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STUDENT soldiers



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By Jessica Rupell
Rocket Focus Editor

“Bomb kills 3 troops in Iraq; PM meets with top Shiite cleric”

“Bush sees Iraq progress, Howard vows to stay”

“26,000 U.S., Iraqi troops go on offensive”

Nearly all U.S. newspapers have been filled with headlines such as these, but these national headlines talk about events that hit home as well.

The fact that young soldiers, from SRU or elsewhere, are going to war is nothing new. Currently, the Iraq War has claimed the lives of 3,742 Americans as of Sept. 4, 2007, according to a CNN count.

Though SRU’s Office of Retention Services said it does not keep track of students’ deployment locations, they said that during the 2006-07 school year, 12 students used “military” as their reason for withdrawal from the university.

Besides students currently serving the U.S. military in Iraq and other locations, SRU also has students who have previously been overseas to serve their country.

Zachary Acon, 23, a junior criminology major, said he was deployed in October 2003, just two months into his freshman

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Training center offers hands-on activities

By Kacie Peterson
Rocket Contributor

On the outskirts of campus, past the new residence halls and behind the Rock Apartments stands a structure composed of wooden walls, metal poles, ropes, ramps and various combinations of the four.

The Slippery Rock University Leadership Program’s Leadership Reaction Course stands tall and quiet in the weekend afternoon sunlight, awaiting students and Reserve Officers Training Corps cadets to return again next week.

Originally built in 2003, the purpose of the course was to bring out and teach leadership skills in participants through task completion.

The Leadership Reaction Course was patterned after a military training base, providing realistic preparation for high school JROTC, college ROTC and National Guard members in the area.

To the uniformed, the wooden walls seem to form numerous three-walled rooms, all containing equipment specific to the task performed inside.

There are 16 different stations in which “groups of students, through different scenarios, complete semi-complex tasks,” said Lieutenant Colonel William Bialozor, a professor in the military science department.

The Slippery Rock Executive Leadership Trail is located behind the LRC, and consists of seven separate task areas, instead of the 16 combined stations in the course. These tasks are performed by the ROTC in a race against the clock.

The cadets train on the course four times a semester, with labs on Thursdays from 2 to 5 p.m.

Each experience with the course means a rotation in leaders and stations, and an evaluation in such areas as confidence, courage, team building and communication.

The course also helps to identify leaders in the group, if those leaders are not already appointed, said Tony Caldarelli, director of the Executive Leadership Program.

“Different styles of leadership are more appropriate at times than others,” Caldarelli said.

The ROTC uses the LRC to build leadership and teamwork skills, a common goal for all who use the course.

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Alumni relations director volunteers to rejoin National Guard

By Chelsey Rovesti
Rocket Contributor

Stepping into Michael Saraka’s office at SRU, one would notice a few U2 posters, some sports memorabilia and a picture of him and his wife, with him in military uniform.

Saraka, 42, director of alumni relations, recently re-enlisted in the National Guard, where he previously served in the 2nd Battalion 103rd Armor in Berwick.

After attending Officer Candidate School, Saraka was

commissioned a second lieutenant in 1992.

“I decided to go back in for a lot reasons,” Saraka said, “I felt like I needed to do something.”

After graduating from SRU in 1989, Saraka enlisted in the National Guard to help pay off his student loans. However, he said what he didn’t know at the time



SUBMITTED PHOTO, STEVE REED/THE ROCKET
Michael Saraka, director of alumni relations, recently re-enlisted in the National Guard.

was that he would learn invaluable lessons from his time spent in the National Guard.

“I liked the order and the camaraderie,” Saraka said.

“You really learned how to challenge yourself.”

One of the most important things Saraka says that he learned from his military

experience was learning time management skills and how to plan accordingly.

“My experience has really helped in my civilian career as alumni director in being organized for meetings, delegating tasks and motivating volunteers,” Saraka said.

Though back with the National Guard, Saraka will retain his full-time position as SRU’s director of alumni relations, devoting one weekend per month and two weeks in the summer to his new

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ROTC members learn to balance time between training, classes, social life

By Melissa McFarland
Rocket Contributor

When outsiders think of ROTC, they may think of uniforms, salutes and physical training.

When an insider such as Cadet Emma Christensen thinks of ROTC, she thinks of “very hard work, physically and mentally, and very time consuming. Meanwhile, the best program I have ever been affiliated with.”

For those who are just being introduced to the program, ROTC is an elective curriculum a student can take along with their required college classes.

It prepares you with the tools, training and experiences that will help a person succeed in any competitive environment.

Along with great leadership training, Army ROTC can pay for

your college tuition as well.

According to a military Web site, a person “will have a normal college student experience like everyone else on campus, but when (they) graduate, (they) will have a service obligation to serve as an officer in the Army.”

The ROTC program at SRU consists of many activities on top of the classes, labs and physical training each cadet is required to take.

For example, cadets are given the option of being involved in the Ranger Team, a group that competes in a type of decathlon against 20 other schools including the University of Pittsburgh, IUP and Princeton.

Some events of this decathlon include a timed two-mile run, an obstacle course, a grenade course, a rope bridge and a written test. Last year, the SRU

Ranger Team finished fifth out of the 20 teams.

The ranger team is completely voluntary, but to be on this team, the cadets must be dedicated. Just for this group, volunteers are required to train from 5:30 a.m. to 7 a.m. Monday through Saturday.

It is estimated that cadets spend 10 to 12 hours a week in the ROTC program alone. Their schoolwork is then added to their already-limited schedule.

There are also members, such as Christensen, who are involved in other school activities as well, like the Honors Program, which have their own sets of requirements and activities.

“Technically, it is not required, but since we are being paid it is expected of us to volunteer with the program,” Christensen

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In 2005, ROTC colorguard members (left to right) 2nd Lt. Kim Lynn, 2nd Lt. Nathaniel Thomson, 2nd Lt. Ian Black and Cadet 1st Lt. Amanda Herman participate in the Homecoming Parade on Main Street.