

SCHOOLS & THE MILITARY

Raising concerns about the role of the military in our schools

The Greater KC Committee on Militarism in Schools opposes the use of public schools for military training and recruiting. It supports public schools in providing education for youth in academic skills. October 2003

*Students may ask about conscientious objection to the military.
Please feel free to make copies of this info available to students.*

Q: I am turning 18 in a few months and I've heard that the law says I am required to register for the military draft. I don't believe in going to war. What are my options?

At present there is no actual draft in the United States, although registration is required. There has not been a draft since the early 1970s. Congress would have to pass a bill calling for a draft if conscription (required military service) were to be resumed.

This could happen if there was a perceived emergency or if the government wanted to "send a message" or threat to another government or foreign group.

There is no way to predict whether a draft will return. It depends on the political climate in the United States and in the government. Not everyone who registers must serve.

Q: What types of conscientious objection are recognized by U.S. law?

● Two types recognized by U.S. law:

Conscientious Objectors (CO) These are persons who, by reason of religious, ethical, or moral belief, are "conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form." These people may be discharged from military service. They are exempt from military service, in the event of a draft. If called up, they may perform alternative service as civilians.

Noncombatant Conscientious Objectors (CO) These are persons who, by reason of religious, ethical, or moral belief, are conscientiously opposed to killing in war in any form but who do not object to performing noncombatant duties (such as being a medic) in the armed forces. These people are reassigned to noncombatant duties in the armed forces or, in the event of a draft, are trained without weapons and assigned to noncombatant service.

● Types *not* currently recognized by U.S. law:

Conscientious Objectors to Paying for War These are persons whose consciences forbid them to pay the military portion of their taxes because of ethical, moral and religious beliefs. Many impoverish themselves by living below taxable levels; others suffer garnishment, court appearances, property loss and, in some cases, imprisonment. (1-888-PEACETAX for more information)

Selective Objectors Their beliefs do not allow them to participate in an "unjust" war but do permit them to participate in what they believe to be a "just" war. For example, some who were conscientiously opposed to the Vietnam War because they believed it to be unjust said that they would have fought in World War II. Selective objectors may also object to certain weaponry or to particular targeting and therefore request reassignment.

Nuclear Pacifists These are persons whose consciences would not permit them to participate in a nuclear war, nor what they believe would likely become a nuclear war. Some nuclear pacifists are opposed to all war because of their belief that any war fought today could lead to the use of nuclear weapons.

Noncooperators with the Draft These are persons whose consciences forbid them to co-operate with draft law requirements. Many of these conscientious objectors refuse to register for the draft. Non-registration is currently illegal.

What questions should a conscientious objector expect to be able to answer in order to be given CO status by the local draft board?

Question 1: Describe the beliefs which are the basis for your claim as a conscientious objector. If appropriate, state whether those beliefs would permit you to serve in a noncombatant position in the armed forces or pay taxes for war.

(Form 22, the Selective Service System documentation form for conscientious objectors, says: "Describe your beliefs which are the reasons for your claiming conscientious objection to combatant military training and service or to all military training and service.")

This question asks you to describe, in some detail and as honestly as possible, the basic principles by which you guide your life. You should describe those values which are of utmost importance to you, such as God, love, truth, etc., and why these beliefs are in conflict with participation in war or paying for war or preparations for war. This question asks you to formulate your own statement of conscientious opposition to war.

Question 2: Describe how and when you acquired these beliefs.

In answering this question you should include anything of significance which helped to form your beliefs. Mention any religious training you have had if you feel such training has helped you arrive at your position. If you feel you arrived at your beliefs with no formal training, there is, of course, no need to mention any. The influence of clergy, teachers, family members, books, television, movies, membership in organizations and experiences in your life should be listed. Be specific. You need to show that strong influences in your life have stimulated you to think clearly and seriously about participation in war.

Specific incidents can be mentioned, such as seminars or assemblies you have attended, courses taken, trips taken, contact with refugees, demonstrations you were in, to show that your beliefs had substantial formation beyond a merely "academic interest." Obviously, if you have experienced war, be sure to reflect on it. Take care not to give the impression that your belief is primarily a matter of political considerations, expediency, or just an arbitrary, personal moral code unrelated to higher values. Unconventional beliefs qualify, but they will require careful statement.

Question 3: Describe how your beliefs affect the way you live and the type of work you do or plan to do.

This may be a difficult questions for objectors who have not had many experiences which can show sincere beliefs. Select the best illustrations of your convictions. You can discuss how your future plans are strongly affected by a commitment to those beliefs. Describe kinds of employment you have had or plan to have which reflect your commitment. Discuss any public expression, written or oral, you have given to your beliefs. Describe your lifestyle, mention your life's goals as you have set them, and show how they are an outgrowth of your beliefs. This question lets you demonstrate the sincerity of your beliefs.

Above information is from:

American Friends Service Committee: <http://www.afsc.org/youthmil.htm> Central Committee on Conscientious Objectors: <http://www.objector.org> Committee Opposed to Militarism & the Draft: <http://comsd.org> War Resisters League/ROOTS: <http://www.warresisters.org>

Greater KC Committee on Militarism in Schools endorsers include American Friends Service Committee, All Souls U.U. Social Justice Committee, Catholics for Justice, Holy Family Catholic Worker House, KC Interfaith Peace Alliance, National Lawyer's Guild, PeaceWorks KC, RESULTS, Sisters of Loretto, Temple Peace Center, and KC World Federalists.