

University of South Florida one of the most militarized in United States

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The University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, Florida is one of the most militarized colleges in the nation, with historical ties to the military/intelligence apparatus and an expanded array of military offered programs. USF joins a list of universities that have, over the last two decades, been developed into centers for training and recruiting students and youth for the highest occupations in the American armed forces.

University administrators have promoted this transformation by issuing certain perks, including out-of-state tuition waivers, to prospective students who are military veterans, dependents, or active duty personnel. According to the *Military Times EDGE* magazine, USF has become the most “veteran friendly” four-year college in the nation. The university has received this title for three consecutive years and has also seen its enrollment of military veterans and dependents increase from 1,774 veterans in fall 2016 to 1,838 in 2017, according to the *Tampa Bay Times*.

USF is also the only school in the state that participates in the federal Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, which is a provision of the post-9/11 GI bill. The program authorizes approved colleges and the Department of Veteran Affairs to fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed the threshold of the GI bill. Such attractive financial incentives shore up the appeal of joining military service, at the expense of spending for public education as a whole.

Indeed, the incentives that schools such as USF offer are part of a national goal of seeking young people who view joining the military as a solution to their inability to pay an expensive college tuition and the lack of decent job opportunities. In fact, after the financial crisis in 2008, when jobs and living standards began to dwindle across the country, the military saw a significant upsurge in its enlistment.

Recruiters and military promoters consciously prey on students as young as middle-school age for recruitment or training in different military programs.

At USF, the premier program for grooming students for positions in different branches of the military is the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), a program designed to prepare young adults for future military officer positions. The program offered at USF has a distinct character that separates it from most college campuses.

The history of the Army ROTC at the school dates back to 1975 when USF and the University of Tampa agreed to cross-enroll students from UT’s ROTC senior program. By November 1979, a senior ROTC Battalion was established at USF. This Battalion eventually grew to become the “Suncoast Battalion” with cross-enrollment between USF, Eckerd College, Hillsborough Community College, Saint Leo University, Saint Petersburg College and Pasco-Hernando State College. The university’s military influence grew larger in 2007, when the US Army Cadet Command (USACC) made USF a “super host” for senior ROTC programs, becoming just one of two in the state.

The university is one of 50 schools in the country that hosts ROTC programs from all the nation’s armed services (Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force). In coordination with the ROTC, the university also has a Joint Military Leadership Center (JMLC) which is geared towards providing cadets and officer candidates “unique core competencies and skills in leadership development, global understanding, and national security/military/defense strategies.” This means that students are introduced to the strategies and tactics that prospective officers are expected to use for invading, attacking and occupying foreign countries.

One significant feature of the program is that it sponsors periodic visits to the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) and US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) at the Macdill Air Force Base, located in Tampa. This activity serves to provide students “an overview of a major unified combatant command, its mission and function.”

In addition to the visits to Macdill, JMLC also sponsors one ROTC student each year to participate in the Naval Academy Foreign Affairs Conference (NAFAC), the leading undergraduate foreign affairs conference in the nation with a special interest in promoting collaboration between youth from different schools.

According to the USF’s webpage on the JMLC’s program and activities, one of the goals of the NAFAC is to create a setting where delegates have “a unique opportunity to meet other students from universities/colleges” and “discuss global issues that directly affect U.S. interests and national security.”

Academia and higher education as a whole have become an critical breeding ground for cultivating the next generation of generals, officers and soldiers used as cannon fodder for the ruling class. The United States has been involved for more than a quarter century in a stream of uninterrupted wars in the Middle East, from Iraq and Afghanistan, to Libya, Syria, and Yemen. These illegal wars of aggression have devastated entire societies, killed millions of people and produced the greatest refugee crisis since World War II. The financial and corporate oligarchy in the US, including their representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties, have deemed it necessary that young people be acclimated to a life of unending wars.

ROTC, which is found in thousands of high schools and colleges across the country, is used to instill jingoistic and chauvinistic attitudes in students as early as possible. Indoctrination into a militarist and police-state mindset, from sports pregame celebrations to active-shooter school drills, is the end goal.

Notably, the mass shooting at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, less than four hours southeast of USF, was carried out by a member of the high school’s Junior ROTC program. The shooter, Nikolas Cruz, became accustomed to shooting rifles like the type used to gun down his victims through the military training program.



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