

ROTC combines academics and service

Students receive Reserve Officers' Training Corps scholarships

by Eli Lieberman

Each year approximately ten New Trier seniors receive a Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Scholarship from one of the branches of the military. These students attend a four-year university while also receiving special training for their military career.

Colin Morris and Olivia Stensberg are two of the this year's seniors who applied for, received, and accepted the ROTC scholarship.

ROTC is an option that combines service with a typical college experience. Morris, who will attend University of Dayton in the fall under the Army's ROTC program, explained that "the experience as a whole intrigues me. I feel like I can meet a lot of new people, learn a lot about leadership, and have the ability to serve."

For Stensberg, who will be going to Texas Christian University and participating in the Air Force's ROTC program, it is an option other than attending a military academy.

"It wasn't until I started applying to schools that I decided to apply for the ROTC scholarship as a backup in case I didn't get into the [military] academies," said Stensberg. "I'm excited to rush and go to football games just like my peers while also having the privilege of doing Air Force ROTC."

A commitment to the military is a big decision, but Stensberg's mind was made up beyond doubt when



Texas Christian University offers an ROTC program and scholarships | TCU

she shadowed a cadet at the Naval Academy. "It was both the hardest and most rewarding thing I've ever done. It was that weekend that I knew the military was 100 percent what I wanted to do for the rest of my life," recalled Stensberg.

In contrast, Morris planned to attend a four-year college for most of his high school career. "I started thinking about it junior year, but not seriously until the winter of senior year. I wanted a normal college experience," said Morris. "But then I learned more about ROTC and it became an opportunity I think I would regret not taking advantage of."

However, once the decision to pursue the scholarship or a military academy has been made, there are many additional hurdles for applicants to navigate.

Stensberg, who was attempting to keep both options open, wrote a total of 40 different essays. She also submitted applications for scholarships as well as for other universities, applied for three separate senator nominations, trained for two fitness tests, and scheduled a medical exam.

Once the scholarships are awarded to applicants, they must attend a college that offers the special training for their respective branch, or is located near a college where they can receive the training.

After they complete their college career, students have years of required service, often four or five minimum. ROTC students' field of study in college often closely correlates to their role in the military, and can jumpstart a structured career.

"At TCU, I'm going to be majoring in computer science, so that means I will most likely be a cyber security officer," said Stensberg. "I'm sure I will change my major as most college students do, but ideally cyber security or intelligence could lead to a job in the FBI or CIA once I complete my five years as an officer in the Air Force."

While a commitment to serve may sound daunting, Morris and Stensberg both see it positively.

Morris said, "I'm looking forward to meeting new people and learning about the Army, and how I can contribute to it."

Mind the gap... year

Students choose gap year to pursue a unique experience

by Molly George

While many of New Trier's seniors are thinking about the college they will be attending next year, more than a handful of seniors are excited not to be going to college. Not right away, anyway.

Gap year continues to gain popularity as a viable option for high school seniors across the country.

Students who decide to take a gap year often apply to college and defer their acceptance for a year while they pursue an experience that includes volunteering, working, or travel.

In 2016, for example, Malia Obama decided to go on a gap year before attending Harvard. Obama reportedly spent most of the year on an extended trip to Peru and Bolivia through a company called Where There Be Dragons.

"A gap year, different from a year off, is after students graduate from high school and before they go to college," said Gretchen Stauder, Post High School Counselor and Gap Fair coordinator.

Various programs and plans fit under the umbrella of a gap year because, as Stauder explained, "Colleges want to see students making choices and being productive with their time, although it doesn't have to be structured."

While no official statistics track participation in gap year programs,

the Associated Press reports that 30,000 to 40,000 students take part each year. In 2015, there was a 22 percent increase in students taking gap years over the previous year, according to surveys taken by the American Gap Association.

Senior Maria von Kunhardt is one of about ten students in the senior class participating in a gap year. She is planning on being an Au Pair in France, "not through a program, but using personal connections to hopefully find a family to work for and with."

Von Kunhardt chose her location because she wants to brush up on her French and see the country. She is originally from Germany. "In Europe it is much more common to travel the first year after graduating," she explained.

Since she doesn't know what she wants to do in college, von Kunhardt hopes the coming year will give her time to think about her future plans.

After her gap year in France, von Kunhardt plans to move back to Germany and study at a university there. Specifically, she said, "I'm hoping to get into an acting school and perhaps pursue my passion for film and stage acting there."

According to Stauder, "Colleges are beginning to recognize the value of these programs because the students who take a gap year are more engaged, their grades and retention rate are higher, they contribute more to the community. It's a win-win for everyone. It just has to be the right thing."

Senior Asher Hoffman will

participate in a Young Judea Year Course run by a pluralistic Zionist youth group next year.

"I'm looking forward to getting more in tune with the culture of Israel and volunteering with Magen David Adom, which is Israel's ambulance service," said Hoffman. The program also includes a week long hike from sea to sea. After his gap year, Hoffman plans to attend Colorado State University.

With a wide variety of programs to choose from, the Post High School Counseling office recommends that students consider the length, location, price range, structure, and overall goal. Stauder broke down the general goal of a potential gap year into categories of service, travel, learning, experiencing something new, and taking a break.

Von Kunhardt said, "I'm looking forward to just having this whole time to myself. Especially being in another country will give me the opportunity to be on my own, see the culture for myself and just be more independent as a whole."

The feedback in recent years from each independent experience has been very positive. Stauder said, "More often than not, students are transformed by the experience, regardless of what they do."

Why does the Destinations issue matter to students?

Destinations issue celebrates seniors and enlightens underclassmen

by May Paddor

The second-to-last annual issue of the Newspaper is almost always the Destinations issue, which shows students where most of the senior class is off to after graduation. This information is collected from a self-reported survey that seniors opt to take through Canvas.

One of the most popular topics leading up to the Destinations issue is the infamous question second semester seniors deal with on a daily basis: Where are you going to college?

Senior Kendal Pridgeon said, "The Destinations issue is a good way to inform students about where their classmates are spending the next four years. It is also interesting to see which schools are most popular."

However, not every senior takes the survey.

"The results are probably skewed towards those who are able to attend one of their top choices. So for some seniors, this could evoke some envy from those who didn't get into their top choice," said senior John Crawford.

Many students have expressed that the weight of social pressure surrounding schools can be hurtful.

Pridgeon conceded, "The issue may open room for judgments about where people are going or embarrassment for people who are not happy with where they are going."

"But the Destinations survey is optional so people who don't want to share don't have to and the goal of Destinations isn't to make room for judgment," she argued.

Another flaw of the Destinations issue is that students are not always honest when answering the survey. Post High School Counseling Department chair James Conroy estimated that there are about three or four students who lie about where they're going to school each year.

"That's something that bothers me, when someone says they're going to a certain place when I know they haven't even applied there. It's never a less prestigious school," said Conroy.

The Destinations issue also enables underclassmen to have a sneak peek of the college process that their friends and classmates experienced.

Junior Mya Kauffman said, "In addition to being a way for seniors to share where they're going to college, it's a good source of information for freshman, sophomores, and juniors to see what colleges are popular."

Crawford said, "For those students, seeing people they know getting into some of the best colleges in the country would make aiming for a top school seem more achievable."

Conroy agreed that the issue gives underclassmen a glimpse of the wide variety of colleges available to students.

"I hope the mature ones can look at it and say 'All these kids are going to all these places' and that they'll be open to a wider range of colleges than only 10 schools that are very competitive," he said.

Destinations is not limited to college, as students' future plans do not all center around going to a

college or university.

While this issue aims to expand students' expectations and notions, they tend to focus on where their peers are going to college.

Senior Frances Lafontant said, "I think it's problematic to focus so much energy on where students are going to school. It makes students feel badly if they are not going to a great school, attending college, or have not made a final decision."

The focus on college can have detrimental effects on the school's environment.

English teacher Tony Gudwien said, "Reading the issue makes me feel bad about myself because I feel like I am reducing students to their future school's reputation."

"The issue is that it creates a more stressful, high pressure environment. It places too much pressure on where we are going to school when, in reality, what matters is how we act everyday," said Lafontant.

The issue's focus on college can make other post-high school endeavors feel ignored and unappreciated.

Sophomore adviser and Engineering teacher Nathan Silvers said, "It's a shame that students who read the issue will spend a lot of their time focusing on the colleges their peers are going to. I'm excited to see the students who choose the path less taken, like the army."

According to Illinois Report Card, 12% of students who graduate from New Trier do not enroll in a two-to-four-year college 16 months after graduating.

Despite these statistics, the idea of Destinations being college-focused remains prevalent.

"We need to create more conversations about the socioeconomic inequality that New Trier represents and be more active in spreading awareness," said Lafontant. "Not everyone in this school can afford to go to college or take a gap year."

The Destinations issue provokes deeper conversations within the student body and the school's environment.

Ultimately, for seniors specifically, the Destinations issue can offer closure to their endeavors at New Trier and with their fellow classmates.

Pridgeon said, "This edition is not a necessity, but it is a good way to celebrate what all of the seniors are doing in their next four years and does more good than harm. It is a way to celebrate and inform others about where the seniors are going."