

# ROTC poised to become permanent at CUNY

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

After a hiatus of nearly 25 years, the military's college-based officer training curriculum returned to CUNY three years ago as a pilot program. Now the Senior Reserve Officers' Training Corps – commonly known by the acronyms ROTC or SROTC – is poised to gain a permanent foothold at CUNY.

At the end of May, the pilot program is set to expire and, according to Rishi Raj, ROTC program director at City College of New York, it is set to be made permanent by the U.S. Army Cadet Command.

"It's similar to an accreditation process," Raj said of the pilot during a telephone interview with *Clarion*, explaining that, in its initial stage at a given campus, the program is evaluated as it grows. After it meets certain benchmarks, he said, the command decides whether to make it permanent. In September 2012, the college's Faculty Senate approved "the establishment of an ROTC center at the City College of New York" in order to initially accommodate the program, but it appears to have had little, if any, input in the decision to make the program permanent. (Raj was chair of the college's Faculty Senate when the resolution passed.)

## A CENTRALIZED PLAN

The City College program, if approved by the Army, would become a host program – a potential anchor for new satellite programs at other CUNY senior colleges that may be added to the SROTC program by amending or updating the existing Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the US Army, City College and CUNY. The memorandum that established CUNY's SROTC pilot program was obtained by the PSC's Committee on the Militarization of CUNY through an open records request. Other documents turned over as a result of that request revealed the existence of a CUNY ROTC working group that includes high-ranking CUNY officials, including Frederick P. Schaffer, general counsel and senior vice chancellor for legal affairs, and Michael Arena, director of communications and marketing, as well as Juana Reina, vice president of student affairs at City College, and Panayiotis Meleties, then-dean of academic affairs at York College, working to bring ROTC to CUNY.

"It was mostly like it was a done deal, and there was no debate. It was centralized," Glenn Kissack told *Clarion*. Kissack, a member of the PSC Committee on the Militarization of CUNY, reviewed the hundreds of pages of documents yielded by the open records request. The PSC opposes the reestablishment of ROTC at CUNY. On May 29, 2014, the union's delegate assembly passed a resolution titled "Against the Institutionalization of ROTC at CUNY," stating that the program is not in the best interests of stu-

## Pilot program likely to pass

dents, and asserting that the means by which the program was established sidestepped the normal governance process (see [tinyurl.com/PSC-ROTC-resolution](http://tinyurl.com/PSC-ROTC-resolution)). "There's no engagement at all with any of the PSC concerns regarding curriculum, and no provision for faculty input on curriculum or hiring," Kissack said.

On May 21, 2013 – the day the memo went into effect – CUNY officials and top Army brass, including former Secretary of State Colin Powell, an alumnus of City College's earlier ROTC program who went on to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, assembled in City College's Great Hall to welcome the return of ROTC to CUNY. In what *The New York Times* described as "a scene reminiscent of an armistice ceremony," CUNY's then-Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, Major General Jefforey A. Smith and City College President Lisa Staiano-Coico signed documents with "ceremonial pens as 14 cadets stood behind them in formation."

The memorandum outlines the Army's requirements for a permanent program, which include the establishment of a Department of Military Science and a chair for the department who would be directly supervised by a committee appointed by Staiano-Coico. Final authority in instruction, per the memo, is to be "vested" in Cadet Command. The role of faculty governance in establishing and approving curriculum for the programs is not outlined anywhere in the agreement, although course content, academic requirements and instructor qualifications are subject to prior approval of CUNY.

Several weeks before the 2013 memorandum went into effect, the CUNY Board of Trustees approved, at an April 29 meeting, the establishment of the title "Professor of Military Science," which, according to the board minutes, "is a non-tenure track position which does not carry any compensation or employment status at CUNY." With the establishment of the title, the board minutes state, CUNY would be able to establish other SROTC programs at other campuses should they wish to do so.

## DECADES-LONG ABSENCE

Ongoing protests of students and faculty members throughout the 1960s, '70s and '80s succeeded in pushing ROTC out of CUNY. Before the recent reintroduction of ROTC, the last campus to host an ROTC program was John Jay College of Criminal Justice, which closed the program in 1989 due to protests around the military's discriminatory LGBT policies.

The push to reinstate the officer training program at CUNY came on the heels of the publication of a report by the conservative Ameri-

can Enterprise Institute titled "Underserved: A Case Study of ROTC in New York City." The report singled out CUNY as fertile ground for the program, stating that the military was "missing out on a huge potential recruiting pool," and making note of the diversity of the student body, including the large number of African-American graduates and the city's fast-growing

Muslim-American community. "By recruiting at CUNY, the ROTC would be targeting a student body for which 'cultural competency' is part of daily life," stated the May 2011 report. In September 2012, the first ROTC classes at CUNY began at York College, and the CUNY ROTC Task Force held its first meeting that December.

Currently, there are only two ROTC programs at CUNY, one at City College and another at York College. A short-lived program at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn ended at the conclusion of the 2014 spring semester after faculty decisively voted against authorizing an ROTC program. Unlike City Col-

lege and York College, the faculty body at Medgar Evers (known as the College Council) never voted on whether to bring ROTC to the campus prior to the program's establishment. Instead, faculty organized a town hall debate, and on February 24, 2014, the College Council voted 30-21 against authorizing the program. Almost a month after the council vote, college president Rudy Crew said that the "vote is binding," and the program would close at the end of the semester (see April 2014 *Clarion*, "Medgar Evers College Council votes 'No' to ROTC").

## FACULTY RESISTANCE

At the College of Staten Island, what seemed to be a done deal to bring SROTC to that campus was abandoned after faculty opposing the establishment of a program organized, and several department chairs refused to house the program.

"The program was never adopted by a department. It just mysteriously went away," said John Lawrence, professor of psychology at CSI, who found out at a general chairs meeting about plans to bring an ROTC program to his college. Lawrence recalls that he and other faculty, pressing administration on out-

lining the process for approving a program, received only vague responses. "We inferred from their actions that it had to be a program affiliated with a department, and the curriculum would have to be approved by the Faculty Senate," Lawrence told *Clarion* (see December 2013 *Clarion*, "CSI debates ROTC plans").

In setting up ROTC programs at CUNY campuses, the University appears not to have an official process in place, nor do the agreements between CUNY and the Army outline anything like a protocol involving standard means of governance. Instead, the process for establishing a program seems to rest ultimately with the Army, the chancellor's office and the president of the local college.

Three years in, the ROTC program has around 120 cadets from various colleges in the CUNY system. According to Raj, the Army has kicked in a little more than \$2.5 million in scholarships, as well as \$230,000 to sponsor CUNY athletic programs and \$70,000 for STEM-related conferences at various colleges. Raj hopes to see the program grow, he told *Clarion*, with at least 400 cadets enrolled in the next two years and opening programs at any campus that "shows the initiative."

## Words of love, kin and revolution

Ava Chin, a Queens College alumna who currently teaches at the College of Staten Island, read her poem, "winter," at the PSC literary event, "CUNY Writers Against Austerity: A Reading in Defense of CUNY,"

which took place at The Great Hall of the Cooper Union on March 20. The event featured some 50 poets and writers who teach at CUNY. Here, *Clarion* presents an excerpt from Chin's poem.

## winter

(excerpt)

By AVA CHIN

Associate Professor, English Department  
College of Staten Island

On the picket line we circle  
breath

we make track marks in the snow

And I learn more and more of  
her language

and protest.

Booi Got is boycott

Gee Chi is support

My Chinese is a hot pot of  
Marxist ideology

worker rhythms and rants

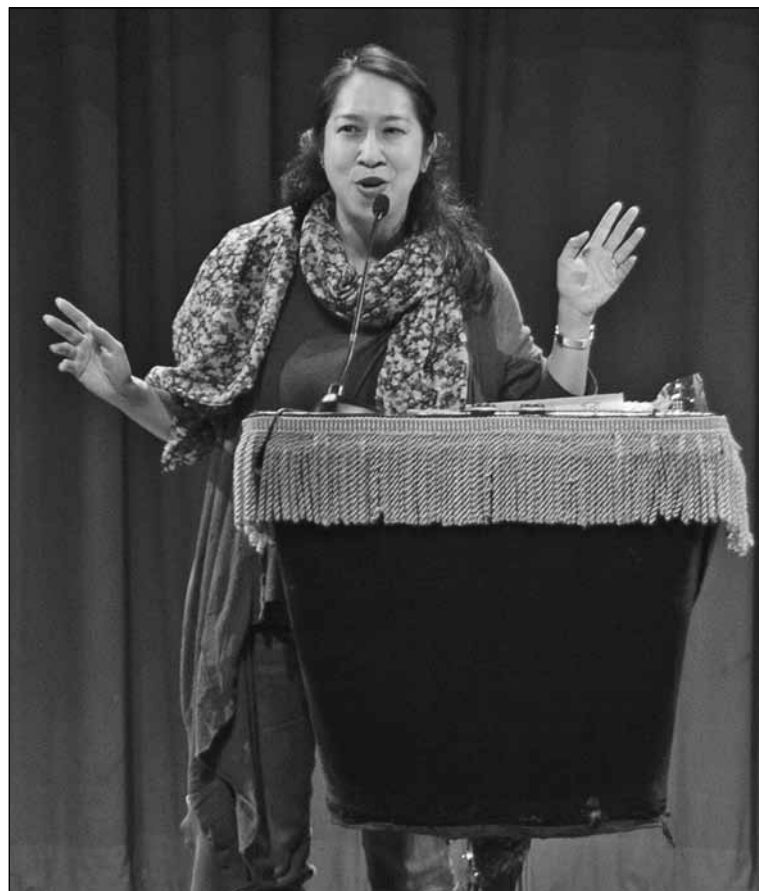
peppered with practicalities like,  
"Where is the bathroom?"

Mistaking the intonation for  
"Take this" for this "whiteness"  
confusing "chicken" and "eat" for  
"explanation."

Explanation.

You gave me more excuses than I  
asked for so

I shut the door on explanations.



Ava Chin performs her poem "winter" at the March 20 union event "CUNY Writers Against Austerity," in The Great Hall of the Cooper Union.