



2025

JULY - DECEMBER

SEMIANNUAL REPORT

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

BOARD OF VISITORS

JANUARY 13, 2026

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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY BOARD OF VISITORS

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USAFA BOARD OF VISITORS SEMIANNUAL REPORT
ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July – December 2025

This summary outlines the key findings and urgent recommendations from the USAFA Board of Visitors Semiannual Report. The Board has identified critical deficiencies and opportunities that require immediate attention and action to ensure USAFA maintains its standing as a premier institution for developing military leaders and to align its operations with the strategic priorities of the Department of War.

The Board's analysis reveals systemic challenges across multiple domains, from leadership and infrastructure to cadet welfare and strategic alignment. The following recommendations are presented for immediate review and assistance.

1. Leadership & Governance:

- Expedite Dean of Faculty Confirmation: The most pressing issue is the leadership vacuum in the Dean of Faculty position, which has been vacant since May 2025. This delay hinders positive academic reform and is in direct opposition to the Secretary of War's guidance on installing key leaders. We urge the immediate selection, nomination, and expedited confirmation of a permanent Dean.
- Strengthen BoV Support: The increased engagement of the BoV requires a corresponding increase in support. The Designated Federal Officer (DFO) role must be elevated from a collateral duty to a dedicated position to ensure timely and transparent communication between the Board and the Department of the Air Force.

2. Cadet End Strength:

- Increase the Cadet Wing to 4,400: USAFA's authorized end strength of 4,000 cadets is significantly lower than West Point (4,459) and Annapolis (4,350). This disparity, a result of past budget cuts, hinders officer production, especially with the need to commission graduates into the U.S. Space Force. We strongly recommend restoring the cadet wing to its pre-sequestration level of 4,400 in the President's Budget Request.

3. Institutional Reviews & Modernization:

- Establish a Military Service Academy Commission: The landscape of collegiate athletics has changed due to Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) rules. Additionally, new merit-based admissions guidance should be standardized and a review of the current accreditation agencies should occur because of the removal of regional restrictions. A commission is needed to analyze these areas and ensure the Military Service Academies remain competitive and effective.
- Review Disciplinary Procedures: Significant concerns have been raised regarding the lack of due process in the cadet disciplinary system. An independent, top-down review of disciplinary procedures by a SecAF-funded BoV Team and expert legal consultants across all USAFA Disciplinary Systems is required to ensure the principles of justice and fairness are upheld.
- Audit Faculty Manning: An audit by the Air Force Manpower Analysis Agency is needed to assess the current faculty composition (military, civilian, reserve component, visiting professors, privately funded professors, international officers, fellows) and determine the required number of faculty, especially in light of the proposed increase in cadet end strength.

4. Infrastructure & Future Development:

- Invest in the Military Service Academies: The Board strongly recommends that the Department of War collaborate with the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to dedicate a specific section of the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to focus on reinvesting in our nation's Military Service Academies. The Board also recommends the Secretary of War engage with the Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of Transportation to revitalize the Service Academies in their Departments.
- Revitalize Academy Infrastructure: USAFA's 1950s-era infrastructure is failing, creating life-health-safety concerns. The next NDAA must prioritize robust and sustained funding to restore facilities, meet modern standards, and build cutting-edge centers for technology and tactics development.
- Fund and Build the Tri-Complex: A visionary Air, Space, and Cyber Education Center is proposed to create a multi-domain learning ecosystem, establish a home for the U.S. Space Force at USAFA, and create a premier center for UAS excellence. This project requires funding and a strong push for public-private partnerships.

5. Enhanced BoV Efforts for 2026:

- Fund 2026 BoV Focus Groups: To provide more insightful and expert-driven advice, the BoV is establishing focus groups for 2026 covering Accreditation, Admissions, AI, Athletics, and Infrastructure. The success of these groups is contingent on funding for on-site travel and the invitation of essential Subject Matter Expert (SME) consultants, as authorized by the BoV charter.

TABLE OF ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the specific actions required to address the Board's recommendations.

Action Item	Authority	Desired Outcome
Expedite Dean Confirmation	SecAF, SASC	Fill the critical leadership vacuum to drive academic reform and strategic vision.
Strengthen BoV Support	Dept. of the Air Force	Convert the Designated Federal Officer position to a dedicated role to streamline BoV communication and support.
Increase Cadet End Strength	Dept. of War Dept. of the Air Force	Restore the cadet wing to its pre-sequestration level of 4,400 in the President’s Budget Request.
Establish a Military Service Academy Commission	Dept. of War	Launch a commission to analyze and provide recommendations on NIL, admissions standardization, and accreditation.
Review Disciplinary Procedures	SecAF	Support by funding an independent review of USAFA discipline and due process processes by a BoV Team of select members and expert legal consultants.

Audit Faculty Manning	Air Force Manpower Analysis Agency	Conduct a data-driven audit of faculty requirements to inform manning decisions.
Invest in the Military Service Academies	Dept. of War, HASC, SASC	Dedicate a specific section of the NDAA to focus on reinvesting in our nation's Military Service Academies.
Revitalize Academy Infrastructure	Dept. of the Air Force HASC, SASC, HAC, SAC	Secure robust, sustained funding in the next NDAA to address safety issues and modernize USAFA facilities.
Fund and Build the Tri-Complex	Dept. of the Air Force HASC, SASC, HAC, SAC, Private Industry	Secure funding and foster partnerships to construct the Air, Space, and Cyber Education Center.
Fund 2026 BoV Focus Groups	SecAF	Direct funding for BoV travel and subject matter expert consultants to enable expert analysis.

1. APPOINTMENT AND DUTIES OF THE BOARD. The Board of Visitors (BoV AFA or the Board) of the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA or the Academy) is a non-discretionary federal advisory committee established by 10 U.S.C. § 9455. The Board operates according to the BoV AFA Charter filed by the Secretary of War, pursuant to 10 USC § 9455 and in accordance with Chapter 10 of Title 5, U.S.C. (commonly known as the “Federal Advisory Committee Act” or “FACA”), and 41 C.F.R. § 102-3.50(a).

a. Constitution: The Board of Visitors to the Academy is constituted annually. The Board consists of the following members per 10 USC § 9455:

- (1) Six persons designated by the President;
- (2) The chair of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate, or their designee;
- (3) The ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate, or the designee of the ranking member;
- (4) Two other members of the Senate designated by the Majority Leader of the Senate, one of whom is a member of the Committee on Appropriation of the Senate;
- (5) Two other members of the Senate designated by the Minority Leader of the Senate, one of whom is a member of the Committee on Appropriation of the Senate;
- (6) The chair of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives, or their designee;
- (7) The ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representative, or the designee of the ranking member;
- (8) Two other members of the House of Representatives designated by the Speaker of the House, one of whom is a member of the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives; and
- (9) One other member of the House of Representatives designated by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

[Note: the FY26 NDAA that became public law in December 2025 increased the House Minority Leader designees from one to two.]

b. Duties: It is the Board’s duty to inquire into the morale, discipline, curriculum, instruction, physical equipment, fiscal affairs, academic methods, and other matters relating to the Academy in which the Board decides to consider.

2. BOARD MEMBERS (a/o 31 December 2025).

a. Presidential Designees:

- (1) Colonel (retired) Doug “Stoli” Nikolai, Spring Branch, TX – Vice Chair, BoV AFA
- (2) Senator Tommy Tuberville, Washington, D.C.
- (3) Mr. Dan Clark, Salt Lake City, UT
- (4) Ms. Dina Powell, Pittsburgh, PA
- (5) Mr. Robert Bigelow, Las Vegas, NV
- (6) Vacant (Vice Mr. Charlie Kirk)

b. Speaker of the House Designees:

- (1) Congressman August Pfluger (R-TX) – Chairman, BoV AFA
- (2) Congressman Jeff Crank (R-CO)

c. House Minority Leader:

- (1) Congressman Don Davis (D-NC)

d. Senate Armed Services Committee:

- (1) Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS, SASC Chairman)
- (2) Senator John Hickenlooper (D-CO, SASC Ranking Member Designee)

e. House Armed Services Committee:

- (1) Congressman Don Bacon (R-NE, HASC Chairman Designee)
- (2) Congressman Gabe Vasquez (D-NM, HASC Ranking Member Designee)

f. Senate Majority Leader:

- (1) Senator Kevin Cramer (R-ND)
- (2) Vacant

g. Senate Minority Leader:

- (1) Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)
- (2) Vacant

3. NEW BOARD OFFICERS. On 11 July 2025, Congressman August Pfluger assumed the role of USAFA BoV Chairman, and Mr. Douglas Nikolai assumed the role as Vice Chairman, having both been elected by a unanimous vote.

4. GOVERNMENT OFFICERS (a/o 17 January 2025).

a. Designated Federal Officer (DFO): Dr. Raquel Rimpola, SAF/MRM

b. Alternate DFO: Ms. Blair Brush, USAFA/DSX

c. Executive Secretary: Captain Daniel Cassidy, AF/A1PT

5. PUBLIC NOTICE. In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 1009 (a), committee meetings were open to the public and notices of the meetings were published in the Federal Register.

6. PROCEDURES. Under the provisions of 5 U.S.C. § 1009 (b), the minutes of each meeting of the Board are certified by the Chair. The minutes of each meeting are published as part of this report. The Board of Visitors' records are available for public inspection in the Office of the Executive Secretary, Board of Visitors, 1040 Air Force Pentagon, Washington, D.C. 20330-1040. Copies of each of the Reports of the Board are submitted to the Library of

Congress as a matter of public record and are posted on the USAFA website at <https://www.usafa.edu/about/bov/>.

7. **BOARD ACTIVITIES.** In 2025, the Board actively pursued its inquiry and advisory mission by convening two times during the year. The summer committee meeting was held at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado on August 7, 2025. The winter committee meeting was held virtually on December 8, 2025. The meeting minutes can be found at <https://www.usafa.edu/about/bov/>.

8. **OBSERVATIONS.**

- a. **General:** In 2025, the Board explored myriad aspects of the U.S. Air Force Academy to advance its mission. The Board leveraged insight from visiting the Academy, engagements with cadets and staff, and information provided by both the Academy and the Headquarters of the Department of the Air Force. The Board also met with graduates, stakeholders, and outside groups, including representatives from higher education associations. The Board developed observations and recommendations for this report. The observations and subsequent recommendations are designed to ensure the Academy continues to excel in developing leaders for the Air Force and Space Force.

- b. **Restoring America’s Fighting Force and Merit-Based Admissions Memorandums:**

The Board reviewed the Academy’s compliance and implementation of the President’s Executive Order titled “Restoring America’s Fighting Force,” dated January 27, 2025, the Secretary of War’s Memorandum titled “Restoring America’s Fighting Force,” dated January 29, 2025, and the Secretary of War’s Memorandum titled “Certification of Merit-Based Military Service Academy Admissions,” dated May 9, 2025. The Academy stated they are compliant with all executive orders. Additionally, the Academy stated that they established a task force to review the curriculum, library, and facility spaces to ensure compliance.

- c. **Air, Space, and Cyber-mindedness:**

The Board analyzed Air, Space, and Cyber-minded items throughout the four years of the Academy. The Board notes that there is plenty of airspace to fly drones at the Academy and cadets should be thinking about the future of war. The Academy should accelerate Air, Space, and Cyber-minded training to put synergistic concepts into action and learn from operations in Ukraine. The Board is aware of drone programs at West Point and Annapolis and believes the Air Force Academy should be leading the other Service Academies in drone research, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), and adaptation for future warfare. The Board also encourages the Department of the Air Force to increase the presence of officers from Intelligence, Cyber, and Space career fields within the Air Officer Commanding / Squadron Commander and Academy Military Training Noncommissioned Officer personnel.

d. Athletics:

The Board believes that Athletics add unique value to the Academy and produce leaders on and off the field. However, recent changes in college athletics like the transfer portal and Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) have created a new landscape for the Military Service Academies to navigate. The Board believes the Academy has outstanding facilities but must continue to be modernized and upgraded to compete with other Service Academies and Division I colleges. Additionally, the Academy should focus its recruiting efforts on athletes who want to serve their country first and foremost in addition to their desire to compete in collegiate athletics.

e. Cadet Chapel:

The multi-year delay in the renovation of the iconic Cadet Chapel, that is now expected to be complete sometime in 2027, has a profound and negative impact on the spiritual resiliency of the Cadet Wing. It required the focused scrutiny of the Board to highlight the protracted timeline and inject a much-needed sense of urgency to prioritize the Chapel's completion. The Board is encouraged by a letter from the Secretary of the Air Force in October and will continue to closely monitor the renovation's progress.

f. Congressional Nominations:

The Board is encouraged that, for the Class of 2029, nearly 100% of Members of Congress with vacancies available nominated candidates. The Members of Congress on the Board are committed to working with their colleagues to nominate constituents to attend the Academy.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS. The Board provides the following recommendations to the Secretary of War.

a. Expedite the Confirmation of the Dean of Faculty:

The vacancy in the position of Dean of the Faculty at the United States Air Force Academy, vacant since the retirement of the previous incumbent in May 2025, has created a significant and untenable leadership vacuum. For an entire academic semester, this critical post has been filled by an acting Dean who has performed admirably in day-to-day operations, but the absence of a permanent Dean is hindering the academic mission and delaying necessary reforms during a pivotal time for the institution.

This leadership void is directly at odds with the explicit strategic guidance issued by the Secretary of War. The Secretary has underscored the absolute imperative of installing the right leaders at USAFA immediately, to begin the vital work of cementing positive, lasting change. The absence of a permanent Dean directly undermines this critical objective and forestalls the implementation of a renewed vision for academic excellence and warfighter ethos at the Academy.

Consequently, we strongly and urgently recommend that the Secretary of the Air Force make the selection and announcement of a nominee for the Dean of the Faculty an

immediate priority. Following the nomination, it is incumbent upon the Secretary to work in close coordination with the Senate Armed Services Committee to secure the most expeditious confirmation process possible. The continuity of academic excellence and the strategic direction of the Air Force Academy demand nothing less.

b. Make a Generational Investment in the Military Service Academies:

Based on extensive observations and detailed briefings on the current state of the Air Force Academy, the Board concluded that increased investment is critically required for the institution to fulfill its stated mission. The Board has determined that this reinvestment is essential to ensure all facets of the cadet experience (including programs, training, academics, and facilities) reflect the notoriety and prestige expected of a premier Service Academy.

Therefore, the Board strongly recommends that the Department of War collaborate with the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to dedicate a specific section of the Fiscal Year 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to focus on reinvesting in our nation's Military Service Academies. Just as previous NDAA's have addressed themes like acquisition reform and quality of life, the Board advocates for the FY27 NDAA to prioritize the unique and vital role of the Military Service Academies in developing future leaders.

Additionally, the Board recommends the Secretary of War engage with the Secretary of Homeland Security and Secretary of Transportation to revitalize the Service Academies in their Departments. The Board is encouraged by the Secretary of Transportation's modernization efforts related to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

c. Establish a Military Service Academy Commission:

The higher education landscape has drastically evolved over the last few years in three key areas: Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) transformed collegiate athletics; the Secretary of War's May 2025 Memorandum on merit-based admissions adjusted the Military Service Academy admissions process; and the Department of Education removed regional restrictions on accreditation agency alignment.

The Board recommends the Department of War establish a Military Service Academy Commission to analyze focus areas including athletics, admissions, and the accreditation process to ensure the Military Service Academies continue to produce the world-class military officers required to lead a ready, lethal fighting force that is prepared to deter war and defend our nation.

1. Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Effects on Service Academy Athletics

The recent landscape of college athletics, particularly regarding NIL deals, has created a significant disadvantage for the Service Academies. Unlike their civilian counterparts, student-athletes at military academies are considered employees of the federal government and are therefore prohibited by law from profiting from their name, image, or likeness. This restriction severely hampers their ability to compete for top athletic talent, as they cannot offer the lucrative NIL deals that have become a major factor in recruiting.

While federal law currently presents a significant hurdle, several creative and structural ideas have been proposed to help the Service Academies level the playing field in the era of NIL. These strategies range from legislative changes to innovative financial models and enhanced institutional support.

2. Merit-based Admissions Standardization

A standardized admissions process for all three Military Service Academies would be the most effective way to ensure compliance with a merit-based directive from the Secretary of War. This approach would create a transparent, equitable, and efficient system that strengthens public trust and ensures that the most qualified candidates are selected to lead the nation's armed forces, regardless of which academy they attend

With a single, clearly defined process, there would be no room for individual academies to interpret a Secretary of War memorandum in a way that allows for the continuation of non-merit-based practices. A standardized system would close any potential loopholes that might exist in separate processes, making it easier to audit and verify compliance. This would create a system where the rules are clear, consistent, and universally applied.

3. Service Academy Accreditation Transition Initiative (*Attachment 1*)

The Board recommends the Department of War standardize the accreditation agency for all three Military Service Academies. A proposal is included as Attachment 1. (*Reference Attachment 1: Service Academy Accreditation Initiative Position Paper*).

Additionally, a future effort should include the standardization of the accreditation agency for other Department of War degree granting institutions like Air University and National Defense University.

d. Increase Cadet End Strength to Match West Point and Annapolis:

A comparative analysis of the Military Service Academies reveals a significant disparity in cadet and midshipmen populations. For Fiscal Year 2026, the United States Naval Academy's budget projects an end strength of 4,350 midshipmen, while the United States Military Academy at West Point projects an end strength of 4,459 cadets. In stark contrast, the Air Force Academy budgeted end strength for the same period is only 4,000 cadets. This discrepancy is a direct result of post-sequestration budget cuts, which reduced the Academy's end strength from its previous level of 4,400 cadets and cut 100 faculty positions to fund other Air Force priorities.

Restoring the Air Force Academy cadet wing to its pre-sequestration level of 4,400 is a strategic necessity. This increase is critical to compensate for the graduates who now commission into the newly formed Space Force, ensuring the Air Force's officer production numbers remain robust. Furthermore, this action would re-establish parity with our sister service academies, reinforcing the Air Force Academy's standing as a premier institution for developing future military leaders.

Therefore, it is imperative that the Department of War and the Department of the Air Force prioritize the restoration of the Air Force Academy's cadet end strength in the President's Budget Request. Making this a reality is a critical investment in the human

capital required to lead our Air Force and Space Force and maintain a competitive edge in an increasingly complex global security environment.

e. Audit the Dean of Faculty with the Air Force Manpower Analysis Agency:

The Superintendent informed the Board about a reduction in available resources due to civilian faculty departures. USAFA also provided data that government civilian faculty increased by over 50 personnel from 2016 to 2024 and that active-duty military faculty decreased by four. The Board's assessment is that the faculty includes active-duty military, government civilians, reserve component personnel on man-days, visiting professors, privately funded professors, international officers, and fellows. The Air Force Manpower Analysis Agency should review information on all categories of faculty, the required number of faculty, adjustments throughout the last five years, and projections across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP). Additionally, the audit should include an assessment of the number of faculty and staff required if cadet end strength was increased to 4,400.

f. Review Discipline Procedures at the Air Force Academy (*Attachment 2*):

An examination of the disciplinary frameworks at USAFA reveals multi-tiered systems encompassing cadet-specific disciplinary codes, administrative actions, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). While these systems are uniquely tailored to the Academy environment, recent events and testimonies from cadets and families have raised substantial concerns regarding their application and the consistency of due process afforded to cadets.

Board of Visitors members have been briefed on multiple disciplinary incidents where the procedural fairness and clarity of standards have been questioned. A particularly illustrative case involves the USAFA Men's Soccer Team, where nine senior players were subjected to a ten-month probationary period following a disciplinary incident. The due process afforded to these cadets was anemic at best. Critically, the terms of their probation lack clearly defined, objective metrics or standards creating ambiguity about a cadet's future graduation and commissioning. This ambiguity has created a precarious and untenable situation for the cadets, casting significant doubt on their future service.

Testimonies from cadets and their families have brought to light numerous other disciplinary actions and disenrollments with outcomes of questionable procedural validity. Furthermore, inter-service academy dialogues among fellow Board of Visitors members indicate that these procedural deficiencies and apparent lack of robust due process may be systemic, potentially extending to the other Military Service Academies. (*Reference Attachment 2: USAFA Discipline Procedures and Due Process*)

Therefore, a comprehensive review of the disciplinary procedures at USAFA appears not only warranted but essential. The Board recommends that the Secretary of the Air Force support a top-down, independent review of the disciplinary systems and processes at USAFA by select BoV Members and expert legal consultants in accordance with the BoV Charter and Bylaws. This investigation should rigorously assess whether cadets are being afforded their full and unequivocal rights to due process under the law, ensuring that the principles of justice and fundamental fairness are upheld.

g. Revitalize the Academy’s Infrastructure:

The imperative to restore USAFA to its status as a premier service academy is a matter of national prestige and security. The majority of its infrastructure, built in the late 1950s, has far exceeded its expected lifespan. This has led to significant life-health-safety concerns, with degraded conditions causing health incidents among cadets. The current state of the facilities is out of compliance with Unified Facilities Criteria (UFC) and requires an increasing number of emergency repairs.

To attract and retain America's best and brightest, the Academy's environment must reflect the nation's commitment to excellence. As a military training installation, an undergraduate institution, and home to NCAA Division I athletics, USAFA's infrastructure must be world-class.

Furthermore, in an era of renewed great power competition, new, cutting-edge facilities are a necessity. These will ensure that USAFA is at the forefront of technology, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs), and operational concepts of operations (CONOPS) to keep pace with and surpass our adversaries.

Therefore, it is crucial that the HASC and the SASC champion this cause. We strongly advocate that these committees prioritize robust and sustained funding for the Academy in the next NDAA. This commitment is essential to guarantee the development of world-class facilities, provide unparalleled training, and restore the Academy to its rightful position of eminence, securing its legacy as the producer of the nation's finest military leaders for generations to come.

h. Fund the Air, Space, and Cyber Education Center: A Proposal for a Synergistic, Multi-Domain Tri-Complex at USAFA

The development of an integrated three-building complex at the Air Force Academy represents a visionary and fiscally responsible investment in the future of our nation's defense. This tri-complex is designed not merely as a set of buildings, but as an ecosystem engineered to foster multi-domain synergy, provide a crucial home for the Space Force, and establish the Academy as the premier institution for unmanned aerial system development.

Fostering Multi-Domain Convergence

The strategic co-location of these three facilities will create a crucible for developing leaders proficient in Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). Modern warfare is no longer confined to traditional domains but requires the seamless orchestration of military activities across air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.

This complex will enable the convergence of effects by physically and organizationally integrating cadets and faculty from disparate fields.

By breaking down traditional stovepipes, the Academy will cultivate a generation of officers who can instinctively synchronize lethal and non-lethal capabilities—from kinetic fires to space, cyber, and electronic warfare—to present multiple, simultaneous dilemmas to any adversary.

Establishing a Home for the U.S. Space Force

As the newest military service within the Department of War, it is imperative that Space Force cadets, known as Guardians, are provided a distinct home and identity within the Air Force Academy. The Academy is already a primary commissioning source for the Space Force, and this complex will solidify that role by giving Guardians a dedicated center for professional development and esprit de corps.

Furthermore, this integrated approach is a fiscally prudent and expedient alternative to the monumental expense of establishing a separate service academy. The cost of land acquisition, and construction of academic, housing, and training facilities for a standalone institution would be substantial. By leveraging the existing infrastructure of the Air Force Academy, we can provide world-class facilities for our Guardians at a fraction of the cost, ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayers' dollars.

A Premier Center for UAS Excellence

The tri-complex is the ideal environment to establish a drone and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Center of Excellence. The proliferation of UAS technology has fundamentally reshaped the character of modern warfare, offering asymmetric advantages at a low cost. This Center will position USAFA as the leading institution for the development of next-generation UAS TTPs and cutting-edge technology.

Cadets will benefit from hands-on research and training, ensuring they are prepared to innovate and lead in a battlespace increasingly defined by autonomous and remotely operated systems. This initiative will guarantee that our future officers are not just users of this technology, but pioneers who will define its future application in defense of the nation.

To secure the future of American air and space dominance, we must act decisively to bring the proposed tri-complex to fruition. This is a mission-critical investment that demands a united front, blending the strength of government and the innovation of private industry. We urge Congress to prioritize this project for funding, recognizing it as a strategic imperative for national defense.

Emphasis should be placed upon partners in the private sector to join us in a powerful public-private partnership as their technological expertise and operational efficiencies are invaluable. This collaboration offers a unique opportunity to co-locate with the nation's brightest minds in aerospace and UAS technology ensuring the Academy remains the undisputed leader in aerospace power for generations to come.

i. Streamline Board of Visitors Management and Communication:

Given the commendable and heightened level of engagement by the current USAFA BoV, it is imperative to enhance the support structure that facilitates their statutory duties. The increased operational tempo of the Board has placed a significant and necessary demand on the Department of the Air Force to provide timely and comprehensive responses.

To this end, we strongly recommend that the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) role, managed by SAF/MR, be elevated from an ancillary "additional duty" to a dedicated position with appropriately allocated man-hours. Treating this critical function as a

collateral responsibility creates competing priorities and resource conflicts that can impede the flow of information. A properly resourced DFO would serve as the single, consistent communications conduit between Presidential and Congressional appointees on the Board and the Department of the Air Force. The Board recommends the Department of the Air Force communicate from one office in one message to the Board Members to ensure consistent communication. This structural enhancement is essential for the Department of the Air Force to fulfill its obligations, adhere to deadlines, and answer all inquiries, including Questions for the Record (QFRs), in the transparent, accurate, concise, and expeditious manner that the Board's critical work requires.

10. 2026 BoV Focus Groups: A Framework for Enhanced Strategic Advice

To fulfill its statutory responsibilities to the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Air Force, the USAFA BoV must evolve its methodology. Passive reviews of prepared briefings are no longer sufficient to navigate the complex challenges facing the Academy. Therefore, for calendar year 2026, the BoV will establish the following focus groups. This structure is not an administrative exercise; it is a fundamental necessity designed to produce the most insightful, expert-driven, and actionable advice possible.

The success of these focus groups—and by extension, the board's ability to provide meaningful advice—is contingent upon proper resourcing. The USAFA BoV charter and bylaws explicitly authorize the engagement of consultants and travel necessary to conduct its duties.

We therefore strongly ask that the Secretary of the Air Force direct the funding of two critical enablers in accordance with the BoV charter and its bylaws:

Funded Focus Group Travel

Reviewing briefing slides is an inadequate substitute for firsthand, on-site investigation. To understand the complexities of infrastructure, cadet culture, disciplinary decisions and admissions outreach, focus group members and their hand-picked consultants must be physically present at the Academy to interact with cadets and faculty, observe programs in person, and validate data. These focused trips are essential fact-finding missions.

Funded Subject Matter Expert (SME) Consultants:

The members of the Board, while distinguished leaders, cannot be expected to possess the niche, technical expertise required to conduct a deep analysis of every complex topic. Retaining world-class, independent consultants in fields like NIL policy, AI, ethics, and advanced infrastructure planning is the only way to provide the Board with the unvarnished ground truth. These experts act as a force multiplier, enabling the Board to ask the right questions, interpret complex data, and provide the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Air Force with analysis that is both credible and truly insightful.

2026 FOCUS GROUPS

A. Accreditation:

This focus group will ensure the Academy's programs and institutional effectiveness exceed the standards of the Higher Learning Commission. This work is critical to safeguarding the academic credibility and national standing of USAFA, which is foundational to its mission.

B. Admissions:

This focus group will scrutinize the policies and standards used to select future officers. Its objective is to ensure the admissions process is strategically aligned with the intellectual, physical, and character requirements of the modern Department of the Air Force, guaranteeing that the nation's best and brightest are called to serve.

C. Artificial Intelligence (AI):

The AI focus group will provide strategic guidance on integrating AI and machine learning across the Academy's curriculum and research. It will ensure USAFA is not merely teaching but is at the vanguard of preparing cadets for the future of algorithmic warfare, a critical component of strategic competition.

D. Athletics:

This focus group will oversee a multifaceted mission to safeguard the strategic viability and financial integrity of the Academy's Athletics Department. Its duties include developing strategies to counter the significant competitive disadvantages posed by the collegiate NIL landscape, which currently restricts cadet-athletes. Simultaneously, the group must conduct rigorous analysis to ensure the Air Force Academy Athletic Corporation (AFAAC) strictly adheres to its financial charter, particularly concerning the appropriate use of federal funds versus privately generated revenue. Furthermore, the focus group is charged with exploring innovative revenue-generation models to better fund all athletic programs. This mandate for new funding is critical to ensure the long-term health of the entire athletic enterprise.

E. Infrastructure:

This focus group will assess the Academy's physical and digital infrastructure. It will provide independent validation for critical construction projects and ensure that strategic investments are made to create a resilient, modern, and world-class environment worthy of the institution's vital mission.



HONORABLE AUGUST L. PFLUGER
Chairman, USAFA Board of Visitors

cc:

Chairman, Senate Committee on Armed Services
Chairman, House Committee on Armed Services
Secretary of the Air Force
Chief of Staff of the Air Force
Chief of Space Operations

Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs
Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Manpower, Personnel, and Services
Deputy Chief of Space Operations for Personnel
U.S. Air Force Academy Superintendent

ATTACHMENT 1: Position Paper - Service Academy Accreditation Alignment

FOR: United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) Board of Visitors

SUBJECT: Accreditation Agency Alignment for USAFA

1. PURPOSE. Briefly review the changing landscape of higher education accreditation in the United States and provide options for USAFA.

2. POSITION. USAFA should immediately begin the formal process of changing its accreditation relationship from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to the newly formed Commission for Public Higher Education (CPHE). This effort should be closely aligned with or concurrently accomplished with USNA and USMA.

3. KEY POINTS

a. Higher education institutions are moving away from legacy accreditation bodies and agencies like HLC. Recent changes at the U.S. Department of Education removed regional restrictions.

b. Service Academies have a generational opportunity to align with an accrediting body that will respect the mission, purpose, and unique qualities of our nation's military institutions.

c. Service Academies can continue to operate under their existing accreditor relationships while pursuing a new partner. The new CPHE is ideally suited as the Service Academy accreditation partner and is interested in pursuing a formal relationship.

4. DISCUSSION

a. 1965 Higher Education Act directed regional accreditors to evaluate 10 broadly defined areas. It was voluntary but required to access federal financial aid. Accreditation has also traditionally validated credits for transfer to other institutions, including graduate and professional schools.

b. Under the regional model USAFA, USNA, and USMA were not able to pursue accreditation by the same agency. Though the academies can now jointly pursue a single accreditor for all institutions, no one agency fully reflects the unique features, academic excellence, financial stability, and devotion to student outcomes integral to the Service Academies. The new CPHE offers close alignment to the Service Academy mission and would welcome the partnership.

c. All Service Academies are currently fully accredited, with USAFA in favorable status until the 2028-2029 academic year. CPHE is in the formation stage. Founding members include schools from Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, with advice and input from the conservative think tank American Enterprise Institute. Initial membership is capped at 10 institutions, but interest is heavy. Members of the working group contacted the co-leaders of the CPHE: Mr. Dan Harrison (former USAF JA) and Mr. Cameron Howell. Both co-leaders offered their desire to consider Service Academies for the next phase of membership and look forward to formalizing the next steps. CPHE has publicly stated they intend to be a national accreditor.

5. ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINTS

- a. Status Quo: USAFA's current accreditor, HLC, has an international footprint and well-developed accreditation process. USAFA faculty will likely prefer continuing the relationship.
- b. Stand up/Create a new Military School Accreditation Agency. This agency can include the five Service Academies, each service's war college systems, other military schools including the Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT), Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), and others.

6. REBUTTAL

- a. Current accreditation relationships do not leverage the uniquely excellent qualities of USAFA and the other Service Academies. Current and future members of the CPHE will be ideal partners for USAFA, USNA, and USMA and will offer improved alignment as the academic landscape continues to evolve.
- b. A new Military School Accreditation Agency is appealing but will take up to ten years to fully form. Schools like AFIT and NPS rely heavily on engineering and STEM accreditations, especially through the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). This option should be explored but as a longer-term solution.

7. WAY AHEAD

Recommend USAFA BoV direct the pursuit of CPHE as the USAFA accreditation agency. CPHE is open to engaging on next steps in the process. USAFA should engage with USNA and USMA to join CPHE simultaneously. Further recommend extending an invitation to each academy, each service headquarters, and the Department of War, to provide representatives to the formal working group that will work the membership process with CPHE. Negotiations with CPHE should include the potential for a Service Academy component to the CPHE board and the creation of unique criteria for Service Academies. Once CPHE membership is secured, consider expanding membership to include the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and U.S. Coast Guard Academy. Future phases of membership can include the war college systems of all services and other military education institutions.

Working Group Members:

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ATTACHMENT 2: Position Paper - A Review of USAFA Disciplinary/Disenrollment Systems

1. **PURPOSE.** The Board of Visitors (BoV) requested a review of the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) disciplinary/disenrollment systems used to address cadet misconduct and academic deficiencies and the methodologies USAFA uses to determine which of those systems to apply for varying levels of cadet misconduct and deficiencies.
2. **POSITION.** Disciplinary and disenrollment systems must be understandable and transparent. They must also operate with consistency and fairness in a manner that inspires trust. The disciplinary and disenrollment systems at USAFA are unique and confusing. They are often administered in ways that are counter-productive, unfair, and illegal. Cadets are generally in their first four years of adult life (18-21) and will quickly become Air Force leaders who will administer discipline as officers. USAFA must leverage its disciplinary and disenrollment processes to correct and train individual cadets and to teach cadets how to discipline subordinates as future Air Force leaders.
3. **KEY POINTS.**
 - a. The USAFA mission is: “To forge leaders of character, motivated to a lifetime of service, and developed to lead our Air Force and Space Force as we fight and win our Nation’s wars.” USAFA develops young men and women who need an opportunity to make mistakes and to learn from those mistakes.
 - b. USAFA has a four-tiered disciplinary approach to address cadet misconduct – the Cadet Disciplinary System (CDS), the Cadet Honor System, administrative actions, and the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). All cadet misconduct can be considered a violation of Article 133 of the UCMJ, Conduct Unbecoming an Officer, or other UCMJ provisions. This allows USAFA leaders to predetermine a disciplinary process and punishment simply by the way they chose to characterize an individual case.
 - c. Webster’s Dictionary defines “discipline” in several ways. The military typically uses the definition “punishment” without leveraging the part of the definition that states “to train or develop by instruction and exercise especially in self-control.” (“Discipline.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline>. Accessed 29 Dec. 2025.)
4. **DISCUSSION.** USAFA’s approach to discipline often results in seven categories of failure, stated below. The failures are often a result of the approach USAFA chooses to handle misconduct. USAFA often disciplines cadets to impose punishment instead of using discipline to train in a way that “trains or develops by instruction.” A cadet has significant Constitutional rights, which are easily violated when USAFA uses discipline as punishment, such as taking a property or a liberty interest. The arcane nature of USAFA’s processes also exaggerates the negative impacts against cadets. The BoV was briefed on several cases in which all seven categories of failure exist. The undersigned have also observed numerous examples of other similar failures over the past several decades.

5. CATEGORIES OF FAILURE:

- a. Lack of fair notice of specific charges and evidence – lack of fair opportunity to respond (by the cadet and through defense counsel) as required by the Constitution. Without specific notice of charges and evidence, a cadet is prevented from effectively providing a defense, a rebuttal, extenuating or mitigating evidence, or background or contextual facts. Insufficient notice combined with the unique nature of USAFA’s disciplinary system hinders the cadet’s response and also prevents defense counsel from effectively representing the cadet.
- b. Lack of prior notice of conduct prohibited and punishments allowed. USAFA does not clearly notify cadets in advance of expected standards, allowable punishments or a logical connection between a failure of standards and consequences. This allows USAFA leaders to subjectively apply processes to justify nearly any action taken. This approach often doesn’t allow cadets to learn from their mistakes and results in excessive, unreasonable, unfair and embittering punishments.
- c. Excessive, disproportionate punishments can far exceed what is allowed under the UCMJ. For example, the UCMJ provides that punishment exceeding one month’s pay and two months deprivation of liberty must be taken at a Special or General Court-Martial, with very limited exceptions. USAFA’s unique disciplinary system exacts punishments in excess of these limitations. A disenrolled cadet can face recoupment charges in excess of \$150,000 or two years service in enlisted status. Cadets can be placed on probation for a full year, which often includes restrictions and significant extra duties. Cadets can be held past graduation denying them a commission, costing the cadet a year of pay and lost date of rank. This is often done by USAFA while providing cadets insufficient Due Process and in some situations no Due Process.
- d. Excessive/unnecessary delays. Many minor instances of misconduct can take six months or more to investigate. The resulting disciplinary actions take an additional several months. In some cases the disciplinary processes can easily consume an entire academic year.
- e. Misleading cadets about the amount of punishments. For example, cadets are induced to accept an Article 15 punishment relying on statements on the Article 15 form that punishment for the Article 15 would be a number of demerits, tours or periods of confinement. Months afterwards cadets have been “double tapped” by informing them that the same Article 15 is being used as a justification to not allow them to graduate from USAFA and be commissioned as an officer.
- f. Punishments based on membership in a group, such as a sports team or club. In some cases cadets are part of a group that fails to meet a standard. Instead of handing each cadet as an individual, cases sometimes are addressed collectively where all cadets in the group receive the exact same punishment regardless of the cadets’ respective conduct/involvement, lack thereof, or mitigating factors.

g. USAFA leaders often don't adhere to their own standards when disciplining cadets and leaders continue to add additional punishment for the same offense. The inconsistencies, unfair lack of due process and ex-post facto changes lead to significant distrust in the system.

6. RESULTS. The inconsistencies, unfair lack of due process, ex post facto changes and other irregularities violating due process cause (1) careers and lives to be destroyed; (2) morale and respect to plummet; and (3) the Air and Space Forces, and our country, to lose good people unnecessarily and at great cost.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS.

We strongly urge the USAFA BoV to:

- a. Stand up a disciplinary focus group of select members and expert legal consultants to deep dive into USAFA disciplinary procedures to better execute their responsibilities; and
- b. Coordinate and crosstalk with their counterparts on the U.S. Military Academy and U.S. Naval Academy BoVs to compare disciplinary processes and procedures to see if a comprehensive disciplinary approach across all Service Academies is advisable.

8. CONCLUSION. The current USAFA disciplinary approach over-emphasizes punishment and shortchanges or excludes due process, fairness, reasonableness and constructive training. USAFA fails to model and to teach cadets by example proper ways to administer discipline as officers. This approach results in young men and women who are not corrected as individual cadets and who are ill-prepared to administer discipline as officers.

Working Group Members:

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Lt Col (ret) R. Davis Younts, JD

Col (ret) Mark Stoup, JD

ATTACHMENT 3: Minutes – USAFA BoV Committee Meeting Minutes

The minutes of each meeting during this time period are published on the USAFA website at <https://www.usafa.edu/about/bov/>.