ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OFFICER EDUCATION COMMITTEE: 2018-2019

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the Officer Education Committee nominated the following individuals for faculty appointments in the Duke ROTC Program. All of them, after being interviewed and vetted by the OEC, were approved and so appointed by Dean Valerie Ashby:

Lt LEVI BLACKWELL
—Visiting Assistant Professor of Naval Science, April 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022

Lt PARIS VINCENT SCOTT
—Visiting Assistant Professor of Naval Science, December 21, 2018 to December 21, 2020

(Marine) Captain SHANNON STANICH
—Visiting Professor of Naval Science, June 1, 2019 to June 1, 2022

Major MICHAEL ARGUELLO
—Visiting Associate Professor of Naval Science, May 15, 2019 to May 15, 2022

Captain ANDREW HERTEL
—Visiting Professor and Chair of Naval Science, June 1, 2019 to June 1, 2022

Lt Colonel LIZA THERIAULT
—Visiting Professor and Chair of Aerospace Studies, July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022

In addition, the OEC recommended, per request of the Pentagon, that the appointment of Major JODY WOOD as Visiting Associate Professor of Aerospace Studies be extended to June 1, 2020.

Our Committee’s other major business this year was to address the problem of dangerously low enrollments in the ROTC units. In late August, 2018, we took our concern to Provost Kornbluth, who allotted $12,000 to the three units (Army, Navy, Air Force) for bringing prospective recruits to Blue Devil Days. This help was greatly appreciated, but the problem continues as a serious matter. This January, we met with President Price to voice our concerns, and received a noncommittal response from him. At both meetings, Dean Guttentag and Susan Waters, of the Admissions Office, expressed an intention to cooperate with the ROTC recruiting efforts, but the multiple, sometimes contradictory pressures on their office have limited what they can contribute by way of healthy recruiting numbers.

For additional clarification of the problem, I have attached a copy of the letter I sent to President Price earlier this year. Inasmuch as I will be stepping down as OEC chair this summer, the problem of inadequate recruitment will carry over to my successor as an urgent matter. I trust that members of the Arts and Sciences faculty will share that sense of urgency.

Victor Strandberg
Professor of English and Chair, Officer Education Committee
—Submitted on May 24, 2019
January 7, 2019

To Professor Vincent Price  
The President, Duke University  
Cc Provost Sally Kornbluth, Dean Christoph Guttentag

Dear President Price:

The Officer Education Committee requests a meeting with you concerning a critical juncture in Duke’s ROTC Program. Our group will consist of the three unit commanders—Lt Colonel Jesse Hunt (Air Force), Lt Colonel Rachelle Macon (Army), and Captain Marc Stern (Navy)—and three civilian faculty members (Victor Strandberg, Peter Feaver, and Michael Gustafson). And of course we would be very pleased if Provost Kornbluth can attend, as well as Dean Guttentag and/or his associate Susan Waters.

Because our Committee has not been in touch with you previously, it seems desirable to lay out some background. Early last semester, members of the Officer Education Committee met in Provost Kornbluth’s office, with Dean Guttentag and his associate Susan Waters attending, to address a pending crisis in Duke’s ROTC program. With Pentagon officials about to commence a review to determine whether our program merits its high financial cost, all three units—Army, Navy, and Air Force—have recently been coping with dangerously low enrollments. (Although the Army unit is the specific focus of this review, our Navy and Air Force units appear likely to undergo a similar review with similar vulnerability, given the DoD’s decision to conduct an annual cost/benefit review of ROTC programs across the nation.)

To enable prospective recruits to attend Blue Devil Day, the Provost allotted $4000 to each unit, a helpful gesture that is much appreciated. Our recruiting goal is to admit at least ten new cadets annually to each unit to meet minimum enrollment requirements. We have been advised that in this era of budget-cutting, the national headquarters of the ROTC programs may not continue to support small programs like Duke’s if we continue to fall below the target, as we unfortunately have in recent years. The problem is not a lack of excellent cadet-applicants; the problem is competition for these applicants from wealthy institutions (e.g. Princeton, Stanford) that until recently did not host ROTC programs. Prospective recruits who meet Duke’s increasingly elite academic standards have been routinely lured away to those schools that can add coverage for non-tuition expenses to the full-tuition scholarships provided by the Pentagon.

Lacking the resources to compete financially, our committee’s proposed solution to this problem has been twofold: to obtain a higher priority for ROTC cadets in our Admissions process; and to lock in such recruits via the Early Decision process, thus finessing our competitors. To our grave disappointment—and considerable alarm—our unit commanders report that our Early Decision recruiting has fallen far short of our goal. (The unit commanders will furnish a more detailed assessment at a later date.) So our units will now have to compete with the Princetons and Stanfords in Regular Admissions, which will
realistically necessitate a higher priority for ROTC cadets in the Admissions process, somewhat in the fashion, perhaps, of our varsity student-athletes.

Although we believe that our Admissions officers perform admirably well under excruciating pressures, we understand that they may need approval from higher authority to prioritize any category of applicants. So we ask that you consider lending your approval to this effort to strengthen our admission numbers to the total of at least thirty cadets per year. By meeting the minimal needs of each cohort, these numbers will ensure the wellbeing—and quite possibly the continued existence—of our ROTC Program as the Department of Defense proceeds with its annual reviews.

After a half-century on this campus, the cultural/financial benefits of our ROTC Program are clear. Its scholarships abet the university’s budget, its cadets enhance student diversity, and it serves the nation by graduating military leaders with a first rate liberal arts education. (Across four years, we cannot resist pointing out, meeting the 10-per-year target for each unit will contribute 100 or more scholarships to Duke’s bottom line, courtesy of the Pentagon—most of them going to students whose families cannot afford Duke’s tuition, a category the Administration has rightly wanted to enlarge.) So we want to make sure we do not risk losing the Program. Toward that end, the OEC respectfully requests a meeting with you to provide more information about this dilemma and to enlist your help in solving it.

Victor Strandberg,
Professor of English & Chair, Officer Education Committee

Peter Feaver,
Professor of Political Science and Public Policy

Michael Gustafson,
Associate Professor of the Practice of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Joseph Nadeau,
Professor of the Practice in Civil and Environmental Engineering

Owen Astrachan,
Professor of the Practice of Computer Science

Milton Blackmon,
Academic Dean, Trinity College

Lt Colonel Jesse Hunt,
United States Air Force

Lt Colonel Rachelle Macon,
United States Army

Captain Marc Stern,
United States Navy