

Army to Develop Conscription Alternative for Students

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Russian military is set to expand a training program for university students to provide an alternative to the country's mandatory draft for young men, Deputy Defense Minister Nikolai Pankov has said.

Male students will be able to opt out of the draft by completing 450 classroom hours of military studies over two years during their degree, and by attending a three-month training course before entering the reserves as a soldier or sergeant, Pankov said Monday.

A similar program has been in place at the country's 72 state universities with military departments since 2008, but the vast majority of male university students attend institutes that do not allow them to fulfill their service obligation during their studies.

University students can delay service while actively enrolled, but after graduating more than 60,000 young men are called up annually to perform their year of mandatory service.

The reform will allow students to attend military training at other universities or at official Defense Ministry training centers.

Pankov said Tuesday that the program would also be made available to students enrolled at private colleges and universities.

The country has struggled in recent years to fulfill its target quotas for incoming conscripts due to widespread draft dodging and the scarcity of young men coming of age who were born when the birth rate collapsed during the turbulent 1990s.

"The Ministry of Defense is making a big step to accommodate young men. Most importantly we are creating favorable conditions for fulfilling military service. Though it is more difficult for us than simply tracking down the draft dodgers," Pankov said Tuesday.

The development of the new form of military training will begin this year, with the first students expected to begin studies by fall 2015.

Russia has made a concerted effort in recent years to improve the image of and conditions in its armed forces after years of widespread reports of brutal hazing and other abuses among conscripts.

More than 244,000 men eligible for the draft managed to avoid being conscripted last year, according to General Staff statistics.

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