

University of Rhode Island

DigitalCommons@URI

ROTC Discrimination

Gender and Sexuality Center

1994

GLBA ROTC Discrimination Appeal

Gary Burkholder

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/rotc-discrimination>

Recommended Citation

Burkholder, Gary, "GLBA ROTC Discrimination Appeal" (1994). *ROTC Discrimination*. Paper 7.
<https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/rotc-discrimination/7>

This Memorandum is brought to you for free and open access by the Gender and Sexuality Center at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in ROTC Discrimination by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.

University of Rhode Island
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Association

From: Gary Burkholder, Co-president,
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Association

To: Barbara Luebke, Chairperson
Faculty Senate

Date: March 4, 1994

Subj: ROTC PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1. It has come to the attention of the GLBA membership that the issue of abolition of ROTC on this campus has not been resolved. Our group strongly recommends that ROTC program be stopped, effective Fall 1995 (as per the original senate resolution) for the following reasons.

a. Change in policy. It is our feeling that the new rules issued by the Pentagon December 22, 1993 do not represent a change from existing policy. Although applicants are not asked about sexual orientation, and the mere admission of homosexual feelings will not be the grounds for dismissal, the military will continue to prosecute and separate members for homosexual acts. People who are gay or lesbian commit homosexual acts, and the military policy will clearly discriminate against people who commit those acts.

b. Coming to terms with one's own sexual identity is a difficult process for most homosexual men and women. Some are aware of their "gayness" very early, some much later in life. The policy appears to treat sexual orientation as a decision that is made once in life during adolescence. A recruit or officer candidate may not realize until later in their service careers that he or she is gay or lesbian. This person will be punished for a psychological process that is unique for everyone.

c. Because of the value placed by the larger society on a heterosexual orientation, many gay and lesbian people who become aware of their orientations at a young age learn to suppress their feelings and conform to the norms of a heterosexual world. I am one of these people - I joined the service at 19, very afraid to ever say that I was gay and hoping that I would change so that it wouldn't be a problem for me anymore. I was too young to realize that the feelings never go away, that they are for some of us a natural expression of our sexuality. Not only does the new policy discriminate against a sailor or soldier, but it has found a way to legalize the "closet".

2. One reply I have heard is that "The ROTC doesn't ask about sexual orientation, and what happens after college is a military matter." I think we need to be careful. As educators in a

university, we have an obligation to set policies that help shape those in society. Being gay in a heterosexual world is difficult. If we understand this, how can we offer ROTC, a program that will ultimately discriminate against a gay or lesbian person, to our young people who because of personal fear cannot and will not admit their sexual orientation? When a child leaves home for an independent life, they are not just "on their own". There is a parental responsibility for training and nurturing children to increase their opportunities for success in life. If we graduate a ROTC person who is a "closeted" gay or lesbian, we have to accept part of the responsibility when we in effect turn that graduate out to the wolves.

3. Conclusion. We feel that the current policy does not represent an improvement over existing policy and may be in fact more damaging to a gay or lesbian servicemember. The policy officially supports the "closet". It is a heterosexist policy that makes the completely ludicrous assumption that people who are gay are not entitled to sexual expression. It remains very discriminatory because a person who admits to being gay or lesbian and chooses to express his or her sexuality in this type of relationship is automatically considered for separation. And, by supporting ROTC, we are indirectly hurting servicemembers who may not be fully aware of their sexuality until during their stay at ROTC or possibly not until they are away from URI jurisdiction.

4. I would like the opportunity to speak on this matter if it comes up for discussion on the Senate floor. I can be reached at 294-7896. Mail correspondence can be sent to either the GLBA c/o Student Senate or to the Department of Psychology, Chafee Building (I am a PhD student in the Experimental Psychology program).