

Introduction

Harvard University has long considered itself a breeding ground for cultivating the future leaders of our nation in every sphere of society. Countless Supreme Court Justices, Presidents, Fortune 500 CEOs, and leaders across academia have “Enter[ed] to grow in wisdom” and “Depart[ed] to serve better thy country and thy kind” as inscribed on Dexter Gate. A legacy that Harvard is particularly proud of is its history of service to the nation, in line with the mission of Harvard College, which is “to educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society” (*Mission, Vision, and History*). Harvard University lays claim to 18 Medal of Honor recipients, more than any other university in the country spare the nation’s two oldest military academies, and has lost over 1,350 lives to war over the course of its history (Mawn 2018). Since the 1970’s when ROTC was removed from Harvard in response to the Vietnam War, progress has been made in reconnecting with this history of service, though student pathways post-graduation have yet to catch up to an increased institutional interest in ROTC.

In Spring 2017, only six officers were commissioned into any branch of the Armed Services from Harvard ROTC programs, while Yale commissioned 18 officers the previous year (Powell 2017). While this count is not inclusive of other students who may be commissioning outside of ROTC, this low number is indicative of the fact that joining the military after Harvard is extremely uncommon and outside of the dominant culture of the university and the paths students take afterwards. While students often change their majors, intended careers, and extracurricular participation upon getting to college, little is known about what pushes students to pivot their pathway towards the military. I am interested in examining what experiences and elements of the Harvard context and elite university culture more broadly are factors in a student’s decision to choose to serve in the military. In the face of a military that is largely

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homogenous, shrinking in size, participating in less and less popular military action, while becoming more geographically and culturally distant from many Americans, Harvard has the capacity to draw on its legacy of military service and inspire military service in its future citizens and citizen leaders (Rapp 2018: 2-4). Through the lens of literature on civil-military relations, dominant culture and cultural capital, and career pathways in the elite context of Harvard, I hope to identify specific elements of the elite university experience that contribute to the decision to join the military post-graduation. Members of the military community suggest the military would be more effective if it was more representative of the broader society it serves, and Harvard as a diverse community has the potential to increase this effectiveness by contributing leaders from its ranks. While Harvard has a well-developed infrastructure to support and encourage public service through the forms of fellowships, offices, and student programs, there has been little in the way of supporting or encouraging military service. In light of this, I am interested in ways that which military service could be promoted and cultivated as an extension of this service infrastructure and culture.

Literature Review

In order to ground this research that will draw on university culture, career pathways, and civilian-military relations, it is necessary to consider literature from all three of these fields. First, I will explore how cultural capital, what statuses, symbols, and positions hold value in an environment, can be specific and unique to the environment of a university and the resulting dominant culture that is created in the university context. This dominant culture pushing students into certain trajectories and pathways which are deemed valuable and worthy of merit. Then, I will connect this dominant culture to how students choose what kind of careers are worth pursuing afterwards as well as considering how this culture influences propensity towards the

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military. By building cultural capital into framings of meritocracy and status in schooling, I hope to highlight how perceptions of prestige shape decision making. From there, I will tie in a review of who joins the military and why in a consideration of what the current composition of the military looks like. Lastly, I will highlight the significance of this topic by addressing cultural and political issues that come from a disconnect between civilian leadership and the military, which could be ameliorated by understanding elements of elite university culture.

Universities and particularly private universities act as an organization, each with its own set of membership criteria, rules, and culture. Organizational psychologist Edgar Schein defines this culture as things shared by members of a group, including their norms, espoused values, formal philosophy, habits of thinking, shared meanings, and rituals (Schein 2010: 12-14). Schools allow for a “closed system of social interaction,” which is especially true in universities which act as “total institutions” in which students experience every aspect of their life, including academic and non-academic domains alike, within a single setting and under the guise of one authority, much like Harvard University which is a primarily residential college (Gaztambide-Fernandez 2009: 22). This creates a distinct “social organism,” in which students are forced to navigate hierarchies and norms that can exist separate from and even in opposition to the broader society outside of the university, cultivated by a level of isolation from the outside world often as a result of the exclusive nature of the space (Waller 1961: 6-10).

Bowles and Gintis use the concept of the educational meritocracy, the stratification of and within the education system to explain capitalism and broader societal inequality. This symbolic system of what kinds of qualities are valuable in education is used to reconcile students to the social position they are needed to fill in society (1976: 102-106). Within the educational meritocracy, certain careers and career pathways are granted more social and cultural capital,

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carrying notions of status and success in the unique university context and therefore making them more prestigious and desirable. Beyond this, the pipeline between elite universities and these “elite” jobs, most often careers in consulting, finance, and banking, has become reinforced by the fact that these elite jobs now require and seek out students who have credentials from elite universities (Katchadourian & Boli 1994). In the elite university context, cultural capital often takes on the embodied and institutionalized states, defined by Bourdieu as “dispositions of the mind” and as an “academic qualification” respectively (2007: 87). Therefore, association of elite university degrees with elite jobs creates a system in which the pursuit, therefore disposition towards, and attainment of these jobs constitutes both forms of cultural capital while still in the university. The pursuit of these jobs becomes normative and encouraged as a means of accruing social capital within the distinct social hierarchy of the university. Because cultural capital has the capacity to be converted into economic capital, the stratification of which is legitimation by the educational meritocracy, pursuing these jobs carries even more status both in the university context and beyond (Bourdieu 2007: 91-92).

In order to understand why military service is important as a post-graduate opportunity in an elite university context, it is relevant to understand the composition of the military as it stands. The military functions similar to other organizations, displaying its own norms, espoused values, formal philosophy, habits of thinking, shared meanings, and rituals (Schein 2010: 12-14). Key elements of the military’s organizational norms and culture include professionalism, political neutrality, specialization, a clearly outlined hierarchy, and corporate-ness (Huntington 1964: 80-85). Huntington, a key theorist of civilian-military relations, writes in his Institutional Theory that for the military to remain effective, it must be able to exercise its functional imperative, defined as its mission of national defense, through a focus on formulation and execution of

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policy. For him, issues in executing this mission arise when professionalism is weakened, as in the case of incompatibility of the military ethic with political ideologies and civilian policymakers (1964: 90-97). Generally, half of a branch's yearly officer commissions come from ROTC and its military academy, with the other half commissioning from Officer Candidacy School. While there are no official statistics on the percentage of the officer corps that attended Harvard or similar elite institutions, our political process is stocked with these graduates, with over 40 Harvard graduates winning seats in the 115th Congress (Cheng et al. 2016). Given this, the lower proportion of officers in the military with elite university backgrounds in comparison to the high level of Harvard graduates in civilian policymaking speaks to a potential misalignment in values, political ideologies, or understanding.

Janowitz, a competing theorist, argues that the military's effectiveness is dependent on its concern with a sense of "civic responsibility." Civic responsibility, defined as integration with societal values, is accomplished through maintaining a representative military and cultivating an enthusiasm for public service broadly among the citizenry (1960: 417-430). Critical elements of this civic responsibility include a mutual understanding and mutual respect for the military among citizens and political leaders. However, as we see now, this is not the case. 75% of the active and reserve military agree with the statement that the military community has little in common with the rest of the country and that most civilians do not understand the military (Rapp 2018: 3). Much of this sentiment comes from geographical distance, ideological differences, and the uniqueness of military life and culture. Similarly, 60% of new recruits in the military are concentrated in just five states (CA, TX, NC, GA, VA) and 79% of those new recruits have a family connection to the military (4). Lastly, the military fails to racially and socioeconomically mirror the diversity of the United States, with an overrepresentation of Black-identifying

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Americans and data showing that as income increases, propensity to serve decreases (Lutz 2008: 177-178). This income finding is interesting to consider given the higher proportion of individuals from top income brackets in elite universities (*Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes at Harvard*). Beyond this, the military is increasingly isolated when considering its proximity to broader society, with military bases being concentrated away from major urban areas. Ideologically and politically, the military is often more conservative than the public at large (Rapp 2018: 4). Observed through the lens of Janowitz's theoretical framework, this failure to fulfill its civic responsibility through a lack of representation and mirroring of social values caused geographic isolation or dissimilar political ideologies poses a danger for the military's strategic capabilities, and also its nature as an apolitical organization that does not intervene in the structures of civilian control over it.

As we can see from these troubling statistics, increasing the extent to which the military is representative of the broader population is critically important for its future success and our democratic wellbeing. Having an understood, representative, and respected military is important to prevent intervention by the military in government decision-making and the failure to achieve this harmony between the society and the military has led to military meddling in politics and even coups in other countries (Janowitz 1960: 430-440). Harvard's position as a diverse environment that has a reputation for producing leaders in all spheres of society makes it a perfect breeding ground for cultivating and inspiring a new generation of military leadership. Seeing that the graduates of Harvard who go into the military assume leadership roles as officers, overseeing tens to hundreds or thousands of enlisted members, the potential for Harvard to have a positive impact in the military through its officers is magnified by the roles they enter.

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Importantly, research shows that graduates from elite universities have a higher likelihood of achieving a position of leadership in organizations that they are a part of in the private sector (Useem & Karabel 1986). This is relevant to my research in that this capacity for leadership is likely transferrable to the military, where elite university graduates and many of their identities are underrepresented. With the implication that Harvard graduates have the potential for reaching high levels of leadership in an organization like the military, it becomes even more imperative to understand their propensity for service knowing they have the capacity to influence organizational change and policy. If elite university graduates are more likely to be disproportionately represented in political leadership, then exposing those graduates to the military by cultivating and promoting service can help bridge the “normative gap,” the expectations the military has of politicians and vice versa, which go into creating strategy and policy (Cohen 2001: 429-431).

Research Questions

What kind of common experiences and cultural elements of student life at Harvard University, and elite university culture more broadly, motivate students to choose to serve in the military? By framing my research question around both the experiences students have at Harvard, and the impact of the dominant culture on post-graduate decision making in the elite university context, I am eliciting responses from students that speak to both their lived experience in this context as well as their perception of how the institution shapes the way they and others around them think. By breaking down this question into two sub-questions, one specifically about experience and another asking about perceptions of culture, I hope to allow for more nuanced reflection on the parts of my participants. I also believe it is important to consider

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the backgrounds of these students, and if it impacted their decision to serve. This led me to the following three sub-questions:

1. What experiences and interactions at Harvard do students who decide to serve in the military identify as having influenced their decision to join the military after graduation?
2. What elements of the broader culture at Harvard influence the decision to serve?
3. How, if at all, does family and personal background influence the decision to serve in the military post-Harvard?

Site and Participant Selection

To answer these research questions, I focused on students who either joined ROTC after matriculating or are planning to attend Officer Candidacy School post-graduation. Students who enter Harvard as ROTC students make the decision to pursue the military post-graduation before arriving at Harvard, while students who join at Harvard or will commission afterwards encounter an element of Harvard's culture or have an experience here that pushes them towards serving; it is these elements and experiences that seek to identify. Similarly, I investigated the backgrounds of students choosing to pursue military service, particularly to identify geographic, familial, or academic patterns, which all could have had an impact on an individual's propensity for military service.

In order to recruit participants, I drew on existing networks and connections to the ROTC and military community at Harvard through my academics and my blocking group. I recruited participants via email (see Appendix), and then broadened my pool of participants through snowball sampling because of the small size and insular nature of the military community at Harvard. In interviewing these students, I hoped to be able to draw out common

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themes about what types of experiences here at Harvard or elements of the culture of Harvard motivate them to pursue military service, as well as identifying

Data Collection

I collected my data through interviews with students who will be joining the military after graduating from Harvard. I first asked each participant about background information, including: hometown and state, parent's occupation, concentration, campus involvement, intended branch of military service, level of connection to the military (family/friend service), ROTC affiliation if any, and tentative post-military plans. Background data will help me answer my first research question about if any common backgrounds exist among these students, and then if any Harvard experiences or cultural influences influence students to serve from a particular background.

Then, I asked participants to reflect on and recount experiences they've had at Harvard surrounding the military, their own and others' perceptions of the military, and reactions and responses from others at Harvard and those outside of Harvard upon learning that they intend to serve. These experiences will allow me to identify key themes in the types of experiences that motivate, encourage, or discourage students from choosing to serve in the military post-graduation. After having them discuss experiences they've had, I asked participants to share insights about and reflect on the culture of Harvard in respect to public service careers, perception of the military and ROTC, and outsider perspectives on the function and responsibility associated with a Harvard degree. From these questions and reflections, I hope to be able to construct a shared perception of Harvard's culture from the perspective of students intending to serve in the military and incorporate their evaluations of if and how this culture has impacted their decision to serve.

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My interviews were conducted in dining halls and student common rooms, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Each of the interviews started with me telling the participants a little more about the project and my interest in the topic. Each participant was told their answers and names would be kept anonymous, and consent was received to record each interview. I used in-depth interviewing along with a loose interview guide, and then partially transcribed interviews after I had completed all of them. This was an important decision in that I wanted to get through all of the interviews before listening to them again and transcribing, in order to limit the extent to which I was “exercising judgement about what is significant in the transcript,” waiting to find common trends among the interviews rather than fishing for information through them as I found interesting elements through them (Seidman 2006: 117-119).

Researcher Positionality

Over the course of my time at Harvard, I have conducted prior research on veteran students as part of coursework and have taken a course on Civil-Military Relations. I have multiple friends who are participants in the ROTC program or plan to commission in the military after graduation, which has informed my decision to pursue this research. I myself considered joining ROTC, so I have a personal connection to uncovering what motivates students to make similar decisions. I believe that my investment in this issue will push me to make sure the research I am conducting is as rigorous as possible, however, this investment will also make it important to check biases. I have my own theories on the answers to my research question and will make sure that any findings or patterns I come to are corroborated by multiple participants in order to minimize the chance of me projecting my own thoughts on the issue into the research. Similarly, I relied on my participants to help with snowball sampling and relied on a cohort that has a majority of participants that I did not know before deciding to take up this research. I did

this in order to limit the influence that personal connection to participants has on their answers, knowing that I myself can relate to some of their experiences.

Findings

After soliciting for participants over email and through snowball and convenience sampling, I was able to complete five interviews with students in ROTC (4 participants) and those intending to join the military after graduation (1 participant). I interviewed three seniors, one junior, and one sophomore, which speaks to the skew of upperclassmen in ROTC programs and the fact that career decisions and ROTC commitments aren't generally made until later in a student's time as an undergraduate. Of the five students, all of those who were involved in ROTC were in the Army ROTC program, with three of them having signed commitment contracts and the sophomore student still deciding whether or not they would commit when it came time to sign a contract. All of the junior and senior ROTC students had already spent at least one summer participating in either basic training or another summer program run by the Army, while the sophomore had yet to have any significant Army experience outside of the battalion at MIT. The one senior who I interviewed who was not in ROTC is planning to apply to Officer Candidate School (OCS) for the Navy upon graduation, a process that he noted cannot start until three months before he would enter OCS, which would likely be in June. Of the participants that I interviewed, three were women and two were men.

I will organize my findings from these interviews into two categories: background and decision-making, and Harvard culture and personal values. I believe that these two categories capture important elements of the decision-making process in how these students ended up in ROTC after getting to Harvard, while taking into account experiences here and factors that may have influenced them before arriving at Harvard. The "background and decision-making" bucket

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highlights trends in the educational, family, and military background of my participants. The “Harvard culture and personal values” bucket points to attitudes and beliefs about ROTC, military service, extracurricular participation, and career pathways at Harvard, which participants considered before joining ROTC and now experience more saliently now that they are in the program alongside more of the personal reasons and values that pushed these students to pursue military service.

Background and Decision-Making Findings

Four out of the five participants I interviewed noted some family connection to the military. For some, this was as close of a connection as having a step-parent as previously enlisted in the Navy, while for others, it was more of a distant connection. Most commonly, individuals mentioned that either grandparents or older uncles had served in the past, most of them serving during times of conflict (Vietnam, Gulf War, and Korea). None of my participants came from “military families,” referring to families in which either of the parents is currently on Active Duty. Similarly, none of the individuals had an officer connection to the military, meaning that all of their connections to the military had previously been enlisted and served without having earned a college degree beforehand like all of my participants would go on to do. The participant intending to join the Navy after graduating noted an extensive connection, saying “I have...four uncles who all either served in the Army or the Navy and they were all enlisted.”¹

When asked what they study at Harvard, participants responded with Government, Applied Math with a focus in Economics, Economics, Human Evolutionary Biology, Computer Science. Of the participants who had a secondary concentration, they were pursuing Classics and Government. Four of my five participants studied a language, with two of them intending to receive a citation in Spanish, another intending to receive a citation in Arabic, and another

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participant studying Russian and Arabic. While these were not necessarily the subjects many of these participants intended to study when they got to Harvard, none of them cited the military or ROTC as a factor in having changed their intended concentration. Most of the participants mentioned that Harvard was one of their top choices for college, with two applying either only to Harvard or to Harvard and one other school. Almost all of their parents were college educated, with just one participant citing that neither of their parents had a college degree. Multiple participants noted that their parents had advanced degrees, including one MBA, one P.h.D., and a J.D. Three participants were involved in recreational sports on campus in some capacity.

Army ROTC was appealing to my participants for multiple reasons. One noted, “I found myself super interested in small unit land based tactics²” while two others mentioned a dislike for being in the air (like they would be doing in the Air Force) or on boats (like they would be in the Navy) as their reason for an Army preference. Army ROTC is the most flexible of the three programs, allowing students to try the program out for multiple semesters before committing to military service post-graduation. One participant said “it wasn’t a scholarship thing for me, so I don’t have to actually sign on a dotted line anywhere for a year³” when asked why she joined Army ROTC, while another said, “the more I learned about Army, the more I realized it was the most flexible option for me to try it for a little while.⁴” Another participant noted that the Army needed more STEM specialists, leading her to choose that branch over the others given what she studies. Alternatively, Navy was the option of choice for a participant intending to commission post-graduation because it offered the best opportunity to get to travel and see more of the world. Desires for joining ROTC more broadly often touched upon the importance of being able to develop a sense of discipline and recreating a team-like atmosphere for many of the participants who were athletes in high school.

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Another topic that I was interested in was to learn how students ended up finding out about ROTC. Multiple participants mentioned finding out about Army ROTC at the student activities fair. Held in the first weeks of the fall semester, a participant noted that, “Army was the only recruiting presence at the activities fair my freshman year, so I honestly didn’t even know the other services were here,⁴” with another participant echoing this being the place that they were first exposed³ (see Appendix). Two of the other participants noted that they had an awareness of the military and ROTC in high school but didn’t act upon that interest until getting to Harvard. When asked if there were any experiences that participants had here at Harvard that motivated them to join ROTC or later second guess or question their decision to do so, none of my participants pointed to specific experiences that they’ve had at Harvard.

Harvard Culture and Personal Values Findings

When asked how participants perceive Harvard’s culture towards military service, participants had different answers. One participant stated, “I think there are a lot of people at Harvard who don't appreciate...service,⁵” while another stated that the culture can be difficult for ROTC students to deal with, noting frustration at the circulation of a “pretty scathing letter about why ROTC shouldn’t be considered a public service in response to alleged administrative actions to include ROTC in the big Harvard public service umbrella.⁶” That same participant, however, noted that the culture of Harvard is at least respectful even if it is ignorant or misinformed. Participants noted the benefit of the liberal arts curriculum and mindset at Harvard when considering that the upper-officer corps of the military is largely similarly comprised of military academy and Ivy League ROTC program graduates. One of my participants noted “the kind of people who go to Harvard and graduate from here successful are the kind of people who would excel in their service.⁷”

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On the other hand, other participants remarked that Harvard instead promotes a culture of service, and that ROTC is wholly in line with that culture. A participant remarked that at Harvard, “there’s a general vibe around public service” meaning that there is a prevalent culture of it here. For her, however, she “just interpreted that vibe of public service a different way and interpreted it as ROTC is another kind of public service.⁸” Harvard students were perceived by my participants as being well-suited for military service, embodying the discipline and “spirit of responsibility” that is in line with military service (see Appendix for full transcription). Another, however, noted that the culture of Harvard “strongly impedes” the pursuit of military service, citing the pattern of the pursuit of prestige and financial success as antithetical to military service. One of my participants noted that, “I think that seeing so many people have that culture of just financial success at Harvard dissuades people from making that decision.⁹” A second participant spoke of a conflict in expectation or stereotype about what a model student pursuing ROTC looked like, saying that peers responded to her decision with “You? Are you sure? That’s what you want to do? You’re at Harvard and you want to do that?¹⁰” For her, joining ROTC and having the military be a part of her path towards becoming a doctor was a way to break down assumptions about the types of jobs in the military and the type of people who join.

In light of the fact that securing employment post-graduation is highly important to students, the financial and employment security offered by a career in the military was highly appealing to my participants. However, the low-pay and low-status nature of a career in the military was presented as an inhibitor towards people following this path, with a participant saying, “the military life isn't glamorous, it's not something that you're gonna go to if you're trying to make a massive amount of money.⁹” For some of my participants, the military was seen as a stepping stone between Harvard and graduate school or a career in government, and joining

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ROTC was an important way to get ahead on being prepared for that stepping stone. Another participant intended to continue into the popular Harvard career track of consulting and finance but wanted to start off with military service immediately post-graduation because it “makes you more competitive as an applicant for those kind of positions.”¹¹

When asked about their values and motivations for joining, answers were varied. Those with a family history of military service or those who came from an area of the U.S. where military service is widely respected, joining ROTC and the military was less of a leap because in their contexts, “the military is probably just the most highly lauded profession you can go into. It's just seen there where I grew up as giving your life to something greater than yourself.”¹² Some of my participants cited pop culture and broader American values through which an interest in service and the military “slides in subconsciously and builds itself up there.”¹³ Others mentioned the importance that their family placed on service or religious values instilled in them by their family. Sense of obligation was echoed by all of my participants, whether that was a result of their time at Harvard and gratitude for the opportunities they've received here, or more broadly with a sense of not “want[ing] to live a life not having contributed anything to those around me.”¹⁴ However, my participants didn't entirely write off the other paths taken by Harvard students, with that same participant noting “There's a way to serve people probably in any profession, even a Wall Street executive or a BCG consultant, there's a way for people to do immense good in that profession.”¹⁴

Analysis & Discussion

Many of my assumptions and hypotheses about my findings ended up not being reflected by the reality of the inspirations behind joining ROTC and how participants perceived their decisions in light of the culture of Harvard. The demographics of the participants were

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particularly interesting and challenged some of the assumptions made by the literature that speaks to military demographics more broadly. My participants motivations heavily weighed service and obligation as central elements of their decision-making process, but they were also motivated by financial reasons, a desire for stability, and the appeal of the opportunities presented by the military. None of the participants mentioned specific experiences that they had at Harvard that pushed them towards joining ROTC or the military, which directly contrasted one of my assumptions of why students would choose to make this decision after having gotten to college. Here, I will analyze each of these trends in depth.

In respect to demographics, there was a large range of concentrations among participants, whereas I had expected to find a narrower distribution that skewed towards the social sciences given the political and historical nature of military service. A majority of my participants study a language, which could speak to the fact that speaking multiple languages is beneficial in the military considering its global reach. Few participants noted that their ROTC involvement or plan for serving had an impact on their academic decisions, except for one participant who explicitly stated that he studies Russian and Arabic for the military. My participants were largely from urban areas, which is in contrast to the demographic makeup of the military as noted by civilian-military relations scholar Rapp (2018: 3-4). The majority had some family connection to the military, which mirrors surveys of the broader military. This trend however, if it continues with Harvard and elite university officers maintaining a military family connection, is potentially worrisome seeing how heavily the military is skewed towards those with a family connection, sparking fears of the development of a “warrior caste” in our society (Janowitz 1960: 417-430). Interestingly, nearly all of my participants had college degree holding and even highly educated (possessing a terminal degree) parents. This would be interesting to explore in a future study that

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also looks at class and racial demographics in ROTC participation and military service intentions.

Originally, I had expected to find that students would see their participation in ROTC or their decision to join the military after graduation as a “counter-cultural” action. Seeing how prevalent and dominant the path to finance and consulting are, I had imagined my participants would see pursuing public service, and this particular form of it, as an opposition to and as active rebellion against the dominant culture of Harvard. However, I was surprised to find that this was not the case. Considering that the framework of dominant culture and educational meritocracy proposed by Bowles & Gintis—particularly within Harvard—values high-status, high-paying careers post-graduation, pursuing the military appears to ignore this stratification (1976: 102-106). However, while some of my participants were critical of this culture, none mentioned their service as juxtaposed to this, with some deciding not to dismiss these careers and the potential positive impact one could have in them. Many, rather, noted that Harvard was a place of service and challenged this assumption of the dominant culture being one of selfishness driven by prestige and financial success.

I was very surprised to learn how influential the fall Activities Fair was to students’ exposure to ROTC. One of my participants noted that Army may have appeared to be the only branch with a presence, and while that likely was not the case as all the branches are typically there, I believe this speaks to the programs’ size and reputation. Army ROTC was noted by almost all of my ROTC participants as the most flexible program, allowing them to try out being in ROTC for an extended period of time without a commitment. For students who decide to join in college as opposed to seeking an ROTC scholarship in high school, this factor came out to be extremely important in deciding to join, seeing as this was a more recent decision that they had

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made with a potential to change their mind. My original hypothesis going into this research was that Navy and Air Force would be more popular considering many of their careers require more advanced and more technical knowledge, which I presumed going to Harvard would supply the participants with. When asked which military careers the participants wanted to have upon commissioning, four of the five sought to have a position that would require them to be close to or in combat, with just one preferring an “office” type of job. The Army, therefore, makes the most sense for these participants with its proximity to combat and diversity of professions within combat, speaking to why it was the most popular branch among my participants. It appeared to me as if these participants had decided to serve, they wanted to have the most impact possible, which to them meant leading on the frontlines.

I was very surprised to hear from all of my participants that there were few experiences at Harvard that influenced their decision to pursue the military. This hypothesis was based largely on a foundational belief that ROTC would be a counter-cultural decision, and therefore one that participants were pushed to make largely due to negative encounters with peers and the culture of Harvard. Instead, students were more motivated by opportunities available to them in ROTC and the military post-graduation—alongside their values. This is an important finding because it suggests that the environment of an elite university like Harvard is no less likely to have students be interested in or develop an interest in pursuing military service. Therefore, it may be just as possible to encourage and produce officers out of elite universities with potentially meaningful benefits to the services they commission into as it would be at any other school.

Many of my participants remarked that the climate and support for ROTC has improved over recent years. After ROTC was reinstated in 2011 since having been removed from campus during the Vietnam-era, Harvard’s formal recognition of the program and allocation of resources

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has had a tangible impact on ROTC life for my participants. One of my interviewees noted, “in my four years here the administration has made some pretty huge steps to like bridge the massive institutional gap.¹⁵” Other older ROTC cadets agreed, sharing that the change in policy allowing ROTC classes taken at MIT to count for Harvard course credit and the addition of commuting subsidies for getting to physical training and classes at MIT have made being an ROTC cadet easier. One of my participants, who I interviewed closer to the end of the semester, stated that at times wearing the ROTC uniform on campus can be alienating and uncomfortable, suggesting that the student culture may not be catching up with administrative support. These policy changes and the reactions of ROTC students to them could potentially speak to why many of my participants found the culture of Harvard to be supportive of military service as a career path. Though, this analysis may be challenged as events develop on campus relating to incorporating ROTC under the public service administrative umbrella.

The findings presented are not meant to be a completely comprehensive overview of the decision-making process for joining ROTC at Harvard. This is due in large part to the fact that the majority of my participants were involved in Army ROTC, only one of the three branches of ROTC available to students. However, I believe these findings are still valuable considering the sizable portion of the targeted ROTC community I was able to interview. My participant pool was a niche slice of the ROTC students on campus, and therefore identifying and interviewing them proved to be a challenge. Similarly, it is important to note the context in which I was conducting these interviews.

During the second half of the fall semester, discussions were occurring among the administration considering including ROTC as part of the public-service and civic-minded infrastructure of Harvard. Much of the student-led groups in this infrastructure, including the

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Phillips Brooks House Association, the First Year Urban Program, and various cultural and religious organizations have signed onto a letter opposing the merger. The letter states that the signatories believe “that integrating ROTC programs into Harvard’s public service department undermines Harvard public service’s commitment to equity and inclusion, limits the integrity and autonomy of civil society structures, and dilutes the unique reflective and community-partnered approach of Harvard public service” (see Appendix for letter). As a result, finding participants willing to discuss their time in ROTC was difficult, and many of the conversations touched on this letter and debate in response to questions about Harvard’s cultural attitudes towards ROTC and military service.

I believe that there is a pressing need for future studies of ROTC participation and intentions to serve in the military after attending an elite education. Promoting military service among undergraduates at elite institutions carries personal benefits and leadership development for those serving and for the military as an organization through the diversity of these institutions and the critical thinking and liberal arts approach taken by these schools. Future studies should take into consideration the race and socioeconomic status of participants, and more seriously weigh gender as a factor in the decision-making process. Similarly, making sure to capture the diversity of experiences and paths to military service across the different branches of the military is key because of the differences between these branches. It is difficult to extrapolate the findings from one elite campus to another given their different histories and relationships with the military and ROTC, so a cross-sectional analysis of elite institutions that takes into account similarities when making generalizations would be an enlightening next step in this field. Future studies should also consider engaging with the scholarship and history of ROTC more broadly, whether that be across elite institutions or the history of the program in general.

Conclusion

Being an institution that predates the founding of our country, Harvard is a unique setting for analyzing a particular way in which an elite university shapes its students. Military service has been a part of Harvard's history since the its very beginning, though the relationship has not always been positive. Harvard has come to glorify and enshrine its military past yet is still catching to peer institutions when it comes to recognizing and supporting that service today. In spite of this, students are coming to Harvard and choosing to serve in the military afterwards and understanding what kind of students do this and why is an important step in being able to uphold and continue this proud legacy.

As the literature shows, universities and especially elite universities often create their own meanings of merit and prestigious pathways. In the elite university sphere, military service often doesn't earn this classification, despite the reverence it may have in other parts of the country. Civil-military relations theorists note that the military is not entirely representative of the United States, which has potentially negative consequences for the social harmony between society and the military. Given the diversity of Harvard and the under-representation of the kinds of students we have here, learning what kinds of students go into the military from here has important implications for mending the gap between the military and society by closing the gap between elite schools and the military.

My findings show that there are nearly zero experiences specific to Harvard as an elite university context that motivate students to pursue ROTC and the military. This is challenging in that there is little that we can point to as a positive motivator, but also shows that nothing about the experiences here at Harvard are negative influencers. ROTC participants are divided on whether or not the culture of Harvard respects, values, and encourages military service, but all

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agree that this pathway is becoming more strongly supported. Harvard students were largely motivated to pursue military service due to family connection or personal values, rather than pursuing a path that is counter-cultural. They value the flexibility they find in some branches and think Harvard student possess the traits key to succeed in the military. Despite what popular opinion here may suggest, these students value service and even see Harvard as a place that encourages it. My findings suggest that anyone, even at Harvard, can choose to serve their country and continue the rich tradition of service that Harvard was built on.

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Appendix

Selected Transcriptions:

1. Ben (B) - Gotcha, So you highlighted a few people in your family who have served in the military before, can you just list those out for me one more time and just say whether they were officer or enlisted.

Participant- Yes so my stepdad was enlisted in the Navy, he was in the Navy for twelve years. My brother in law was an Army Ranger for 7 years I believe. I have...four uncles who all either served in the Army or the Navy and they were all enlisted--

B- And what time period was that?

Participant- So uhh two...of the four served in Vietnam. One of the four served in Korea, I have another uncle now that I think about it who served in the Persian Gulf War of the nineteen nineties, and then I have a great uncle who served as an enlisted person in the army during World War II.

2. B-Can you talk a little bit on why you decided to join the Army ROTC program as opposed to the others?

Participant- I mean other than by and far Army being the best branch, the thing that drew me to that was that I really find myself super interested in like small unit land based tactics and stuff like that. That's always been something that interests me.

B-Have you...studied that academically, just watched movies?

Participant- Yeah I mean both. Modern land based warfare is really something, it's really interesting, and so that seemed interesting to me.

3- B-When did you decide to join ROTC?

Participant- So I kind of decided during my freshman winter in Chile where I would like, it was kind of like a spur of the moment decision to join and I would say that was more random than like my decision to stay in the program which I feel was deeper. I feel like my decision to join was kind of based on the fact that I missed the organization of a sports team in high school my freshman year. My first semester I was totally undisciplined, I didn't have my shit together, I didn't know what I was doing, and I was literally just looking for a program that would help me get my shit together and discipline me because the Army's really good at that. I saw them at the activities fair and I was like hey that seems like fun, I need to be in shape, I need to be disciplined, I need to get my shit together, all this sounds good, and then it was the kind of thing where it wasn't a scholarship thing for me so I don't have to actually sign on a dotted line anywhere for a year.

4- B- So why did you pick Army over the other branches?

Participant- Army was the only recruiting presence at the activities fair my freshman year, so I honestly didn't even know the other services were here and the more I learned about Army the more I realized it was the most flexible option for me to try it for a little while. That flexibility

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exists in hindsight with air force and navy and its less obvious. Most of their recruits come in having already received a scholarship as a high school senior and having already signed a contract.

5- B- What are your thoughts on Harvard's culture towards military service?

PARTICIPANT- It pisses me off, that's my first thought. I think there are a lot of people at Harvard who don't appreciate...service. People are very critical, so my opinion is that its perfectly valid to be critical of United States military operations, I'm critical of quite a few of them myself, but for the people who go in ummm I think that it is...unjustly assuming...like a wrong motivation for people to think that they're just going in you know to I don't even know what people tell themselves...just going in to you know kill people or whatever. Most people go in because they truly believe that despite its flaws, America is a great country and we do great things around the world and people who are willing to sacrifice their own individual...their individualism for that greater good I think deserve to be lauded no matter what. I don't think many people at Harvard appreciate that for instance on Monday on Veterans Day, we don't have that day off which is ridiculous. MIT has it off, quite a few other colleges in the Boston area have it off and I think that the decision for that not to be declared a university holiday is a little too political and I don't like it when the military is politicized even though that comes from both sides. So yeah, I think it's under-appreciated I feel like people are overly critical to service people in general and not appreciative enough. But that's also you know that that could also be ranting about a minority population who just happens to be especially vocal. The vast majority of the people I associate with, my friends, love the military and think the people who you know join the military are doing great things. I guess that's really my opinion.

6. B-Can you think of any experiences that negatively impacted your decision to serve?

Participant- It's a tricky question, it's hard for me to point to something, there are things I'm consistently frustrated with at the University. Recently, the president of PBHA published...circulated a pretty scathing letter about why ROTC shouldn't be considered a public service in response to alleged administrative actions to include ROTC in the big Harvard public service umbrella. Which makes sense to me because that's literally the definition of public service but this letter was just so misinformed and uneducated and missed the purpose and mission of our program. If this is what people think ROTC is, then we have a big big problem on this campus to solve.

7. B- Maybe more people are unemployed after graduation than are going into the military.

Participant- It might be 2 or 3 people each year, I mean that's probably also the kind of people who go to Harvard and graduate from here successful are the kind of people who would excel in their service so that might have something to do with the fact that we have so many Medal of Honor recipients but that's interesting I didn't know about that. I don't know if that speaks at all to...

8. B- Can you think of any specific experience at Harvard that impacted your decision to serve?

Participant-Honestly, not really. Obviously I try to do public service and volunteering things outside of ROTC...I do Mission Hill...I think it's just... There's just a general vibe around public service here, I do think that, and I just interpreted that vibe of public service a different way and

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interpreted it as ROTC is another kind of public service. ROTC is definitely service oriented and we're gonna serve our country.

9. B- Do you think that Harvard's culture...impedes or promotes students joining the military?

Participant- Impedes. Strongly impedes. Students who go here, for good reason I mean, it's the greatest university in the world. Students who go here expect big things out of themselves. And that often leads to stress and mental health issues and everything like that and many of these students don't exceed these massive insurmountable expectations ummm but many of the people who go here get some of the best research opportunities, have the ability to go to some of the best medical and law schools, including Harvard's own, and if they don't decide to do graduate work they have the ability to get jobs at places like Goldman-Sachs and places where they can make astronomical amounts of money straight out of college. Because people are constantly surrounded by other students who get those opportunities, you know they want the same things for themselves. And the military life isn't glamorous, it's not something that you're gonna go to if you're trying to make a massive amount of money. You might realistically have expectations for after you get out, that's, you don't get rich by going into the military. I think that seeing so many people have that culture of just financial success at Harvard dissuades people from making that decision.

10. What was the reaction you got to joining the military?

Participant- I think they were all supportive of me, they were all supportive of the military, they like appreciate the values that the military has. But they were all like, "You? Are you sure? That's what you want to do? You're going to Harvard and you want to do that?" It wasn't in terms of like, if you want to join the military you have to be more of a dude like...

11- B- Very cool. Let's shift a little more towards talking about your interest in the military. So

I'm curious, if you could pick a time in your Harvard career, when did you start considering the military as a career option? Obviously you've known about it you know with family connection

PARTICIPANT- So the military was in the back of my head for a long time...because of how daunting doing a long phd program was, I wasn't seriously considering it when I was considering a career in academia. But as I shifted interests to economics I began to realize that if I was only gonna be doing an undergraduate degree, the time that I would be spending otherwise doing a graduate degree could be better spent in some form of service. And something that definitely heavily influenced my decision was of course having a lot of family in the military -- growing up with this spirit and idea that service is important and everyone should do it in some form or another, combined with the fact that the jobs that I was looking at, given my interest in economics now, are largely competitive because you know the finance and the consulting jobs that people go to after majoring in Applied Math Ec or Economics are jobs that a lot of Harvard students are you know are reaching for. And, because of my terrible experience with Physics my spring semester freshman year my GPA has never been what I think it probably should be and uh it also -- military service I'm talking about -- makes you more competitive as an applicant for those kind of positions. It seems like a win-win, you know I've enjoyed so many privileges in my life up to this point especially considering with the ample financial aid Harvard gives you and everything like that, I don't pay very much to go here. Having that kind of opportunity made me realize that the reason this whole thing works is because we have a stable system in America and

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you know helping to provide for that stability for four short years seems like a pretty even trade to me.

12 B- You mention that you have a value, you see a value in service, and I wonder where, where has that kind of come from?

PARTICIPANT- Well, I mean growing up in the South, especially in really conservative environments, the military is probably just the most highly lauded profession you can go into. It's just seen there where I grew up as giving your life to something greater than yourself. As opposed to pursuing the paycheck or trade, it's really about sacrificing for other people because of that you get a lot of respect as a veteran in the south. I mean any time you go to a bar, especially if you're coming off base in a uniform or something like that, somebody's gonna offer to pay for your drink. So, I kinda grew up with this idea that service was, military service in particular, was the...greatest thing you can do with your life if you're willing to put forth that sacrifice.

13. Where do you think your value for service came from?

Participant- Probably like pop culture, like watching TV, saying the pledge everyday. Even if you don't intentionally, the fact that everyone gets up and they stop school for it. I went to a school with 5000 kids for high school so like it's just like a powerful moment to know 5000 people are. I think there are times where it slides in subconsciously and then builds itself up there.

14. B-What motivates you to serve and what would you say is your sense of purpose?

Participant-Everyone who answers this question provably answers I have a sense of obligation or a desire to give back. I think that's valid there's something, I don't want to live a life not having contributed anything to those around me. There's a way to serve people probably in any profession, even a Wall Street executive or a BCG consultant, there's a way for people to do immense good in that profession. To me though, I think one of the best ways to do that is through the military and we need more people from Harvard doing that. We've been endowed with so many resources and skills and whatnot, we are even more obligated to find something to give to. We need more Harvard leaders in the military.

15. B-Do you think the culture of Harvard has been encouraging towards students joining the military?

Participant- In my four years here the administration has made some pretty huge steps to like bridge the massive institutional gap...Not having course credit for the first three years I did ROTC was incredibly frustrating because I did as much as in my other classes and more plus going to MIT. The frickin orchestra gets class credit, surely we can get partial credit for going to take a class at MIT.

Interview Protocol

Background

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Where are you from? Where do you live on campus now?
4. What is your concentration and any secondaries?
5. What do your parents do for a living?
6. Did your parents attend college? Where? What did they study?
7. Do you have any siblings? What do they study and where? If they work, what do they do?
8. Do you have a family history of serving in the military? Are any of your friends serving or intending to serve?
 - a. What is the concentration of the military around where you grew up?

Career Pathway

1. What did you intend to study as you were applying to colleges?
2. Where were you hoping or planning to attend college? Why those schools?
3. What kind of career did you imagine you would have after college before arriving to Harvard?
4. What kind of activities are you involved in on campus?
5. What did you do last summer? The summer before that?

Military Basic Information

1. Are you in ROTC?
 - a. Which branch?
 - b. Why that branch?
2. If you are not in ROTC, which branch of the military do you intend to serve in? Why that branch?
3. What occupation do you intend to have in the military?
4. How long do you intend to stay in the military?

Choosing the Military

1. When did you decide to join ROTC/the military after graduation?

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2. Why did you decide to join the military?
3. What were your family values around the military
4. Were there any specific experiences at Harvard that influenced your decision to serve?
5. Were there any specific experiences at Harvard that have negatively influenced or impacted your decision to serve?
6. Have you found the culture of Harvard to be respectful towards students joining the military?
7. Have you found the culture of Harvard to be encouraging towards students joining the military?
8. What elements of the Harvard culture are conducive towards serving in the military?
9. What elements of the Harvard culture are not conducive towards serving in the military?
10. What motivates you to serve? What is your sense of purpose? What is your mission statement?
11. MOH fact is regularly mentioned fact, why might this be meaningful what purpose does it serve? What's the significance? How do you relate
12. Views on general state of things (popularity of finance) and how you view your own path in light of that

Where did your value for service come from?

How do you think Harvard would be different if more people served?

How do you think the military would be different if more people from Harvard served?

How has your decision affected further academic choices, personal choices, social choices?

What have been the academic affects?

What did you take into consideration?

Do you feel like your time/experience at ROTC is in line with your Harvard experience or do they compete?

Solicitation Email

Hi _____,

I hope you're doing well. I'm reaching out to see if you'd be interested in helping me with a research project I'm doing for a class on elite higher education and you were recommended to me as someone in my pool of interest. I am interested to learn more about your decision to join ROTC at Harvard, and would love to find some time this week/weekend to chat. Let me know if this would be possible!

Best,

Ben Sorkin

ROTC Integration Response by the Public Service Community Letter

EQUITY, INTEGRITY, COMMUNITY:

KEEP ROTC OUT OF HARVARD'S PUBLIC SERVICE DEPARTMENT

In recent weeks, it has come to light that College administrators intend to integrate Harvard's Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) divisions into Harvard's existing public service department. We the undersigned urge the College to reconsider this decision. While we recognize that ROTC students arrive from many places at their choice to serve, and Harvard students are free to associate in whatever ways they wish within College policy, **we believe that integrating ROTC programs into Harvard's public service department undermines Harvard public service's commitment to equity and inclusion, limits the integrity and autonomy of civil society structures, and dilutes the unique reflective and community-partnered approach of Harvard public service.**

The current public service department has its origins in 1904, with the creation of community-based, student-led public service in what is now the Phillips Brooks House Association. Since then, the department has grown to include the Center for Public Interest Careers, the Mindich Program on Engaged Scholarship, and the Public Service Network, in partnership with the Institute of Politics and the Office for Career Services. As the department has worked to define itself through the Seamless Pathways to Public Service process, six critical shared values have emerged for Harvard's public service landscape: **Community Agency and Reciprocity; Community Building and Belonging; Learning; Leadership Development; Commitment to Public Good; and Equity and Inclusion.** Developed and agreed upon by stakeholders within and alongside public service groups, these values define the parameters for public service structures at Harvard College.

EQUITY & INCLUSION

For over a century, public service at Harvard has been a home for those who have otherwise struggled to feel included at Harvard. At various points housing an [African American cultural](#)

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center, the [first women's center](#), and other vital spaces of **Equity and Inclusion**, the Phillips Brooks House and Harvard public service's mission of community partnership and civic responsibility have always attracted students from diverse backgrounds. Today, the administration supports their unilateral push to integrate ROTC by claiming that this historic inclusivity has alienated White and conservative students. However, not only are such students (including ROTC members themselves) active and valued members of the public service community who should not be reduced to ideological caricatures -- the numbers themselves don't bear this out. Public service volunteers' racial and gender breakdowns closely echo those of the College, which it widely touts as extremely diverse. Furthermore, participants in Harvard public service programs regularly rate above the national mean when it comes to "resolv[ing] conflicts that involve bias, discrimination, or prejudice" and "lead[ing] a group where people from different backgrounds feel welcomed and included," as reported by the National Survey on Student Engagement. Harvard public service's current commitment to **Equity and Inclusion** does not need external correction or reframing. As our yearly data indicate, it instead makes our work with all communities -- and our students' capacity to engage with difference in all forms -- even stronger.

In fact, integrating ROTC into Harvard public service may challenge this commitment to inclusivity. Last March, the Trump administration re-instituted a ban against trans people serving

in the military, and recently reaffirmed that ban with the revocation of legal protections for trans and intersex people. Even prior to this, however, before and during the military's brief period of inclusion of trans and intersex individuals, the [ROTC had maintained its prohibition](#) on trans membership (even as the University [welcomed it back](#) for abandoning its Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy). While the College is free to make its own assessments of discrimination elsewhere, we believe that the Harvard public service department, historically a space that has championed **Equity and Inclusion** for all people -- especially the most marginalized among us -- cannot tolerate and has no place for such discrimination and its detrimental effect on our students and programming. ROTC students are welcome, as always, to participate in any and all programming as individuals, but to structurally integrate ROTC into a Harvard public service department would be to fundamentally challenge the **Community Building and Belonging** so central to our work.

INTEGRITY & AUTONOMY OF CIVIL SOCIETY & HIGHER EDUCATION

In his installation address, President Larry Bacow emphasized the importance of higher education institutions in fighting for the greater good. It is crucial to remember, however, that higher education cannot engage in that fight alone; it can only do so as part of a vibrant civil society infrastructure that keeps our democracy strong. In the address, President Bacow reminded us that truth must be sought without being constrained by today's "whirling economic, social, and political currents." In fact, that is precisely what has made Harvard's public service programs great: their **Commitment to Public Good** unconstrained by political agendas and state influences. From community-based non-profits to hospitals to campaigns and education initiatives, the civil society partnerships built by Harvard public service organizations have been the groundwork of a civically responsible student body. This civil society fabric stands in stark contrast to ROTC, which is not simply a military affinity group but rather a branch of the

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military itself, subject to the policies of the state and the Commander-in-Chief rather than the shared priorities of the Harvard community as discussed and decided in a civil society space. While ROTC may be doing service of its own kind, to integrate ROTC into this hallowed civil society space is to limit the integrity of these free spaces and introduce undue state influence into service and the liberal arts education it complements.

CRITICAL, REFLECTIVE, & COMMUNITY-PARTNERED APPROACH

Throughout its history and across its offices, Harvard public service has been characterized by community partnership and a critical, reflection-based approach to public service. Through engagement with the shared vision established by our **Commitment to Public Good**, students become critical and active participants in their societies, challenging society through that collective commitment. Such critical reflection on service experiences is what fosters **Learning and Leadership Development**, pushing students to reevaluate their assumptions, not solidify them, and channel that into commitments to societal change. To integrate ROTC into a network of offices based in a critical service learning approach -- one not practiced by ROTC -- is to dilute the value of the specific **Learning and Leadership Development** practices that scaffold public service in favor of a catch-all definition that strips them of substance. In other words, if this department encompasses everything, then it encompasses nothing at all.

But beyond that, crucial to the history and character of public service at Harvard has been its alignment to the communities we work with -- that is, **Community Agency and Reciprocity**. This is, in fact, what characterizes our work at its best: whether in Lawrence, Massachusetts, or Cochabamba, Bolivia, Harvard's public service programs believe in engaging deeply with the communities they serve, listening to the perspectives of the most marginalized and centering their concerns. To define our public service in the abstract and narcissistic terms of student experience, then, rather than by the positions and concerns of the communities we serve -- and critical reflection on those positions and concerns -- is to abscond our responsibility to our community partners and to our highest values. What would it mean, for example, for the department to house the US military's ROTC programs while also housing programs that serve refugees created by that military and others like it? What happens if, in pursuit of its ultimate goal -- national security -- the military and its ROTC program affect our communities in ways that sacrifice the department's ultimate goals -- justice and equity? What would it mean for the stories of students working with immigrants and refugees across the rest of the department to be used to raise funds to support, among other things, a military program? Such a move not only creates an uncomfortable environment for students who are themselves affected by the military (a challenge to **Community Building and Belonging**), it also hinders community trust and the **Community Agency and Reciprocity** that has been so foundational to our work. If we lose that commitment to our values in pursuit of administrative consolidation for the sake of student experience, then we may as well forgo doing public service at all

CONCLUSION

While the college is free to maintain the programming it chooses to outside the public service department at Harvard, we the undersigned believe that integrating ROTC into that department contradicts the core values that constitute it. To overlook the impact such an integration would

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have on public service's commitment to equity and inclusion, its ability to operate in a free, civil society space, and its history of critical learning and deep community partnership is to jeopardize the very mission and vision of our work itself.

Our responsibility to the communities we work with calls us to make this statement, as does our responsibility to hold the College to the higher values we claim to represent. We understand that ROTC students have varied backgrounds and motivations and we recognize the choice they have made to serve. **But for the student community we build, for the integrity of our work, and for the communities we work alongside, we the undersigned demand that the College abandon its plans to integrate ROTC into Harvard's public service, community service, and civic engagement structures.**

Sincerely,
The Undersigned

PUBLIC SERVICE AT HARVARD

Phillips Brooks House Association First-Year Urban Program Harvard College Act on a Dream

HARVARD STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Harvard Islamic Society
Society of Arab Students Palestine Solidarity Committee Pakistani Student Association
Progressive Jewish Alliance Trans Task Force
Harvard TPS Coalition
Harvard Vietnamese Association

HARVARD FACULTY MEMBERS

Full Transcription

Ben- Alright is it cool if I record

Participant-Yeah sure

B- Alright so can you tell me your name, how old you are, and where you're from

PARTICIPANT- So my name is Nicholas Wheeler, I'm 20 years old, and I'm from Savannah, GA.

B- What house do you live in on campus and what do you study?

PARTICIPANT- So I live in Quincy House and I study Applied Math, uh, my field of application is Economics and I'm getting a secondary in Astrophysics

B- Gotcha, do you study any languages here?

Participant - Yes so I began studying Russian when I was in my sophomore year. I took Russian AA and AB uh that summer I went to St. Petersburg to study there for three months, and then after that my next year my junior year I didn't take any languages but I resumed with Russian this year and I'm planning on taking BA and BB and I also started taking Arabic.

B- Um, what was part of your motivation for studying those languages -- studying your concentration first off, your secondary second off, and then the languages?

PARTICIPANT- So I started studying uhh Applied Math actually, I think...beginning of Junior year. When I initially came here I studied Physics and the reason was I planned on becoming a physics professors, physics always seemed interesting to me. But um, after I started getting into the more rigorous academic work, started looking at different research proposals I could pursue, things like that, uhm I decided Physics just wasn't for me. So I went through a period of crises where I was just switching between a number of different concentrations and I settled on

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Economics and realized after settling on Economics that I'd taken too many difficult classes and my grades were too low to justify having a concentration where most of the people have a 4.0 so I decided to do something a little more difficult so I did the Applied Math economics route and because I'd taken so many physics classes already I wanted to make something of that so I took the Astrophysics secondary.

B- Uh huh

PARTICIPANT- Now as for studying the languages, ummm I got into Sophomore year and I didn't have any language skills to fulfill any kind of placement tests. The natural route would've been to take Spanish cuz I took Spanish in high school, however, I just was kinda bored of Spanish and everybody here takes it and I wanted to do something a little different, and uh Russian seemed interesting. So I started taking Russian and then as I became more and more sure of a career in the military, I decided to take Russian more seriously and I also started studying Arabic.

B- Gotcha, very cool. What do your parents do for a living?

PARTICIPANT- So, uh, my dad is deceased but he used to be an elevator mechanic. My mom was always a stay at home mom, but now her and her fiancée, my step-dad, are both managers of a bar together, they own a bar together in Savannah. Prior to that my step-dad worked, he was in the Navy for twelve years, and then became an electrical engineer by taking college classes in the Navy, worked in private aviation for a long time.

B- Do your parents and your stepparents included have college degrees?

PARTICIPANT- Uhhhh, no, my, neither my mom nor my had a college degree. My stepdad might have a college degree considering he got an education through the Navy, but uh that wouldn't have been the traditional route so uh maybe my stepdad, but nah my mom's not educated.

B- Do you have any siblings?

PARTICIPANT- Yes, I have an older brother and an older sister.

B- Gotcha, and then, did they go to college, where did they go, and what did they study?

PARTICIPANT- Yes so my sister's the eldest of the three of us, she is thirty three years old. She started out college in the local university in Savannah, Armstrong. She transferred to Georgia Southern which is about 30 minutes outside of Savannah after that, then transferred back after a semester just cuz Georgia Southern is a party school and she couldn't handle it. Then she met her husband and because he is a Ranger in the Army they had to move up to North Georgia so she could be with him while he was in camp and she began taking classes at the University of Phoenix in Atlanta ummm where she got her degree. So, she graduated from the University of Phoenix, she studied Business Administration there although she was originally a math concentrator funnily enough. As for my brother who is the middle child, he is twenty seven years old, he began studying at Armstrong also but he transferred to Georgia Tech and got a degree in Mechanical Engineering, that's the field that he currently works in.

B- Gotcha, So you highlighted a few people in your family who have served in the military before, can you just list those out for me one more time and just say whether they were officer or enlisted.

PARTICIPANT- Yes so my stepdad was enlisted in the Navy, he was in the Navy for twelve years. My brother in law was an Army Ranger for 7 years I believe. I have...four uncles who all either served in the Army or the Navy and they were all enlisted--

B- And what time period was that?

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PARTICIPANT- So uhh two...of the four served in Vietnam. One of the four served in Korea, I have another uncle now that I think about it who served in the Persian Gulf War of the nineteen nineties, and then I have a great uncle who served as an enlisted person in the army during World War II.

B- Got it...So as you were as you mentioned you were interested in studying Physics when you got here, was that your intended concentration or major as you were applying to colleges?

PARTICIPANT- Yes yes. As I was applying to colleges, I was a junior in high school as I was applying to colleges and I really enjoyed my Physics classes that I took in high school and again it always just been interested in the universe and been good at math. I applied here assuming that I would be studying Physics, well I applied everywhere assuming I'd be studying Physics.

B- Uh huh and then where did you apply and where were you hoping to go. Was Harvard your top choice orrr?

PARTICIPANT- So because I applied as a junior I didn't apply anywhere that like you would consider a safety school. I applied to Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and then Stanford, Columbia, Cornell, uhm anndddd CalTech. I didn't take the required SAT subject tests for CalTech, they got rescinded, of the remaining six, the one I was most uhhh hoping for was Harvard. Cuz that was just the one I knew the best, I was also thinking maybe Princeton or Stanford would be cool that would've been a decision. I ultimately ended up getting into Harvard and Columbia, I had never experienced a big city and Columbia didn't have a very renowned Physics program compared to Harvard so I made the choice to go to Harvard based off of that.

B- Uh huh

PARTICIPANT- But when I got into Harvard I went ahead and got promoted, promoted myself to senior in high school, so I was a senior for two weeks, and then graduated and came here.

B- Can you talk about how that worked with you applying as a junior and kind of what process facilitated that?

PARTICIPANT- Yep, so uh going into high school I was fourteen and I was living with my parents. I ended up getting kicked out of my house for different reasons and after my freshman year of high school, so I moved up with my sister in North Georgia where she was living and lived with her through my sophomore year of high school. By that point I didn't really feel any connection to any schools and I was really tired of my math and english classes, and in Georgia you're able to take the final exam for a class and if you get at least a 90% on it then that's your grade for the class and that counts as the credits. So I did that for all my math and english classes so I had a bunch of credits lined up and then so going into my sophomore year I did that and then after my sophomore year we relocated...

B- You and your sister?

PARTICIPANT- Yeah, my sister moved from Delonge which was the city I was living in to Gainesville which is a city thirty minutes away from that and then I went to a different school there. the first two schools I went to had block scheduling, which means you take eight classes a year so the minimum number of required credits was slightly higher. The school I went to my junior year, high school, only had seven classes a year because they were yearlong classes instead of semesterly. Because of that the required number of credits required to graduate just because you took four fewer classes throughout your high school career was lower. And because of that with all the tests I'd taken previously, enough credits to graduate.

B- Oh interesting

PARTICIPANT- So going into that, because I'd gone to three different high schools and didn't particularly care about graduating with any one of them, I uhh ended up applying to colleges

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in...it was a spur of the moment decision I didn't apply early anywhere it was right before the March first, I think that was the deadline, March first deadline. I was just sitting there at home, huh I might as well you know what I'll do it, so I sent out the applications, basically submitted the same essay to all 6 six schools and uhhh I was like well if I get in I'll uh get promoted to be a senior and go and if I don't, I'll stay another year and then I'll have another chance to try again. So, that's what ended up happening.

B- As you were, so, you mentioned you were applying as a physics major, did you think you would be...continue on to a career in academia before you got to Harvard?

PARTICIPANT- Yes, yes. So I uhhh initially applied thinking I wanted to do research in Astrophysics. I'd looked at a lot of astrophysicists like Steven Hawking, and read a lot of those books. Neil DeGrasse Tyson was becoming big at that time and of course Carl Sagan and people like and I really wanted you know to aspire to that. Ummm and that carried me through probably the first three quarters of freshman year before I ended up changing my interests.

B- Uh huh. What kind of activities did you do in high school?

PARTICIPANT- So in high school I was really into sports, I played football I wrestled. I was also president of the Academic Team, or the Quiz Bowl team, and I worked, I believe I was on the student council, and then I think I was in Future Farmers of America. A buncha different organizations but the ones I really cared about were the academic team and the sports teams. For the academic team, I also competed in a statewide competition called SkillsUSA which is traditionally a trade competition so I got to interact with people who were you know the best teenage plumbers in the state, the best teenage masons in the state things like that. So it was a really cool experience. The first time I went as a Quiz Bowl unit as a sophomore in high school, we did pretty well. And then my junior year my academic team coach, the teacher who was responsible for uhhh proctoring our academic team, uhhh didn't want to compile the resource for...didn't want to send in the application for us to compete at SkillsUSA for that but I still ended up going to the tournament and ended up competing in Applied Math. Sooo those were the main activities that I did. And then I worked, I had a 30 hour a week job when I was in high school starting midway through the fall semester my sophomore year and uh that took up probably the majority of my time.

B- And what were you doing?

PARTICIPANT- So I initially applied in September of 20thirteen to be a copy-writer at a local internet marketing agency. I had written an essay for one of my English classes that was about eight times too long and I still wanted you know to be recognized and it was so good that my teacher actually asked me to read it out in class much to the dismay of the other student in My English. But I was like, you know this is really good work, you know I feel like I could actually do this so I sent it in to that internet marking agency, Get You Wired, and uh asked if I could you know come in for an interview to be a copy writer and uh they said yes. I came in, went through an interview process, and they were like, alright we want you on. I got trained up and do that for awhile. I was the only person who didn't have a college degree at the time, and that ended up changing afterwards, they hired a couple more people, who didn't stay on very long but, it was a new experience for the both of us. After three months I decided writing for a job wasn't really for me so I ended up switching to what's called Marketing Automation. And marketing automation, what you do is you work in some kind of system, so I was working in the Customer Relationship Management System in Fusionsoft. Basically what I did was I would work with the top business people around America and work with them on how they can set up programs inside of a CRO, and a CRO is really like an automated system that allows you to communicate with clients

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without having to actually manually manage the communications. You don't have to actually type out the emails or anything like that, it does it all for you. It allows you to mass market to a potential list of leads so I would setup systems like that. Well first we would convince them to purchase Fusionsoft, that was our sales team, and then they'd come on with me, we'd discuss what they wanted to do, and then we would setup whatever they wanted as campaigns inside of their system. And then over the course of several calls you know I would strategize with them and consult with them on how they can use the campaigns, best marketing practices in their respective industries, things like that. So I still do that on and off to this day, that's the department I ended up working in primarily. You know, been able to work with some cool people through that uhhh Damon John off of Shark Tank is one of our clients. I met with him.

B- Yeah he's awesome

PARTICIPANT- Yeah so uh yeah that was my experience.

B- Very cool. What did you do last summer?

PARTICIPANT -So last summer I just worked full time at the job I was just talking about. So we started, they were starting a new program right before I left to go to Harvard. I had to train one of my replacements and uh they were doing alright but they had this new thing rolling out where we were working with what's called a kickstart. So, it was basically pre set list of packages that a person could purchase and you bring these different types of communications to their systems and what the clients pay for is five calls where you come on and literally just build from scratch like what do you need and build with them. It was a lot more about strategy and actual consultation than the stuff I worked in previously and stuff I taught my replacement how to do. So because of that they needed someone who was more freeform so I came in to do that and to train that person again on how to communicate with clients and how really to build from the ground up. So I just spent my time doing that.

B- Very cool. Let's shift a little more towards talking about your interest in the military. So I'm curious, if you could pick a time in your Harvard career, when did you start considering the military as a career option? Obviously you've known about it you know with family connection

PARTICIPANT- So the military was in the back of my head for a long time...because of how daunting doing a long P.h.D program was, I wasn't seriously considering it when I was considering a career in academia. But as I shifted interests to economics I began to realize that if I was only gonna be doing an undergraduate degree, the time that I would be spending otherwise doing a graduate degree could be better spent in some form of service. And something that definitely heavily influenced my decision was of course having a lot of family in the military -- growing up with this spirit and idea that service is important and everyone should do it in some form or another, combined with the fact that the jobs that I was looking at, given my interest in economics now, are largely competitive because you know the finance and the consulting jobs that people go to after majoring in Applied Math Ec or Economics are jobs that a lot of Harvard students are you know are reaching for. And, because of my terrible experience with Physics my spring semester freshman year my GPA has never been what I think it probably should be and uh it also -- military service I'm talking about -- makes you more competitive as an applicant for those kind of positions. It seems like a win-win, you know I've enjoyed so many privileges in my life up to this point especially considering with the ample financial aid Harvard gives you and everything like that, I don't pay very much to go here. Having that kind of opportunity made me realize that the reason this whole thing works is because we have a stable system in America and you know helping to provide for that stability for four short years seems like a pretty even trade to me. And there are also all kinds of benefits that go along with military service. Access to free

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health insurance at great clinics, a military discount, you know, on big purchases, lack of sales tax on base, free housing, an ability especially considered that I'm a single male right now with no serious relationship commitments, an ability especially in the Navy to see the world, was a big one. And you know, as an officer, you're making a pretty competitive wage so it seemed like something that I'd be interested in.

B- You mention that you have a value, you see a value in service, and I wonder where, where has that kind of come from?

PARTICIPANT- Well, I mean growing up in the South, especially in really conservative environments, the military is probably just the most highly lauded profession you can go into. It's just seen there where I grew up as giving your life to something greater than yourself. As opposed to pursuing the paycheck or trade, it's really about sacrificing for other people because of that you get a lot of respect as a veteran in the south. I mean any time you go to a bar, especially if you're coming off base in a uniform or something like that, somebody's gonna offer to pay for your drink. So, I kinda grew up with this idea that service was, military service in particular, was the...greatest thing you can do with your life if you're willing to put forth that sacrifice. Now that goes even more so for people who enlist, because I'm not enlisting I can't count myself among them, enlisted people make a third of the amount that officers do and their jobs are arguably much more difficult because they're actually the ones on the front lines and doing the real work for America, so that goes even more so for them. But combined with that you know my experiences at Harvard kinda branching out have shown me that military service isn't the only kind of service you can do that's laudable, you know there's all kinds of things you can do like the Peace Corps, you know working for international organizations to build or rebuild, develop, in countries around the world. All kinds of things like that I think are important, this is just the kind of service that I think that most appeals to me.

B- Would you say that your family kinda also shared values around the military that your community did?

PARTICIPANT- Oh yeah absolutely, absolutely. So I come from a very red-blooded conservative family and although I don't materialize that myself, and you know they've always been some of the people that respected the military the most in my life. And that's probably shaped by the fact that probably half the males in my family have been or served in the military so that's definitely something that I grew up with and been around with my family in particular.

B- Can you tell me a little bit more about why you chose the Navy over the other branches?

PARTICIPANT- So the Navy...you know so because I have a lot of people in my family who have served in the military everybody has their own conception of which branch is the best. I have people in my family that have served in all kinds of branches and each branch kind of has a stigma or an idea of the servicemen in other branches and its often pejorative. So for instance, my brother in law thinks that Navy dudes are weird and Air Force dudes are pussies and everything like that. For me, uhhh the way I went about it was there are four main branches that you can consider really.

B- No love for the coast guard?

PARTICIPANT- No not the coast guard, that was never in consideration. The Marines are actually a subset of the Navy but you can consider them separately. There's the Navy, Marines, the Air Force, and the Army. Uhh the Army is by far the largest of the four, I think its larger than all the other three combined. If I were to go into the army I would probably go in as an Army Ranger but the army life never really just appealed to me. There...the way their bases are set up and how they live overseas isn't great compared to the other branches. The probably the greatest

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or most comfortable branch for an officer would be the Air Force because pretty much you've got a desk job if you work as an officer in the Air Force you aren't really on the front lines or anything like that. And that doesn't necessarily appeal to me there especially because a lot of your time spent as a member of the Air Force is gonna be spent coast-side in the States. And then of course, Marines, there's a common mantra among the marines, you know, "every marine a rifleman." They're very much the combat unit, you know if you don't consider special forces, they're very much the combat unit of the military and I was figuring you know if I'm gonna be in a combat unit I'd rather be in a special force unit in one of the other branches. The Marines have their own special forces, MARSOC, but I never really learned much about them up until this point. One of our family friends is actually in MARSOC, I don't know, it just doesn't sound like an appealing life to me. But uhhh the thing that really drew me to the Navy was I was in conversation once with my cousin who's actually a female who's an Air Force officer, the only officer in my family, and she was saying that if she could do it all over again and if her husband who's also in the Air Force wasn't in the Air Force, she probably would've chosen the Navy. The basis for that decision for her was she had met quite a few officers who were in the Navy and one of her good friends was among them and she just said that especially for someone who's single who doesn't have a relationship commitment, people in the Navy travel much more than people in the other branches because they're constantly on ships docking in foreign ports and even the officers are you know paddling along on the ships along with the enlisted men. So because I've always been somebody who loved traveling and that's something that's been one of my dreams to travel all over the world that was probably the part that drew me to the Navy the most.

B- Gotcha. Have you had any specific experiences at Harvard that influenced your decision to serve?

PARTICIPANT- Uhhmm, I mean so so the experience that I already talked about where you know my grades were a little lower definitely influence the decision on the basis that it would make me more competitive in perhaps grad school perhaps job applications. So that's that's definitely affected me. Also I've definitely seen...I hate using this word but I've seen a lot of privilege at Harvard in the sense that I see a lot of people who grew up in very wealthy circumstance who don't really appreciate the kind of life context in which they arose and don't really ever think about the people who are you know right now sleeping in tents in Iraq, fighting, however you feel about any of the foreign interventions that the United States has gone through in it's history. But who are fighting, at least in their minds, for people like us to be successful, and people like their families and not many people here spare much time to think about that. And seeing that, because I come from a place where it's completely different, where everyone is constantly thinking about the military and everything has to be politicized, that's why the you know NFL crisis is going on, so maybe they're taking it too far in that direction but uhhh seeing that here made me realize that I don't want to be one of those people that...can say all I've ever experienced is privilege. I want to be able to pay it forward in some sense and make sacrifices and truly appreciate what I have, but also because I think it's a moral imperative because I am somebody with means like and I feel like I can be useful as a member of the military. I feel like it's my obligation as someone who benefits from so much in the U.S. to do that and really seeing how much being a..how far the benefits of being an American go...by seeing how well off some of the people here are...is one of the big factors in why I chose to go into the military in the first place.

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B- Mmmm, would you say that your...both your immediate social circle and more broadly...is this something that people are aware of? Of your plans, do you have any other friends in similar situations?

PARTICIPANT- Yes. So I don't...I don't really...I have acquaintances that I know of that are going into the military. Nobody who's really a close friend. My roommate, my best friend, Harry, his sister actually went to Johns Hopkins and is now an officer in the Army. So that's probably as close as my friendly connections go with experiences in the military. As far as whether my friends know, yes, pretty much everybody that I talk to knows that that's my immediate plan after I graduate. I do have a friend that has been talking about perhaps going into the Navy OCS with me after he graduates from the School of Education so that might be something that we move forward on, but I don't know where at this moment how serious that is. Everyone that I'm close with is pretty much aware of that decision.

B- What has been the reaction of people around you?

PARTICIPANT- So mostly ummm

B- Specifically Harvard people.

PARTICIPANT- Yeah I'd say mostly supportive, ummmm there are definitely people that...even my family which is kinda odd considering everything that I've said tonight...my family is probably the most critical of the decision. they're like "holy shit, you're going to Harvard, you're getting a Harvard education and you're gonna potentially waste it by going into the military?" And I say the same thing that I've said to you, I want to pay it forward, but I feel like a lot of the people I've spoken to at Harvard are more supportive of that decision. I mean they they definitely see the...the morals of it...they see that it's beneficial. They think its beneficial you know for me also. I feel like military service can really shape who you are as a person in positive ways. So so yeah I'd say the reaction of my friends is mostly supportive, I can't think of anybody who's been overly critical.

B- What is the process ro timeline for you as someone who isn't doing ROTC to be commissioning into the military

PARTICIPANT- So yeah, if you want to be an officer in the military there are three routes that you can go through. One of them is attending a military service academy, you know West Point or Navy at Annapolis, but uh you go through like that obviously I'm not doing that. You can go through ROTC for four years but because I was on the rugby team that was never really an option not something that I found particularly enticing anyway. And then the final option which is the option I'm gonna go through is Officer Candidate School is a three month program that you attend after you graduate. You have to have a college degree to go. It may sound like 3 months is a short span of time, but when you consider that ROTC, you might be getting yourself 8-ten hours a week you know throughout your college career, OCS is actually your life for three months. And then they teach you the same skills that they'd teach you in ROTC. So getting commissioned into the military from either of those two is comparable, you go in at the same rank, there's no real distinction between the two ,perhaps socially but that's beside the point. For me, my timeline, so because I'm going into the Navy, somebody else you may speak to who's also considering military service is Brandon Lee who also goes to Harvard, he's going into the Marines. The Marines have an option where you can actually attend OCS in the summer between your junior and senior years of college. So basically you can go in for those three months, get out of OCS, and as soon as you graduate from college you're guaranteed your position so you just begin working immediately. The Navy does not have that option, you actually can't begin talking seriously to a recruiter about sending in an application to OCS until three months within your

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graduation date. So for me, that'll be near the end of winter break is when I'll begin talking to my serious recruiter. I'll probably be doing that in Georgia, and then in those three months you just bring up your application, get your transcripts your recs, everything like that in order. You send it in front of a board and when the board approves it you're able to go in and get tested and then get administered an exam and go into OCS for the three months and then pending your result from OCS you get positions you get more tests everything like that. So that's my immediate plan, I'm considering also doing SEALS, the special forces in the Navy, if I do that then between OCS and my actual military career starting, I'll have a six month program called BUDS in San Francisco which is Navy seals training, specialized training, that's still an up in the air decision I haven't thought too seriously about it yet. But that would be the timeline so uh the three months would begin, there's always an OCS class that starts in the summer, hopefully I'd be able to start then. Otherwise I can wait till the winter and then after those 3 months you're a commissioned officer in the US military, there's usually like a four year service requirement along with that depending on the position you get and the training that you require and that's what it'll look like.

B- Can you tell me what it's been like to not really be doing serious job stuff now in the midst of while other seniors are?

PARTICIPANT- It's it's VERY nice, it's one of the perks of choosing this. I did do a little bit of job searching my junior year for a summer internship but I didn't realize how early you have to begin for some of these competitive positions and I just wasn't willing to do that. I didn't want to walk around like a little thumb in a suit like everybody else is and I uh honestly from what little I experienced of the interview process, I really don't like it. Attending these recruiting events, I'm much more excited to be able to do something more individual where they're not looking at like a whole swath of students graduating at the same time and evaluating them on that basis but being evaluated rather as someone coming out of the military in an unorthodox situation and being evaluated as an individual on that basis. So I haven't decided about that but it has been ice like I mentioned not having to go through recruiting is a lot less stressful. I feel like I have a more concrete plan of what I'm gonna be doing and I'm not sitting here in this pivotal time when you're taking your senior classes and finishing out and finalizing your GPA. I'm not sitting here worrying or stressing about job applications, whether I made this position or that. So yeah it has been pretty nice.

B- If you don't do special forces, what position do you see yourself having in the Navy?

PARTICIPANT- So the most, now this is not entirely my decision, how you do on examinations that you are administered once you get into the military is strongly determines what you end up doing cuz they only want the best people in certain positions. One of the higher up positions that I'd probably be most interested in is as a military intelligence officer and that might occur even if I am doing SEALS because there are intelligence officers in the SEALS so uh that's probably that's my immediate plan for career. But I'm open to other options, like I said when you send in your portfolio it's encouraged that you play down how important it is to get certain positions in the military because they want to see first and foremost that you're dedicated to military service and then to a position in the military cuz those are the kind of people who succeed and are the most effective in the military. So I'll probably send in a list of you know five or ten positions that I could potentially be interested in depending on their needs and then the decision at that point would be largely out of my control.

B- What would you say is the likelihood of you staying in beyond your service commitment?

PARTICIPANT- Right now it's really up in the air, I can't really speak to that too much. I can't say how much I'll enjoy you know military service, you know if I enjoy it at all. From the

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experiences that I've been relayed from my family members who were in the military it sounds like an excellent time, and you know based off of if I meet someone and decide to have a family, that obviously doesn't jive great with military service, especially if you're just starting, so that could be a part of my decision after four years whether I resign. Also, you know just whether I enjoy if I think the money that's coming in at that point, it's really competitive what kind of job opportunities there are after four years. You know it's really up in the air I'm definitely not shutting myself off to it because I might love it and you know some things are more important, it's cliché but some things are more important than money and I definitely feel like no matter what it won't be four years wasted.

B- How would you say that your decision has, once you decided that this is a path you want to be pursuing, how did that decision affect academic, personal, or social choices you made after that fact?

PARTICIPANT- So it's obviously the primary reason I'm taking Arabic right now which is definitely making my semester hell. Social choices, I mean I've kinda made the same social choices I always have, stay away from hard drugs everything like that, well obviously that would be discounting now or rather disqualifying now going into a position especially like intelligence where you need security clearance. Things like that...so that's probably affected my, I mean it's effected marginally my social life, I don't really do any hard drugs anyway. Besides that, that's the academic, that's the social, I've definitely tried harder to better my grades just because there are certain loose but present cut offs that exist for going into the military for things like GPA and things like that, obviously I want to make myself as competitive an applicant as can be. And having a concrete plan has definitely helped to focus my studies and worry more about things like that.

B- You mentioned rugby being one of the, rugby and general lack of appeal, as being some of the reasons why you're not interested in ROTC. Can you speak a little more to that?

PARTICIPANT- So we often have uhhh morning practices and lifts for rugby and most of the time we spent at ROTC is in the morning so I'd have to head over to MIT at 6 AM, 6 to 8 whatever it is I don't remember the exact hours, that would conflict with rugby because rugby is such a big part of my social and academic experience so far...its not something that I'd want to give up for something like ROTC.

B- Yeah...Have you had any experiences at Harvard that have made you question your decision to serve?

PARTICIPANT- Not particularly. You know obviously if Goldman gives me a call and says hey you know your friends say you're fuckin awesome and we want you to go work for us that might impact my decision I can't say that would never happen but there's nothing that's really happened to me especially recently that there's kinda shift in my decision at all.

B- What are your thoughts on Harvard's culture towards military service?

PARTICIPANT- It pisses me off, that's my first thought. I think there are a lot of people at Harvard who don't appreciate...service. People are very critical, so my opinion is that it's perfectly valid to be critical of United States military operations, I'm critical of quite a few of them myself, but for the people who go in ummm I think that it is...unjustly assuming...like a wrong motivation for people to think that they're just going in you know to I don't even know what people tell themselves...just going in to you know kill people or whatever. Most people go in because they truly believe that despite its flaws, America is a great country and we do great things around the world and people who are willing to sacrifice their own individual...their individualism for that greater good I think deserve to be lauded no matter what. I don't think

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many people at Harvard appreciate that for instance on Monday on Veterans Day, we don't have that day off which is ridiculous. MIT has it off, quite a few other colleges in the Boston area have it off and I think that the decision for that not to be declared a university holiday is a little too political and I don't like it when the military is politicized even though that comes from both sides. So yeah, I think it's under-appreciated I feel like people are overly critical to service people in general and not appreciative enough. But that's also you know that that could also be ranting about a minority population who just happens to be especially vocal. The vast majority of the people I associate with, my friends, love the military and think the people who you know join the military are doing great things. I guess that's really my opinion.

B- Do you think that Harvard's culture...impedes or promotes students joining the military?

PARTICIPANT- Impedes. Strongly impedes. Students who go here, for good reason I mean, it's the greatest university in the world. Students who go here expect big things out of themselves. And that often leads to stress and mental health issues and everything like that and many of these students don't exceed these massive insurmountable expectations ummm but many of the people who go here get some of the best research opportunities, have the ability to go to some of the best medical and law schools, including Harvard's own, and if they don't decide to do graduate work they have the ability to get jobs at places like Goldman-Sachs and places where they can make astronomical amounts of money straight out of college. Because people are constantly surrounded by other students who get those opportunities, you know they want the same things for themselves. And the military life isn't glamorous, it's not something that you're gonna go to if you're trying to make a massive amount of money. You might realistically have expectations for after you get out, that's, you don't get rich by going into the military. I think that seeing so many people have that culture of just financial success at Harvard dissuades people from making that decision.

B- Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Do you think that there are any elements of the culture that are conducive towards serving in the military?

PARTICIPANT- Uhhh let me think about that.

B- Yeah take your time...And if not I can lead with a follow up question.

PARTICIPANT- I can't really think of any...I mean so...The people who are drawn to the military tend to overwhelmingly be from either rural or conservative areas. Harvard obviously is a very politically liberal place is not very conducive to military service. Now there are plenty of liberals in the military, its not a sweeping statement, it's just not the kind of culture that would make a lot of people decide to go into the military. And then of course you know as we were just talking about with the uh being surrounded by people who can make a lot of money...that plays into the decision for not going into the military. I cant really think of anything that is inherent about Harvard's culture that is conducive to military service or conducive to getting people to want to go into the military.

B- So the reason I ask is because, Dean Khurana, one of the statistics that he loves to mention in his mission of the college speech is that Harvard has given more...um...men and women...more men and women of Harvard have received the Medal of Honor than any other university spare West Point and Annapolis. And so the fact that that is something that A he says regularly and B is common knowledge around here, you know says something about Harvard's...Harvard's view or connection to the military.

PARTICIPANT- That's actually...that's very surprising. I didn't know that statistic...because everyone who goes to West Point goes into the military.

B- Yeah so, besides those two schools, we have given the most...

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PARTICIPANT- Oh besides those two?

B- Yes yes. So spare West Point and Annapolis, Harvard has given has had the most Medal of Honor recipients.

PARTICIPANT- Oh that makes more sense. I mean, there are other military colleges that send an overwhelming percentage of their student population to the military like the University of North Georgia where I dual enrolled in high school. So that's kind of surprising with that, that...the reason for that is probably multivariate...I mean if you look at the statistics who graduate from Harvard each year and go into the military. It's by far the least represented among the popular profession choices post graduate college. It's by far the least common choice, I haven't looked at the statistics recently but it might be more like 2 or 3 people each year.

B- Maybe more people unemployed than going into the military.

PARTICIPANT- It might be 2 or 3 people each year, I mean that's probably also the kind of people who go to Harvard and graduate from here successful are the kind of people who would excel in their service so that might have something to do with the fact that we have so many Medal of Honor recipients but that's interesting I didn't know about that. I don't know if that speaks at all to...

B- I just think that it's interesting that that is something that I've heard mentioned.

PARTICIPANT- Yeah I mean I think that's an incredibly laudable statistic no matter what. Yeah that's interesting.

B- How do you think Harvard would be different if more people decided to serve after graduation?

PARTICIPANT- How would Harvard be different...Now....I am the outlier here, by far. But the people who I know who plan on going into the military post graduation are often very straight minded very disciplined people. Now that is a characteristic that a lot of Harvard students embody anyway you know just to be successful at a place like Harvard you have to be regimented you know and study well and everything like that especially for people in more difficult concentrations. But I think that that spirit of discipline and that spirit of responsibility might show itself a little more at Harvard if more people went into the military. I can say that one of my good friends who's on the Rugby team was in the military prior to coming here, so he was enlisted for four years and then came here. And there are a couple of people at Harvard who have that same experience and the people I've met who have gone that route are some of the most up...probably by virtue of just being older...are some of the most mature disciplined just very...uh....like...mild mannered people that I know. Whether that would change how people are in their undergraduate life, assuming this is preceding their military experience, I'm not sure. I mean I can say nothing but good things about the people I know who have chosen that route.