

## June 28, 2005: Intolerance claims need another look - The Denver Post

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Differences between Yale and Air Force reports on religious discrimination at the Air Force Academy indicate questions haven't been fully answered. The disparity between a Yale Divinity School finding of "stridently evangelical themes" at the Air Force Academy and an Air Force team's report of no "overt religious discrimination" weighs strongly in favor of yet another probe of the school's religious climate. An Air Force team headed by Lt. Gen. Roger Brady, deputy chief of staff for personnel, investigated religious discrimination at the academy after several complaints about evangelical Christian faculty and cadets harassing members of other faiths. The service team found no bias but did identify "insensitivity." But the Yale Divinity School team said evangelical Christian proselytizing was commonplace, including an incident in which a chaplain told 600 cadets to "go back to their tents and tell their fellow cadets that those who are not born again will burn in the fires of hell." There was also an incident in which Cadet Curtis Weinstein was called an "(expletive) Jew." Hardly examples of religious tolerance. There was also no excuse for football coach Fisher DeBerry's hanging a banner reading "I am a member of Team Jesus Christ" in a locker room, even if he apologized later. To his credit, outgoing Superintendent Lt. Gen. John Rosa has implemented programs to address intolerance at the academy. "If we have one problem of religious discrimination, it's too many," said Rosa. Air Force Academy cadets, like all Americans, have First Amendment rights to practice their religions, but Brady's team found that events and activities sometimes were scheduled without regard for the needs of some faiths. The Air Force report was seen as weak by some members of Congress. "It is not a whitewash, but it does resemble milquetoast," said Rep. Steve Israel, D-N.Y. Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., said he will ask for a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on the report and also has asked the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to monitor academy compliance with the Air Force team's recommendations. Salazar's suggestion for Senate hearings is a good one, but the academy's problems don't rise to the level of the brutal religious repression that the commission normally probes. A Senate inquiry would be welcome to get at all the facts and also to make sure that religious bias is banished from the academy.