

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

UNIVERSITY SENATE

For Immediate Release

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**Columbia University Senate Task Force on Military Engagement
Statement on Events of February 15, 2011**

NEW YORK, February 21, 2011— The Task Force on Military Engagement is a non-partisan facilitator of discussions about military engagement on campus with a strong focus on the issue of formal participation in the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program. It comprises five students and four faculty members.

It was constituted with the goals of informing the University community about the basic facts and history surrounding ROTC at Columbia, facilitating debate and discussion about ROTC at Columbia, and ultimately providing a report to the University Senate on campus opinion regarding ROTC.

To this end, the Task Force has been holding a series of University-wide public hearings. These hearings have been meant to provide a forum for community members to discuss the issues in an open and constructive manner.

The hearings as a whole have been considerate and thoughtful. There have been very few instances where members of the audience have begun to interrupt speakers. With the exception of one brief exchange that occurred approximately two hours into the hearing on February 15, 2011, the Task Force's process has been characterized by respect and civility.

It is the Task Force's position that reactions from the audience that interfere with a speaker's ability to express an opinion are antithetical to the notions of free speech and dialogue that the Columbia community holds dear. The ability to respectfully listen to a comment with which one doesn't agree—rather than attempt to silence it—is the bedrock of a tolerant and open community.

The Task Force has taken a number of steps, in addition to public hearings, to engage with the Columbia community. A non-partisan information resource website that does not take a position on the question of the Reserve Officers Training Corps program on campus has been created, with the intent of providing basic information on ROTC and its history at Columbia University.

The website is also acting as an up-to-date resource regarding Task Force decisions, and has been publishing submissions and letters received from the Columbia community on issues of

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ROTC and military engagement. The website may be found at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/senate/militaryengagement/>.

The Task Force also is conducting a broad survey of Columbia students to gauge attitudes towards ROTC and Columbia's relations with the military. The survey involves the student bodies of Barnard College, Columbia College, General Studies, SEAS, and SIPA. It opened on February 16th and will close on February 24th. The results will be included in the Task Force's report to the University Senate, to be released in early March.

As a matter of record, Columbia University has a long history of engagement with the U.S. Armed Forces.

- The growing community of student military veterans at Columbia today is due in part to the University's active embrace of the Yellow Ribbon program. Well over 300 veterans across 17 of Columbia's schools are currently receiving tuition waivers from Columbia, with many funds matched by the Department of Veteran Affairs. This funding supplements the base educational benefits provided by the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.
- Columbia is the only private university recognized by G.I. Jobs as a "military friendly school."
- During the course of World War II, Columbia hosted a U.S. Navy midshipmen's school that trained over 20,000 naval officers.
- The University has hosted leading military figures, such as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Michael Mullen, who began his national speaking tour at Columbia in April 2010. (<http://news.columbia.edu/oncampus/2000>)
- In 2008, the University dedicated a new campus war memorial to honor Columbia alumni who gave their lives in military service, dating as far back as the American Revolution. (<http://news.columbia.edu/oncampus/1192>)

About the Columbia University Senate

The Columbia University Senate is the University-wide legislative and policy-making body at Columbia University. It is mandated to consider all matters affecting more than one school, or the entire University. Its 108 elected and appointed members represent faculty, students, administration, staff, alumni, librarians, and research officers. The Senate was established in 1969.