According to a senior Clinton administration official at a White House briefing, such a student would enter a "serious danger zone." In other words, the Clinton plan appears to define the statement "I am gay" as homosexual conduct and sufficient grounds to initiate disenrollment proceedings. Hardly a procedure to be proud of in an institution that values diversity and abhors discrimination.

I believe we should stand firm in our determination to phase-out ROTC from the University until such time as all artificial, demeaning restrictions on the full and open participation of gay and lesbian individuals are removed. Once that has happened we can welcome back a democratic ROTC program that will accept participants on their merit and not rule them out on the basis of some arbitrary prejudicial standard.