



Why Harvard Harasses the Military

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Atchison, Kan.

It's a long way from Harvard yard to Benedictine College. But this little Kansas campus could give Cambridge a big lesson in diversity.

Benedictine held its annual commencement ceremonies this past weekend, and I happened to be there because I was the speaker. After all the degrees had been handed out, two young men in dress blue were called back on stage. Before their families, their classmates, and their teachers, these men raised their right hands and swore to "support and defend" our Constitution. And then Lt. Jeff Fetters and Lt. Michael Mundie were presented to their class as "the newest officers in the United States Army."

What a striking moment this was. Here were two young men who had stepped forward to wear the uniform in a time of war – and who had their service publicly acknowledged by their peers and institution. One retired general who graduated from this same campus in 1966 put it this way. "These young men will need every bit of encouragement in the world they have now entered," said Tom Wessels. "And by golly, it was great to see them get it."

Now, Benedictine is hardly an Army kind of place. On this campus, you are far more likely to encounter someone becoming a missionary than someone entering the military. And not everyone assents to its generally conservative outlook. In fact, one of the three valedictorians made a point of saying so – and used her address to emphasize that it was important for Benedictine to make room for people like her. The point, of course, is that Benedictine did make room for her.

How far removed this is from the kind of orthodoxy that reigns at Harvard. There ROTC has not been allowed on campus (students can do the coursework at another school) since it was booted off during the Vietnam War. It remains unwelcome largely because of the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy that excludes openly gay individuals.

In November 2001, the school's then-president, Larry Summers, tried to bridge the divide. At the Kennedy School, he spoke about the "special grace" that attends "those who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for our country." And Mr. Summers backed up his words by attending the commissioning ceremonies for Harvard's ROTC graduates.

Unfortunately, his successor, Drew Faust, did not attend last year's ceremony. Recently, she announced she *will* attend this year's ceremony. And in an email, a Harvard spokesman confirms that while President Faust has the "greatest admiration" for

Harvard's ROTC students, she has clearly stated that the opportunity to serve should be open to all Harvard students – and any reference she makes that day will be "respectfully and appropriately conveyed." In other words, she reserves the right to use the event to voice disagreement with "don't ask, don't tell."

What would this mean? Well, for the Harvard seniors who will be receiving the gold bars of a second lieutenant, it would mean a political note injected into what should be a day of pride and celebration. It would mean that they will be called to account for a political policy that they do not set. And it would mean that in their first moments as new officers, they will be told by the leader of their university that they serve an institution that isn't, well, quite worthy of Harvard.

How sad this is. We are constantly told by critics that it is the war and the administration's policy they oppose, not the troops. University commissioning ceremonies would be a good time to prove it. Whether our new officers come from Benedictine or Harvard, they will be entrusted with one of the gravest responsibilities in our democracy: the lives of the men and women under their command. When America's sons and daughters are put in harm's way, we want them led by officers of character and integrity.

The United States military is one of our nation's most open and diverse institutions. The freedoms our universities depend on are defended by those who wear the uniform. And whether you are for the war in Iraq or against it, for gays in the military or against them, we should be able to honor these good men and women – publicly and without embarrassment.

When the lieutenants at Benedictine were sent off from their campus, it was with the prayers and respect of their college community. Our young officers at Harvard deserve no less. And if President Faust wants an example of the kind of diversity that makes this possible, she need look no farther than Atchison, Kan.