

# Students dying to demilitarize McGill

By Mikey Opatowski and Melissa Karine Ward <http://www.mcgilldaily.com/view.php?aid=6946>  
The McGill daily, January 30<sup>th</sup> 2008



Seventeen student activists dropped dead in McConnell Engineering yesterday morning to protest campus military recruitment.

The students, members of the radical campus group GrassRoots Association for Student Power (GRASPé), smeared themselves in red paint and lay still for ten minutes in front of a Canadian Forces table at the Technology Career Fair.

"I don't think its right for military recruiters to be here at all," said Dave Howden, one of the participants in the die-in. "They're misleading students that the army is all about an exciting career and travelling the world."

The recruiters stood watch during the action and did not talk with any of the protesters. In an interview after the die-in, Lt. Serge Abergel spoke politely of the protesters but defended his presence at the career fair.

"It was polite, peaceful, no bad things to say about it," Abergel said, adding, "We are simply giving information about employment opportunities for over 107 different trades, not just infantry. We are not imposing that people join the military, nor have quotas to reach."

Bystanders trying to make their way around the protesters said they were impressed by the die-in, but were not opposed to on-campus military recruitment.

Other GRASPé members handed out flyers that challenged Canada's role in the Afghanistan occupation and argued against students enlisting to finance postsecondary education.

Lt. Sean Frankham, who was also recruiting at the fair, defended serving in the army to pay for school.

"That's how I got through school," Frankham said. "And there was never any problem with that."

The protesters left peacefully, chanting, "Recruiters lie, students die."

The mobilization stemmed from a workshop that GRASPé members Alexandre Vidal and Cleve Higgins coordinated on Monday evening. About 20 students attended the gathering, which fostered ideas on ways to eliminate military presence and influence at McGill.

Focusing on government investment in the military and recruitment on campus, Vidal and Higgins presented results of research they completed on the relationship between universities and the military.

Vidal, who opposes Canada's involvement in the Afghanistan occupation, asserted that government investments directed to the military should instead be used to pay for student tuition fees.

"I don't want my tax dollars to go towards things I disapprove of, like people being killed in Afghanistan," Vidal said.

"The 13 per cent of annual funds currently paying for military supplies could be used to abolish tuition fees for all Quebec students," he added.

The discussion proceeded to dissect how recruitment processes work, what kind of people they attract, and why.

Students in the rank force must spend their summers at school, and attend a postsecondary institution for an additional five years after completing their enrolment. Enlisted students who break their contracts are required to reimburse the government for the difference of their tuition costs.

Higgins focused his presentation on changes that should be made to improve transparency in McGill's research policies, suggesting that the University make its harm evaluations publicly accessible and oppose confidentiality agreements with corporations.

GRASPé is planning additional protests in front of Montreal's recruitment centre and will work to "demilitarize McGill" by advocating the prohibition of recruiters on campus.

Last year Higgins discovered that McGill engineering professor David Frost received funding from Defence & Research Development Canada (DRDC) – and worked in conjunction with a DRDC employee Fan Zhang – for a 2006 paper, "Effect on Scale of a Blast Wave from a Metalized Explosive."

For the paper, Zhang received research funding from the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, a combat support division of the U.S. Department of Defense that has commissioned research on explosives used by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan.



Student activists lie dead to protest on-campus military recruitment in the McConnell Engineering building yesterday.  
*Stephen Davis / The McGill Daily*