

Military Affairs Liaison Dillon Smith '19 seeks to revitalize Alfred University ROTC program

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ALFRED, NY – When Dillon Smith '19 was developing his graduate assistantship at Alfred University, one of his key initiatives was to promote and grow the University's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program. One semester into his tenure as Military Affairs liaison, the tools are in place to help him accomplish that goal.

Currently, there are four ROTC cadets enrolled in the program. Smith said two of those students have received ROTC Scholarships – one is a four-year national scholarship; the other is for two years – while the others are awaiting eligibility to receive scholarship funding. A student must complete one year in program before qualifying for a scholarships. Nine prospective students, seeking admission in the fall, have applied for ROTC scholarships.

Scholarships, Smith said, are one of the most attractive benefits to joining ROTC. They pay 100 percent of tuition as well as a book allowance and monthly living stipend.

Another benefit cadets enjoy is they earn academic credit for their ROTC courses. Cadets take coursework in Military Science, with classes taught in Alfred – on the Alfred University and Alfred State College campuses – and at the St. Bonaventure University. St. Bonaventure is the host institution for the ROTC Seneca Battalion, which also includes Alfred University, Alfred State College, Houghton College, Jamestown Community College and the University of Pittsburgh-Bradford.

Alfred University's ROTC program was founded in 1952. The Board of Trustees voted to require all physically qualified male students to participate in ROTC, beginning with the 1956-57 academic year. Compulsory participation in the program ended in 1968. The ROTC program was based on the Alfred University campus until 1976, when low numbers forced cadets to take classwork and training at St. Bonaventure.

In 1992, when "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the policy that discriminated against individuals based on sexual orientation, was implemented by the U.S. government, Alfred University's ROTC program remained active. However, the

University stopped accepting ROTC scholarship funding from the U.S. Army and ceased offering credits for ROTC classes. In 2011, Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed and the University resumed accepting ROTC scholarships. However, the University did not at the time resume making ROTC classes credit-bearing. Smith said that has changed beginning this semester, when students will again earn credit for Military Science classes taken through ROTC.

"The biggest change is the school has acknowledged that the courses are credit-based," Smith said. Cadets earn two or three credits (classroom instruction and labs) each semester, usually finishing with between 15 and 20 credits of Military Science coursework. Smith said the credits can be used for non-required general electives; to fulfill physical education requirements; or to apply toward earning a Leadership minor.

Students awarded ROTC scholarships commit to four years active duty or six years in the Army Reserves. Upon graduation, they are commissioned as Second Lieutenants.

"That is a big benefit because it puts you in the military as an officer. If you want to join (the Army) – either the Reserves or active duty, you can join ROTC here and you'll go in as an officer," said Smith, who knows all about the challenges that come with combining military service with college life.

Smith was an Army Reservist when he enrolled at Alfred University in the spring of 2014. His studies were interrupted by his military obligations on several occasions before he earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and experimental psychology (minors in sociology and public law) in May 2019. Last fall, Smith began his graduate studies at Alfred, pursuing a master's degree in College Student Development while serving his graduate assistantship at Military Affairs Liaison.

ROTC cadets wouldn't see their studies interrupted as Smith's were. "ROTC spreads your (military) training out while you're in school, so you don't miss school," he said. "You're a student first, soldier second."

A significant benefit to participating in ROTC, Smith noted, is the program teaches cadets to become leaders, a trait that will benefit them during and after their time serving in the military.

Alfred University has a long history of military service, with several hundred students – many of them participating in the ROTC here – serving after graduation. Notable Alfred University alumni who have served include: Civil War veteran Col. William Wallace Brown, Class of 1861, elected congressman from Pennsylvania; Wallace "Wally" Higgins '52 (U.S. Army Air Corps, member of Tuskegee Airmen); Col. Sara "Sally" Pritchett '62 (U.S. Marine Corps (1964-87), retired Navy Information Officer at the Pentagon); Lt. Kevin Flaherty '65 (first commissioned student from Alfred University killed in Vietnam; the former ROTC house on campus was named in his honor); Peter Cuneo '67, current member of Alfred University Board of Trustees (served in the U.S. Navy after graduating with honors from Officer Candidate School; served three years aboard the USS Joseph Strauss and was decorated for his service during Vietnam); Col. Harold W. Lord '69 (participated in ROTC at Alfred, retired U.S. Army, father of current Alfred University Trustee Christine (Lord) Heckle '92, Ph.D. '98); Robert L. "Steve" Stephens, '71 MS Ed. (retired brigadier general in the U.S. Army; earned his master's degree while serving as an ROTC instructor; joined the Alfred University Board of Trustees in 2007 and was elected a Life Trustee in 2017); and Kristin (ne Christopher) Beck '89 (retired U.S. Navy, serving with the United States Naval Special Warfare Development Group (DEVGRU) as well as SEAL Team Six; first openly transgender former U.S. Navy SEAL).

Beck, who earned a bachelor's degree in political science, said her experience as a student at Alfred University benefitted her as a soldier, helping shape her role as a leader.

"I am proud to be an alumna of Alfred University and also proud of my service as a Navy SEAL in the military," Beck commented. "I feel that many of my decisions in the military were profoundly shaped by my Liberal Arts education at Alfred. Leaders from Alfred will be Alfred educated in more than books, which will always benefit our nation."

Beck praised the University for taking action to resume awarding academic credit for ROTC coursework. "The

decision to accredit and support ROTC at Alfred is a step toward progressive leadership that our country sorely needs,” she said.

Mia Porter '18, participated three years in the ROTC while at Alfred University, graduating with a bachelor's degree in psychology (minor in criminal justice). Today, Porter is a second-year doctoral student studying clinical psychology at William James College in Boston, and is a First Lieutenant in the Massachusetts Army National Guard.

Porter said she was recently selected to be an Army Psychology Health Professions Scholarship Program recipient. The competitive scholarship, which funds three years of her graduate school tuition, affords Porter the opportunity to ascend to active duty as a Clinical Psychologist and Behavioral Health Officer upon receiving her doctorate of psychology.

“It will provide me the opportunity to receive world-renowned training at military medical centers and hospitals for her American Psychological Association (APA) internship, residency, and long-term career,” said Porter, who credited her Alfred University experience, including her participation in ROTC, for helping her in her pursuit of her goals.

“I recognize how instrumental my undergraduate experience at Alfred University is to my current successes as a doctoral student and Army officer. I would like to thank all Alfred University faculty and staff who have supported my academic, military, personal, and professional development.”

Smith's graduate assistantship is supported by a pair of gifts to Alfred University: from Alfred University Trustee Neal Miller and his wife, Lynne; and from Dr. Robert Chaikin '62 (B.A., psychology), a Vietnam veteran. The goals for the assistantship are many and since the 2019-20 academic year began, Smith has accomplished several. In addition to making Military Science classes credit-bearing, a new [Military Affairs website](#) has been created, providing information on resources available to veteran students, information aimed at prospective ROTC students, and testimonials from students who have gone through the program. A special ROTC reunion will be included in this year's Alumni Reunion, scheduled for June 12-14, and as a community outreach event, the University hosted a Veteran's Day dinner last fall, which drew about 20 area veterans.

Other initiatives Smith plans for his assistantship include developing an on-campus resource center where veterans and military-connected students can go to get information on maximizing the benefits that are available to them. He wants to increase the support and benefits for student veterans considering attending Alfred University; create a system where students can more easily sign up for Military Science classes; and develop on-line coursework for veterans and active duty military personnel. And, he wants to continue to educate students on the benefits of participating in ROTC.

“We need to get out of the mindset that ROTC is a club. It's not. ROTC is like any other course a student would take at the University, except at the end you are responsible for leading others,” Smith said. “We need to let current and prospective students know the program is an available option here. I want to grow the program and give the opportunity to students who want to take it.”

In the photo above are, from left to right: ROTC cadets Wyatt Niedziejko, sophomore mechanical engineering major from, Corinth, NY, and Matthew Barber, sophomore health fitness management major from Westfield, PA; John Gordnier, instructor and recruiting officer, ROTC Seneca Battalion; Dillon Smith '19, Military Affairs liaison, Alfred University; Lt. Col. Sean Coulter, professor of military science, Officer in Charge, ROTC Seneca Battalion; ROTC cadet Makenzie Cashmer, sophomore mechanical engineering major from Weedville, PA; and Mark Zupan, Alfred University president.