

# **Real Winning Service Academy Application Essays**

Real Essays that Helped Candidates  
Win the Appointment



Gain Service Academy Admission

# Real Winning Service Academy and Congressional Nomination Essays

The purpose of this book is to give you several examples of winning Academy and Congressional Nomination essays in order for you to see what “right” looks like. Why examples?

- **To help you understand what is expected of you.** When you read these essays, you get a better sense of what is expected in terms of content, organization, and writing style. This will help you feel more confident and motivated as you work on these essays.
- **Reading well written essays can help you understand what makes this type of essay effective and persuasive.** It can also allow you to continue to develop your own writing style as you continue on your path in military service.
- Reading these essays shows you **what works well** and **what to avoid**. You can look at the way you planned to write and see what areas to emphasize more.

**[please note that all specific personal details of these essays have been changed to ensure the privacy of the writers]**

Essays are an opportunity to showcase that you've gone above and beyond your peers in terms of learning about life as a future officer. The research that you conduct into the branch of service you are applying to will help you throughout the entire application process.

Showcase the research you've done about the service you are interested in. Visit your local ROTC unit and talk to cadre and cadets/midshipmen, visit your local national guard or reserve unit and “shadow” an officer for a few hours, and speak to serving or former officers. Learn all you can about what the challenges are at the Service Academies and what life will be like as a future officer.

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## Research Resources to Help you Prepare

It should be clear by this point that research is needed to get ready. The following are helpful links you can use to get ready to compose your essays. These links are also helpful in getting ready for your interviews:

### Congressional Interview Sources

- [Defense News Early Bird](#) - Sign up to receive daily updates on military related topics in your inbox
- [Defense Department National Defense Strategy Website](#) - Outlines the major concerns and threats to the U.S.
- [Department of Defense Human Goals Charter](#)
- [Congressional Research Service](#) - Gender Neutral Standards for Military Occupational Specialties
- [Current Military policy on LGBTQI\\_ Persons](#)

### Air Force Sources

- [Excellent videos and information on life as a cadet at the Air Force Academy](#)
- [Officer Career Specialties in the Air Force.](#)
- [Information on the Space Force.](#)
- [Air Force Academy Facebook Page.](#)
- [Excellent Blog on becoming a pilot in the Air Force](#)
- [Air Force Values](#)
- [Air Force Academy Honor Code](#) (with link to Honor Code Handbook)
- [Air Force Webpage on Diversity and Inclusion](#)

### Army Sources

- [Life as a cadet at West Point](#)
- [Career Specialties in the Army](#) - Excellent interactive website about the basic branches of the Army
- [West Point Admissions Facebook Page](#)
- [Excellent Blog on becoming a pilot in the Army](#)
- [Army Values](#)
- [Army Diversity](#)
- [New Army Combat Fitness Test](#)

### Navy and Marine Corps Sources

- [Full lay down of life at the Naval Academy](#) (The Blue and Gold Book)
- [Life at the Naval Academy](#)
- [Summary of Career Specialties in the Navy and Marine Corps](#)
- [Naval Academy Admissions Office Facebook Page](#)
- [Excellent Blog on becoming a pilot in the Navy or Marine Corps](#)
- [Naval Academy Honor Concept](#)
- [Navy Core Values Charter](#)
- [Navy Diversity and Equity](#)

## Successful Air Force Academy Essays

### Air Force Academy Essay 1 - Setback/Ethical Dilemma

The Setback/ethical Dilemma essay is common in a Service Academy essay.

When looking at a setback, the Academies want to see that you have had any experiences which show that you have grit or determination to see things through.

Angela Duckworth's book: *Grit, the Power of Passion and Perseverance*, explores the concept of grit as a key predictor of success. According to Duckworth, grit is a combination of passion and perseverance, or the ability to stay focused and motivated on a goal even in the face of challenges and setbacks.

In the book, Duckworth discusses her own research on grit. The foundation of her work was a study of first year cadets at West Point. Those who had more grit were more likely to stay at West Point and complete the four-year training.

The ethical dilemma is another common facet of Academy essays. Honor codes are an important part of the culture at U.S. Service Academies. Honor codes are meant to instill a strong sense of integrity, honor and personal responsibility in cadets and midshipmen.

In practice, the honor codes are enforced through a system of peer reporting and accountability. Cadets and midshipmen are expected to report any violations of the honor code as part of their commitment to the Academy.

In this essay question, the Academy is trying to determine if you have had a moral or ethical dilemma and how you resolved it in order to see if you would be a good fit for the Academy and are able to live as an honorable person.

#### Essay Prompt:

**Describe a setback or ethical dilemma that you have faced. How did you resolve it? How did the outcome affect you? Most importantly, what did you learn about yourself and how would you handle a similar situation in the future? (400 to 500 words, 3000 characters max)**

#### Essay 1 - Answer 1:

Joining the Civil Air Patrol at age 14, it was difficult for me to imagine that one day I might have the opportunity to become a Spaatz cadet. Considered to be the crowning achievement in the Cadet Program, it can take an average of five years for a cadet to master the sixteen achievements aimed at developing leadership abilities, a strong sense of personal responsibility, and self-discipline. My goal to earn the General Carl A. Spaatz Award this summer proved to be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my cadet career.

The physical requirements, as well as the cumulative exams in leadership and aerospace, proved to be as demanding as one would expect. During the school year, I had learned the value of self-discipline and applied that to a structured schedule of review and physical training in anticipation of the testing

day. As per regulations, only three attempts are granted to complete the four phases of the exam; essay, leadership, aerospace, and PT.

After a month of training, I had reservations about my performance for the 1-mile run. The PT exam is modeled after the CFA standards of the Air Force Academy, and I was able to meet my targets for the pushups and curl-ups. My mile, however, was still over by almost 45 seconds. On test day, I knew that my mile would likely not meet the required time, but I was prepared to push myself. After passing the academic portions of the exam, I missed the mile by 24 seconds.

I began to look for a different approach to my training program. I made the purposeful decision to join the cross country team at my high school to surround myself with peers and a team to push myself further. It was encouraging to share in the accomplishments of my teammates and being in their company had a very positive effect. After training with my team and focusing on aspects of training I did not consider before, I was able to re-test and finish the mile well within the allotted time of three weeks.

This experience helped me understand that failures are sometimes just opportunities to reach a goal by other means. I realized that I am able to adapt and utilize additional resources to complete a task. Many times these additional resources are people and the expertise they bring to the group. People are the backbone of any organization. I learned being part of a team with a strong commitment to achievement can motivate me to surpass my own expectations. In turn, with my leadership skills, I can provide others with the support to accomplish their goals and push them to work hard. If given the privilege of attending the United States Air Force Academy, I will continue my dedication towards the core value of excellence.

### **Essay 1 - Answer 2:**

When I was selected to join my high school's FIRST Robotics Competition (FRC) Team my sophomore year, I achieved a major goal. Transitioning to living in the United States, I chose my high school specifically for the opportunity of joining the robotics team. Our team of 40 student engineers and programmers is highly selective. The time commitment is also extensive as together our team only has two months to design, prototype, manufacture, program, and test the robot we build together. This commitment challenged my ability to develop other aspects of my life, but also gave me the opportunity to lead and motivate others.

Upon moving to the United States, I quickly realized I was behind my peers athletically. By joining the crew team my freshman year, I gained an appreciation and passion for fitness completely new to me. While I was eager to participate in robotics, the 18 hour per week time commitment, on top of my already packed schedule of classes and extracurriculars left little time for fitness. When robotics season started, I realized my newfound fitness and confidence had become a part of my identity I could not afford to lose during robotics season. From freshman to sophomore year, I went from being alone in a new country and totally overwhelmed to learning how to manage my workload and finding a sense of belonging and confidence through athletics.

I looked to one of my personal heroes, David Smith, to motivate me to succeed. One of my favorite quotes of his helped me overcome this challenge: "When you feel like giving up, you are only at 40% of what you are truly capable of." I knew this was another opportunity to persevere and overcome this challenge, a chance to put his words into action.

I meticulously planned my days in order to accomplish all my goals. My days were packed from 5:45 am to 10 pm. Most of my robotics teammates were skeptical. Many were not into athletics and did not believe I could excel in all areas of my life. Most thought I would give up my workouts. My perseverance throughout the year changed their attitudes. My teammates noticed not only had I not stopped working out, but I was contributing more to the team than many of my teammates who were not nearly as busy. Many of my teammates began to join me in the gym several times per week. I realized the importance of believing in myself and motivating others to do the same.

I learned that success takes planning and combining planning with grit helps us accomplish incredible feats. We are more capable than we realize, and one of the aspects I look forward to most as a cadet and eventually an officer is helping my future peers and subordinates to realize their vast capabilities. I will continue to push myself towards excellence and to one day lead by example as an Air Force officer.

### **Essay 1 - Answer 3:**

While everyone has experienced uncertainty and hardship in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, I found myself with the difficult decision after my boarding school, Webb Academy, decided in March 2020 to send their students home and start online-only classes. I was forced to decide whether to leave the U.S. and join my parents in Kuwait or find somewhere to stay in the U.S., Kuwait's time zone difference would have required me to do classes through the night and also held the risk of not being able to return to school in the U.S. in early August to start football and leadership training for my role as Command Sergeant Major. Before making the difficult decision to stay in the U.S. and live with a family friend, I consulted with my family, school leaders and older siblings. I decided to remain in America to complete the school year and summer classes virtually.

My time living with families in the United States since March has been a significant challenge. The first family I stayed with lived in Portland. However, concerned about the worsening situation where they lived, they decided it was best for all of us to relocate to their small farm in remote Montana. Unfortunately, it was so remote that there was no cellular signal and very poor wi-fi making virtual classes almost impossible. As I began to fall behind in studies, and realizing the situation was tenuous, I went about making new arrangements to stay with another family in Southern Utah where I'd spent time with the previous summer working on their extended family's large ranch. Returning to somewhere with familiar surroundings and with better wi-fi, my studies improved. However, the parents ended up separating while I was there. Despite the tension in their home, I felt that my being there was helpful to their son who was a year older than me and I could support him emotionally. I continued working on the ranch every day while also doing my spring and summer studies which proved quite challenging given the family's difficult situation. So, in mid-July I was able to arrange to return to California to stay with the family of a school friend.

Looking back on this period, I learned a lot about being decisive in the face of uncertainty, the importance of being adaptive as situations change, and being resilient under challenging circumstances. I know I have become a stronger person because of my experiences that summer.

### **Essay 1 - Answer 4:**

Setback and defeat is something that everyone experiences. But it isn't those defeats that should define who you are, it is the way that you respond and react to those setbacks that defines you. My

experience of being cut from the rowing team taught me lessons regarding hard work and never giving up.

Going into my first year of high school I chose to try out for my school's rowing team and soon this goal became the governing force in my life. When the year came to an end, I was excited for the tryouts going into sophomore year, confident that I was going to make the team. But as the five-day tryout progressed, I realized I was woefully unprepared. By the end of the week, I was cut from the team. I was devastated and didn't know what to do. I felt lost because all I had known was success in both academics and athletics up until then.

After a few weeks of trying to figure out what I needed to do I thought I would go back to something I was familiar with, so I joined my school's water polo team. With renewed focus, I started to get back to training for water polo as well as rowing. I worked out daily through the fall and winter.

When spring tryouts for rowing commenced, I was finally able to show the coaches what I had done. I ended up on the junior varsity team and continued my career in rowing eventually making varsity a year later in the spring of my junior year. I ran for captain of the team for my senior year. I unfortunately was runner up but I have focused my leadership in other ways by staying after summer practice to help out with the younger rowers and instilling the passion and drive that I know they are capable of. I try to make sure that no one gives up on themselves and that there is someone who cares about their progress and success.

## **Air Force Academy Essay 2 - Attributes**

The attributes of selfless service and teamwork are valued most by the military.

Selfless service and teamwork are important values in the military for a number of reasons.

First, the military is a team-based organization that relies on the cooperation and cooperation of its members to achieve its mission. Military operations often require soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to work closely together and rely on each other in order to succeed. As a result, the ability to work effectively as a team is critical for the success of the military as a whole.

Second, selfless service is a core value in the military because it reflects a commitment to putting the needs of the team and the mission above one's own personal interests. This value is especially important in the military because soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines are often called upon to make sacrifices and put themselves in harm's way in order to protect their country and defend its interests.

Finally, selfless service and teamwork are important in the military because they foster a sense of camaraderie and esprit de corps among military personnel. By working together and putting the needs of the team first, military personnel develop strong bonds of loyalty and trust with their fellow service members, which can help to build a cohesive and effective military force.

In understanding this, you can begin to formulate your answer to Essay 2.

**Essay Prompt:**

**What attributes, life experiences, unique perspectives, and/or special talents do you possess that would contribute to the classroom, student body, and/or Air Force Academy? (400 to 500 words, 3000 characters max)**

**Essay 2 - Answer 1:**

I believe my strengths lie in my dedication to holding myself to the highest of standards, being grounded by a moral compass, and helping others to achieve success. My attributes, learned from my life experiences, will greatly assist me in contributing to the student body and my overall endeavor to commission as a capable leader from the Air Force Academy.

As a cadet in the Civil Air Patrol for over four years, the skills I have refined and demonstrated have provided me with foundational leadership experiences and a desire to be of service to others. In various positions I have had the privilege to hold, including Cadet Commander of my squadron, I have reinforced within myself the importance of leading by example, going first, and striving for excellence. I feel these beliefs would guide me at the academy in being a positive influence on others.

Competing in Martial Arts has taught me the importance of humility, patience, and determination. I have found the discipline and physical demands of jiu-jitsu to be of personal benefit in my pursuit of elevated fitness. I have seen that, when we push ourselves just a little farther than we think we can go, we can achieve immense personal growth. Although it is not always easy to press beyond our perceived limits, the rewards far outweigh those brief sacrifices. I am confident in my ability to persevere in times of adversity and I will use this skill to support others in the cadet community.

Finally, should I be granted the honor of becoming a cadet, I will bring my ability to adapt to setbacks and meet challenges. After an unsuccessful tryout for my high school basketball team, I decided to join track and field. I recognized running to be a fitness weakness and was determined to improve. I learned the importance of the power of a team and put in the time practicing and learning from my teammates. In my junior year, a teammate suggested that I take on an even bigger challenge: hurdles. Even though the other athletes had been hurdling since freshman year, I committed myself to work hard to meet or even exceed my expectations. This was a new skill for me, but the more experienced hurdlers on the team gave me the confidence I needed to develop the skill quickly. From their support, I learned the value of teamwork, and I have determined that it was invaluable in motivating myself and others.

These experiences allowed me to develop my skills as a leader and coach by instructing others. I value working with others, and my ability to assist the team will hopefully make me an asset to others at the academy. I believe that these leadership experiences combined with my drive and motivation will help me serve others and benefit the cadet wing.

**Essay 2 - Answer 2:**

Moving from Vietnam to the United States as a young adult has given me an uncommon opportunity. I bring a multicultural view of the world. This view has humbled me and helped me learn how to recognize and overcome my shortcomings with determination. As a result, I have developed problem-solving skills I hope to bring to the Air Force as a cadet and hopeful officer.



When I first moved to the United States from Vietnam I was overwhelmed. Not only did I experience culture shock, but I realized I was not pursuing excellence in my past. My academic life in Vietnam did not challenge me nearly to the extent of my boarding school in the U.S. I quickly realized that my lack of effort in Vietnam, which still resulted in success, would not achieve much at my U.S. high school. At my new high school, I learned to put my goals and aspirations ahead of my whims. Before, I was quick to quit anything I didn't immediately excel in. Now, I am someone who pushes myself and motivates others towards achieving success.

While some people are taught passion for sports and exercise from a young age, I was not exposed to exercise in Vietnam. As a result, I began high school as an unfit individual. I quickly realized this was a weakness as soon as I started my freshman year. I worked hard to increase my fitness through lifting and training and learned determination and perseverance. To make up for my late start, I became a student of training and nutrition. I used my knowledge to train optimally and progress as fast as possible. I also developed determination for success. The routines and lifestyle I created helped me overcome my athletic weaknesses and bulk over 70 pounds. The confidence I gained allowed me to try many new sports despite my inexperience, including rowing, track, varsity football, and varsity wrestling.

My Vietnamese-American heritage and experience empowers me to excel in diverse situations. The international school I attended in Vietnam helped me create relationships with people from all over the world from Oceania to Asia and Europe. Since I constantly traveled between different cultures from my mom's side to my dad's side of the family, I learned how to quickly adapt to different environments. I learned how to effectively communicate and work together with a variety of people. I pride myself in recognizing and acting as an ambassador for many cultures. My transition from living in Vietnam to the United States has helped me learn to cross cultural barriers. I enjoy befriending people from different cultures, as I completely relate to their experience.

I want to serve and lead others. My cross-cultural competency, ability to recognize my shortcomings, and my perseverance brings a unique set of skills that I would like to continue to develop to one day serve in the Air Force. I look forward to the opportunity to grow into a capable leader at The Air Force Academy.

### **Essay 2 - Answer 3:**

I have been blessed with many opportunities and I strongly believe it is my duty to repay my community and country through national service. Becoming an officer in the Air Force would be both a great honor and responsibility and one that I am prepared to undertake. I believe my experience as an Army ROTC cadet as well as being a student at a military boarding school will bring an uncommon perspective to my Air Force Academy class.

I am now an Army ROTC MS I (freshman) cadet at Ohio University. I have enjoyed my time in Army ROTC and have been exposed to some of the finest officers and non-commissioned officers in the U.S. Army. However, after having experienced a semester as an Army ROTC cadet, I decided that the Air Force would be a better fit for me and would allow me to pursue my dream of flying fixed winged aircraft. I continue to learn a great deal about small unit tactics and troop leading procedures and plan to finish out my MS I year.

Being a former student at a military boarding school (Webb Academy--Riverside, California) also afforded me the opportunity to interact with many retired officers. Our commandant of cadets was a retired colonel and was instrumental in my leadership development and has encouraged me to apply to the Air Force Academy. I have also visited local military bases in the San Diego area and spent time in the training areas there and observed military unit operations in action. In my discussions and observations, I learned much about the high standards that will be demanded of me as an officer. It is an awesome responsibility that I want to start with my enrollment at the USAFA.

Overall, I believe I have been exposed to the military environment over the last four years as a military boarding school student as well as an Army ROTC cadet at Ohio University. I hope to bring that knowledge and maturity in joining a talented class of cadets at the Air Force Academy.

#### **Essay 2 - Answer 4:**

Two signature strengths I have are determination and commitment. I believe that these attributes will be vital in excelling at the Air Force Academy as well as something I can draw from as an officer in the United States Air Force.

My commitment is displayed in multiple aspects, whether it be physically, academically, or in service to others. Physically, I strive to push myself further and farther during every practice for rowing. After being cut from the team my sophomore year, I was always determined to not let that happen to me again and I always put 100% of my effort into everything athletic practice or competition. Academically I stay resilient and committed to my work. Over my high school career I would say that I didn't start off as strong as I would have liked to. But after having some slight setbacks I found a way to set myself up for success and have managed to maintain my 3.83 GPA while still taking academically rigorous classes in a variety of topics ranging from math to music.

I have spent a lot of my life involved with leadership of some sort. I have been in Boy Scouts ever since the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I have always loved Scouts and pursued every achievement I could. I have traveled around the country to attend different leadership training as well as holding many key leadership roles in my Boy Scout troop such as Troop Quartermaster, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, Senior Patrol Leader, and Assistant Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. I have also put my leadership skills to the test and achieved the rank of Eagle Scout during the winter of 2020.

My most memorable experience from scouts is when I went to Nocent Scout Ranch in New Hampshire for the National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience. It was a week out in the mountainous desert where we were taught different strategies to lead small and large groups. We also were given the opportunities to put these lessons to the test. My experience there was very special. I was one of the youngest scouts ever to be accepted into the program and attend. During the week I was on patrol where the closest person to me in age was close to two years. To be frank I was intimidated by being so relatively young, but I knew I had to overcome that negative mindset and take charge when it came time for me to take up the leadership mantle. I was elected patrol leader for the last day and was in charge of leading and conducting drills for the patrol throughout the day. It really changed how I approached problems with leadership, having those older kids trust me as their leader. Since then, I have never backed down from a challenge whether academically or dealing with others. I always take charge and get to work.

In conclusion, I am looking forward to becoming an officer candidate at the Air Force Academy and drawing from my signature strengths in order to be the best cadet, teammate, and future officer I can be.

## Air Force Academy Essay 3 - Optional

Essay #3—while optional, may be the most important essay that the Air Force Academy considers. Continue to emphasize selfless service and teamwork as well as the Air Force values of *Integrity First, Service Above Self, and Excellence in All We Do*.

### Essay Prompt:

**Please provide any additional information or background you believe will be of assistance in evaluating your application. (400 to 500 words, 3000 characters max)**

### Essay 3 - Answer 1:

The legacy of honor and service in my family has set me on a personal path towards serving others in our nation's military. My grandfather, a Korean War veteran, was assigned to the USS New York. My father was both an officer in the USNR and U.S. Merchant Marine. Their dedication to serving others while serving their country is in part what inspired me to follow a similar course. Although I have grown in my achievements, I credit my family for their influence and examples of personal sacrifice. To embark on my journey as an officer in the Air Force is my primary reason for wanting to attend the Air Force Academy.

Service and aviation have been of great significance in my life. For several years, my family and I have attended the "Wings of Freedom Tour" sponsored by the Collings Foundation, an organization with a mission to preserve our nation's achievements in flight. It was an opportunity to expand upon what I had already learned as a cadet in CAP. I was able to enjoy many flights in WWII aircraft like the B-17 and B-25 with my grandfather and other veterans who shared our desire to leave an enduring legacy for future generations.

From there, I was inspired to learn more about the Air Force Academy. I met with cadets and graduates to gain their perspectives on academy life, and their stories gave me the motivation to find ways that I could give back to my country. I became energized at the thought of being part of a community that shared the same values of integrity, service, and excellence. I truly believe that I will find teammates of the highest caliber with a dedication to excellence, both physically and academically, at the Air Force Academy.

This summer, I also experienced military aviation in a new and more immersive way. I was one of 75 cadets selected to attend the National Blue Beret Cadet Special Activity in Oshkosh, WI. During the two-week course, my fellow cadets and I managed flight line operations, working as a team to direct small aircraft on the ground. Even though the days were long and exhausting, my cadet flight was there to ensure that we were motivated for whatever the next day demanded. By the end of the first week, we were already a team working together to ensure all our objectives were met and tasks completed. Overall, the experience challenged me and made me appreciate how best to respond to

leadership under pressure. The experience also solidified my desire to surround myself with peers who will support and push me to become the best version of myself.

In conclusion, my pursuit of service to my country allowed me to see the opportunities for self-development at the Air Force Academy. Having the honor of attending the Air Force Academy will allow me to pursue my dreams, serve others, and develop myself into a successful leader and officer.

### **Essay 3 - Answer 2:**

I want to attend the Air Force Academy for many reasons encompassing many aspects of my life. Primarily, I wish to attend and grow into the best leader to protect the freedoms we enjoy in the U.S. in stark contrast to my experience in Vietnam. My family's legacy of service and the opportunities available at service academies also motivate me towards commissioning from a service academy.

My first exposure to service academies was as a freshman in high school. I go to a boarding school which serves as a Naval Academy Foundation school, so every year I encounter Navy postgraduate students. The more I encountered these students the more I realized they were unlike others. These individuals had drive, motivation, clear goals, discipline, balanced academics, sports, fitness and yet could still relax and have fun. Their model behavior demonstrated the premier leadership training received from U.S. service academies. To learn more about the service academies and life in the military, I attended the USAFA Summer Seminar this past summer. This opportunity cemented my decision to apply, as I learned about the incredible leadership opportunities and am excited to pursue my goals of commissioning into the Air Force as a developmental engineer under the aeronautical engineering program. I desire to serve my country and lead others while challenging myself academically and physically. The Air Force Academy will help me grow into a capable leader.

Having spent my early life in Vietnam, a country where freedom is not valued as highly, I believe I can appreciate the liberties afforded to me more than the average American. It is my duty to give back to the country. I appreciate things most take for granted, including exposure to multiple viewpoints on current affairs. This freedom is unavailable to those in Vietnam due to the government-controlled media and information flow through the national firewall. The fear of Western influence can be felt throughout Vietnam.

My family also has a military tradition; my uncle served in WWII and my grandfather served in the Air Force. However, no one in the generation before me served. Many of my family members hold very negative views of the military and dislike the fact I am applying to a service academy. By attending a service academy and becoming an officer I hope to restore my family tradition. I believe the service academies will best prepare me to lead Airmen.

My goals include attending the Air Force Academy, successfully graduating, and serving as a development engineer or a pilot in the U.S. Air Force. I desire to complete at least 20 years of honorable service as an Air Force officer. If I am unable to attend a service academy, my backup plans are to attend either the University of Vermont or Duke University. Both of these universities have strong engineering and ROTC programs. Above all, I am committed to commissioning as an Air Force officer and will do everything in my power to achieve that goal.

### **Essay 3 - Answer 3:**

Ever since I was little I have been fascinated by planes, rockets, and space. For years I have been going to EAA Air Venture Toledo to see all of the experimental airplanes that people were developing, and one of my favorite parts was always getting to walk through a C-17 Globemaster and seeing F-16s, F-35s, F-22s, and A-10s doing aerial maneuvers and then talking to the pilots afterwards.

I realize attending the Air Force Academy and training to become an officer is a serious commitment and that I needed to educate myself about what life would be like as a cadet and future officer. I had a plan.

This past year I was able to talk to some Air Force Academy graduates about their experiences there and asked for their advice on how to be the best cadet I could be. I was also able to talk with an F-16 pilot with the Oregon Guard and an officer in the Air Force Special Operations Command. Getting to hear their path through the Air Force and the Academy really opened my eyes to what was possible. They talked about how the Academy really helped them grow as a person and see things around them differently. They became more effective leaders because of their time at the Air Force Academy.

During the summer of 2021 I attended the summer seminar program. This more recent experience reinforced what I had learned from talking with Air Force officers. Being able to talk to the current cadets about how life was in the Academy and what they enjoyed and learned there reinforced my decision to attend the Air Force Academy.

Overall, I am excited about the future and training to become an officer in the United States Air Force.

### **Essay 3 - Answer 3:**

I've lived in multiple countries where I've had very diverse experiences with very different groups of people. I believe this has helped me a great deal in understanding people of different race, ethnicity, and religious beliefs.

When I was eight, I moved from the U.S. to Australia. At my school in Australia, I was a student ambassador chosen to visit a remote Aboriginal community in Smythville in Australia's Northern Territory. While there, our group shared our experiences with this community. I quickly found myself immersed in their way of life. We fished, played sports, and participated in community activities. Their life was simple but had a lot of joy in it. It made me realize how all peoples have similar aspirations to include access to economic opportunity, friendship, and enjoyment of life.

At age 14 my family moved to Kuwait where I first attended an international school that had over 70 nationalities. Forty percent of the school was Indian students. It took a lot to adjust to this school where for the first time I felt I was in the minority. Sports were my bridge to build friendships and get to know the other kids. I found I could quickly make friends and become an accepted member of a number of diverse groups because of sports and my comfort in different cultural settings.

During the recent pandemic I was unable to travel to Kuwait to be with my parents due to border closures. I ended up staying with three different families, including one in Bradford, in far south Utah near the border of Colorado. While there for three months I worked on a ranch with many Hispanic workers. I took this chance to learn more about Hispanic culture and spent time in their close-knit

community. My respect for my Hispanic friends grew as I got to know them more and learned about their families and their aspirations for the future.

I have never felt uncomfortable with any person based on their color, gender, ethnicity, or religion. I have traveled extensively to many countries and have always enjoyed learning about different cultures and making friends. I look forward to having diverse classmates at the Air Force Academy and serving in the Air Force where I will lead soldiers of different ethnicities. Additionally, when I deploy as an officer, I believe that my experiences overseas will help me to understand and appreciate the local cultures I will interact with as an officer.

## Successful Naval Academy Essays

There is only one Naval Academy essay. You need to make it count.

Do research about the Naval Academy, talk to officers and midshipmen, visit a local Navy Reserve unit and “shadow” an officer for a few hours. Learn all one can about what the challenges are in store at USNA and what life will be like as a future officer.

Then, when the applicant writes an essay, talk about those experiences in the essay. Be humble. The candidate should tell USNA that he/she did his/her due diligence to understand the challenges ahead. Additionally, the candidate should tell USNA that he/she has prepared as best he/she can (speak to past leadership experiences) and feel confident that, based on past leadership and these visits/talks, he/she is up to the task of being an officer candidate and a future military officer.

The essay should also be self-effacing and continue to go back to the Navy Core Values Charter. Again, it is not about the candidate but about how the candidate makes his/her teammates better, acts as a servant leader, and lives a committed, honorable life.

### Essay Prompt:

**In a well-organized essay of a total of 300 to 500 words, please discuss both of the following:**

**(1) Describe what led to your initial interest in the naval service and how the Naval Academy will help you achieve your long range goals, and (2) Describe a personal experience you have had which you feel has contributed to your own character development and integrity.**

### Answer 1:

The legacy of honor and service in my family has set me on a personal path towards serving others in our nation’s military. My grandfather, a Korean War Veteran, was assigned to the USS New York. My father was both an officer in the USNR and U.S. Merchant Marine. Their experience at sea and their dedication to serving others while serving their country were in part what inspired me to follow a similar path. Although I have grown in my own achievements, I credit my family for their influence. My family’s example, combined with my dedication to selfless service, are my primary reasons for wanting to attend the Naval Academy.

Last year, a fellow Civil Air Patrol cadet officer that I greatly admire was accepted into the Naval Academy. Following his journey over Plebe Summer gave me my first indication that a similar course was one that I would be honored to undertake myself. Participating in the USNA Summer Session 2021 provided a glimpse into what daily life as a midshipman would be like, and I welcomed the challenge of that experience. I became energized at the thought of being part of a core of individuals with a focus on leadership and service to one another. I developed a better understanding of the Naval Academy’s mission statement, and how it aligns with my own developing value system. Serving alongside teammates that share these values, and being part of a community dedicated to selfless service, will help me grow into the most principled naval officer.

Integrity and honor are held in high regard and are expected of those attending the Naval Academy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools across the country were dealing with virtual learning platforms that were prone to inconsistencies and situations for cheating. In my junior year, many of my classmates felt the virtual classrooms required more discipline than they were willing to apply in order to continue learning. It was just easier to go along with a group of students that traded their integrity for a higher grade, one that they would never achieve in a normal classroom setting. Although it was a more difficult route, my integrity is more valuable to me than a grade I did not earn. For me, the Naval Academy Honor Concept represents the same structure that I hold myself accountable to in all that I do.

Attending a service academy takes hard work, unwavering commitment, and an expectation to uphold the highest of standards. My cadet career in the Civil Air Patrol, culminating in earning the General Carl A. Spaatz Award, embodies similar values. My leadership experience has taught me that I am grounded by a clear moral compass and that a team is more essential than the individual. If given the opportunity to attend the Naval Academy, these experiences will help me grow into the most capable leader and to be the best I can be for myself and others.

Through the STEM program at the Naval Academy, I hope to pursue my dream of joining the Navy as an engineer. Even if I am unable to attain a spot for an engineering slot, my main goal is to become a naval officer, and to use all the knowledge that I gain from the Naval Academy to serve others.

#### **Answer 2:**

The legacy of service in my family first opened my eyes to the value of serving my country. Since learning about my grandfather's contributions onboard the USS Dallas in World War II, I have always known I wanted to serve in the Navy. My grandfather's stories showcased courage and commitment. These stories serve not only as my initial interest but have driven me to challenge myself throughout my life to prepare for leadership. From a young age, I committed my future to serving my country.

Growing up in the Middle East also largely influenced my long-term goals. Overseas, I constantly witnessed the lack of freedoms available to many citizens of other nations. My core aspirations are to complete a full career as a naval officer, serving my country and leading others as a computer engineer. My childhood in the Middle East taught me the importance of our freedoms in the United States. I want to defend those freedoms and rights for future generations. The defense of the United States Constitution is the defense of opportunity for our citizens.

My time developing my leadership skills and style have not been without challenges. A challenging character development experience solidified my understanding of integrity. During my sophomore year, I witnessed a close friend violating our honor code by vaping. At first I tried to talk my peer out of violating the code altogether through reasoning with him about his health. When this didn't work, I discussed his long-term goals of commissioning and how he would fail to reach those goals if he continued with his honor violation which had now implicated me as a bystander. I helped him access the school's rehabilitation program so that he could get the help he needed. Through this experience, I learned how to lead my peers to do the right thing. This experience helped solidify my confidence in my ability to do the right thing, even if there are unpleasant consequences.



I am dedicated to commissioning into the Navy as an officer but want to best prepare myself for service. In search of this goal, if I am given the chance to attend the Naval Academy the opportunities afforded to me as a midshipman will help me to reach my highest leadership potential. I desire to push myself and compete amongst the best. The servant leadership style I have developed through leading in the Boy Scouts and while attending a military high school forms the basis of how I have learned to lift my teammates up and lead them to excel. The core values of the Navy are extremely meaningful to me, as they develop honor and courage and mold men and women as Sailors. Living in an environment where every day is challenging but builds character and strength will help me become the best officer possible. The character of the men and women who thrive in this environment are the people with which I desire to serve.

### Answer 3:

Some of my earliest memories are of hearing stories of my family's long history of military service. My great grandfather served in the Second World War and was a POW in the Burma theater. He escaped his imprisonment, walked thousands of miles through enemy lines to return to his hometown in Punjab, and was awarded the Victoria Cross. My great uncle destroyed eight tanks and was posthumously awarded the British equivalent of the Purple Heart. Hearing such stories left an indelible impression and I have been drawn to military service as far back as my memory goes.

I had recently moved to a small town on the Robic peninsula when I had my first encounter with Frank Ronald. After seeing me playing outside in military garb he walked over and introduced himself as our neighbor and retired Navy Captain. Over the years Captain Ronald and I became friends and he would tell me the many adventures he had while serving. I came to find out that Captain Ronald's 32-year Naval Career started as a bet and I recall him laughing as he remembered that his reward for enlisting was a pie. One of his favorite memories was being given a collection of seashells by the Philippines president at the time Manuel Quezon. He would proudly display the shells he had collected from all over the Pacific throughout his home. One day he took one of those shells from President Quezon and gifted it to me. It now resides on a shelf I hope to fill with objects from my military adventures. Captain Ronald eventually applied to the USNA and after his enlisted deployment to the Pacific.

Our other neighbor was Robert Smith, a retired Marine Colonel. Colonel Smith would routinely stop by our home to offer landscaping advice but would always end up telling one of his stories. He would frequently recount his adventures around the world on behalf of NATO. However, every one of his stories would end with the Colonel reminiscing in his southern drawl about how much he missed military life.

After hearing Captain Ronald and Colonel Smith's stories I was eager to see some of the places they described. So, in the third grade, my dad and I planned a trip to Europe with an itinerary full of military museums and battle sites. I saw the *Musee National de la Marine*, the Danish Military Museum, the Imperial War Museum and walked on the Normandy beaches. One thing that struck me was wherever we traveled in Europe everyone was very grateful for the contributions of America in both World Wars.

I see it as my moral, civic, and constitutional duty to serve the country where I was born and raised and the Naval Academy provides me the opportunity to do that. I wish to embody the Navy values of honor, courage, and commitment. The history, experience, and leaders it has produced make it unparalleled.

Being offered an appointment to walk the same halls as Chester Nimitz, Ernst King, John McCain, and Frank Ronald would be the greatest possible honor. I look forward to leading America's sailors as an officer in the U.S. Navy.

**Answer 4:**

My interest in naval science first originated from learning about our nation's Navy. To pursue a career in the Navy, I took the initiative to learn as much as possible about the branch. I visited Naval Weapons Station Smithtown and learned there is much more to the Navy than ships and powerful weaponry. I learned that the sailors and marines are the backbone of the service. My host, LT Jared Cheek, shared stories about his tours in Italy, Iraq and an intelligence facility in Washington state. I learned that a formidable Navy controls shipping lanes, deploys troops with incredible speed, and possesses the capability to defend the seas at all costs. This visit helped solidify my desire to serve and confirmed that the Navy is the branch in which I belong.

After attending Summer Seminar, touring campus, and speaking with several USNA alumni, I confirmed that life as a midshipman will best prepare me for future service in the U.S. Navy. I am particularly interested in USNA's new Foreign Area Studies major. I have enjoyed taking Mandarin Chinese courses throughout high school, conducting independent research on contemporary China, and spending a summer in Hong Kong, where I immersed myself in Chinese language and culture. China not only possesses the fastest growing Navy in the world, but it also has the capacity to militarize ports across the Indo-Pacific. I would like to grow in my knowledge and expertise on East Asia and the far east while studying at USNA and simultaneously growing into a capable leader for our Navy. I hope to use this knowledge to help the United States Navy in the Sino-US strategic competition, either as a SWO or working in Naval intelligence. In addition, I am excited about USNA's core curriculum, as it allows humanities students to take rigorous STEM courses such as "Applications of Cyber Engineering." The Academy's emphasis on physical fitness, organization, and teamwork will push me to reach my full potential as a future Naval officer.

Above all, I believe that we should be of service to others. In high school, my desire to better myself as a leader has driven me to look for servant leadership opportunities. Although my track team's season was canceled due to COVID in the Spring of 2020, I led my team in a community service project. Together we collected over \$15,000 and provided 1500 meals for individuals in need living with serious illness. This five-month "Wildcats Paving the Way" fundraiser developed my initiative and integrity during a challenging period. As Class President, I involved my entire grade, and we came together as a group to coordinate silent auctions and organize virtual remote running events. In the face of adversity, I learned how to keep faith in my team and find creative solutions to serve others. The opportunities available at USNA will best prepare me for service as a U.S. Naval officer.

**Answer 5:**

I became committed to earn an appointment as a result of the college research process. During my visit to the USNA my decision was cemented, and I shared the following with my parents: "I am feeling a calling to serve and make a difference. If I attend a conventional college, I will just be an older version of myself but not changed or inspired, just older and wiser. However, I strongly believe that if I were to attend the USNA I will become someone different; someone better than I was before." I shared the

following, which I always believed, but became clearer after my visit: "I have always felt like I am destined to do something good. I don't know what it is, or how I will get there, but I know that I need to be at the USNA. I believe a glimmer of light is leading me along the path of being an officer in the Navy." Because of this feeling I applied and was accepted into VNASS. VNASS reinforced the calling to attend the USNA. Attending the USNA will prepare me to achieve my potential as a leader, aligning my desire to pursue a dedicated career of service in the Navy. The community I desire to serve would be that of a submarine officer on a fast attack sub. I believe the USNA academic and leadership programs will support my goal of becoming an effective officer and will prepare me for making the important decisions that may be required when called upon while serving in the Fleet.

One experience that contributed to my development is a Boy Scout adventure that went awry. The situation rapidly deteriorated as a cold front accelerated hitting us sooner than anticipated. We planned to get our canoes over the breaking waves so we could try to make our way home. We attempted two launches with each canoe failing and succumbing to the waves.

On the third attempt, one canoe was lucky to get far enough to where the waves were manageable and disappeared off the shoreline resulting in the separation of our crew. I felt a responsibility to find the canoe that was already at sea. I hiked the shoreline with another Scout until I found them as they were blown into shore. Once we were together, we abandoned the canoes, located a hiking path, and hiked for 12 miles to the Ranger station.

This adventure taught me how to use my voice as a leader. I learned that I naturally take leadership by evaluating situations and voicing a plan to the group. I am calm under pressure and this naturally draws people to seek my leadership.

Overall, the experience I had participating in VNASS as well as the adversity I faced in my Scouting experience has made me stronger and more determined to pursue future service to my country starting as a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy. I am excited and look forward to the challenges ahead.

## Successful West Point Essays

For West Point Essays #1 and #2, as mentioned in part earlier, we believe that these essays should not be a laundry list or rundown of what the applicant achieved in high school or why the applicant believes he/she is an outstanding leader. The attitude that West Point may get out of essays such as these are: “Hey, I’m a talented wonderful person and you have to select me because of my past accomplishments.

But—how can the applicant really say this if they have no idea of what life will be like as a cadet and future officer?

What should the applicant do instead?

Do research about the Army, talk to officers and cadets, visit a local National Guard or Reserves unit and “shadow” an officer for a few hours. Learn all one can about what the challenges are in store at West Point and what life will be like as a future officer.

Then, when the applicant writes Statements 1 and 2, talk about those experiences in the essay. Be humble. The candidate should tell West Point that he/she did his/her due diligence to understand the challenges ahead. Additionally, the candidate should tell West Point that he/she has prepared as best he/she can (speak to past leadership experiences) and feel confident that, based on past leadership and these visits/talks, he/she is up to the task of being an officer candidate and a future military officer.

If one writes this type of essay for Statements 1 and 2, he/she will be in the 5% category of those who have gone out of their way to validate the statement that they are ready to be an officer candidate.

### West Point Essay 1 - Why USMA?

#### Essay Prompt:

**Explain why you want to attend the United States Military Academy and serve on active duty as an Army officer.**

#### Essay 1 - Answer 1:

I believe that American values and our way of life are worth fighting for. One of the finest ways to demonstrate this commitment is by attending West Point to train to become an officer in the United States Army. I understand this commitment is not something to be taken lightly and deserves thorough research and exploration.

I first set up a visit to a local Army National Guard unit. From my visit, I learned how officers lead by example and rely on their non-commissioned officers. The Army works as a team, and officers lead teams of soldiers to accomplish the vital missions of the Army. These officers also emphasized the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The visit made a significant impact on me.

The ability to lead and problem solve is essential for military officers. While I have not nearly had the responsibility of an Army officer, I believe my experience leading others has formed a solid foundation

to build upon. For example, as a team captain, a high school level coach, and president of the woodworking club, I have gained leadership experiences. Problem-solving is something I have developed through my time coaching as well as with my volunteer work. I am excited to improve my leadership at West Point to be best prepared to lead America's soldiers.

With my experience as a leader, my visit to an Army National Guard unit, and my time researching West Point, I feel I understand better the responsibilities of Army officers and am prepared for the challenges ahead.

### **Essay 1 - Answer 2:**

The reason I want to attend the United States Military Academy is that I want to join the greatest team in the world--the United States Army--and have the privilege to lead America's sons and daughters as a commissioned officer.

In order to learn more about life as a junior officer, I recently visited a combat engineering unit of the Alabama Army National Guard at Camp Swampy. I had the opportunity to shadow a second lieutenant, several non-commissioned officers and spend the night in the field with them. I was also able to take the new Army Combat Fitness Test with the unit. The lieutenant taught me that as an officer you must lead by example in all aspects—you must “Be-Know and Do.” You must show commitment and work with your NCOs to accomplish the mission. My visit with the National Guard made me excited to become an Army officer and lead soldiers.

After learning about West Point from my debate teacher, a 1988 graduate, I visited West Point in the 9th grade. Walking through the halls of West Point with a cadet, sitting in classes, and spending time learning about the Academy, affirmed where I wanted to be in four years. I am especially excited about the unique military and educational opportunities that a service academy like West Point offers. I want to earn an undergraduate degree from West Point and pursue Engineering. I was fortunate to apply and be selected to attend the Society for American Military Engineer's STEM Camp. This camp exposed me to the multitude of career opportunities within the military, as I met career military engineering officers who have been able to merge their passion for engineering with their desire for service. My goal is to branch Engineers upon graduation.

Through these experiences, I learned what it means to serve and the sacrifices our service members make every day on our behalf to serve a cause bigger than oneself. For many people my age their heroes wear sports team's uniforms, my heroes wear a different uniform. These incredible servicemen and women have influenced me greatly. They are a true representation of what makes our country the greatest in the world. I want to be a part of that and become a cadet at the United States Military Academy to train to become a commissioned officer in the United States Army.

### **Essay 1 - Answer 3:**

Growing up, I always felt like I had an obligation to give back to the country that had already given so much to me. Given my huge expectations at home to go to college, I feared that I'd miss out on my opportunity to serve. That was until I learned about the United States Military Academy. The more I read, the more I felt like this program was perfectly tailored to me. It has always been clear to me that I want to lead America's soldiers as an officer in the U.S. Army.

This past spring, I had the privilege of attending West Point's Summer Leaders Experience, where in addition to following USMA Cadets through their day and attending workshops with West Point professors, I learned about the different branches of the Army, in particular my preferred branches of Air Defense Artillery and Signal Corps. I also noticed that even though the cadet formations had 50 or more cadets, they all knew each other and seemed to have a strong bond. I'm not sure I've ever seen anything like that and I wanted to join them in order to be a part of something larger than myself.

Given the opportunity to enroll in the United States Military Academy, I would be able to fulfill my obligation to serve, achieve a high level of education and gain valuable skills to follow me all my life. My greatest inspirations for wanting to serve are my father and his mother. My grandmother, though I never had the opportunity to meet her personally, influenced me a great deal. Both she and my father enrolled in Navy ROTC, commissioned, and served for many years. I believe that their service to our country taught them integrity, leadership and how to overcome obstacles in the face of adversity. My father has passed these values to me as well, and I am confident that admittance into West Point would allow me to build on these values set by my father.

Overall, I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to apply to the United States Military Academy and train to become an officer in the United States Army.

#### **Essay 1 - Answer 4:**

The reason I want to attend West Point stems not only from a burning desire to serve but also to have the privilege of leading America's soldiers. I want to make a difference in their lives in the pursuit of executing missions on behalf of the U.S. Government. I believe that West Point would be the best route in helping me to become the best leader possible in the service of others.

To learn more about what it takes to be an effective leader in the military and to have a better idea of the responsibilities of officership, I took some time to visit a National Guard Army Aviation Unit located at Tutor Space Force Base, shadowing Lieutenant Smith of Alpha Company. Throughout the day I was able to observe what a monthly drill weekend looked like, surrounded by both 1LT Smith and several warrant officers for most of the day. I was able to see the multiple aircraft they were responsible for, and the rigor and discipline required in both maintaining, flying, and conducting missions. I was impressed by what each individual contributed to the company, and it was obvious that 1LT Smith led not just from a position of authority but also as a respected equal. One of the most important things I observed from my visit was the innate brotherhood of Alpha Company and how such brotherhood allowed 1LT Smith to lead more effectively. Alpha Company and their officers clearly embodied the Army values of Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage and made a great impact on me. After my visit, I became even more committed to becoming an Army officer.

Finally, I've been a Boy Scout for almost six years and have achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. In doing so I've had a number of defining learning experiences. The most significant of which came from directing my Eagle Scout project. During the process I had to navigate a multitude of moving parts from planning, fundraising, and execution of the project. Having the honor of directing a team of volunteers based off of a plan that I created myself was a humbling experience but also gave me a preview of what I could accomplish as a military officer.

Overall, I am excited about the future and training to become an officer in the United States Army at West Point. I am grateful for the opportunity to compete for appointment and to serve others and my country.

## **West Point Essay 2 - Setback/Ethical Dilemma**

### **Essay 2 Prompt:**

**Think of some things in the past that were difficult for you. Pick one and discuss what steps you took to address it. Include whether you turned to anyone, the role that person played, and what you learned about your character as a result of this challenge.**

### **Essay 2 - Answer 1:**

I had a major football injury my senior year of high school. Through my recovery I found that whatever the circumstances may be, I can always motivate myself through grit and determination. In reflection, the experience I gained in my recovery will prove far more valuable as I move onto the next challenge in my life—becoming a cadet and a future Army officer. I know there will be challenging circumstances both at West Point and in the Army. Nevertheless, I now know that when I have a setback in the future, I can call on my past experience working through my football injury to persevere and succeed.

Coming up to my final year of high school football I wanted to really put everything into the off season. I lifted weights twice a day and put in extensive twice daily running sessions. However, when the time came for the season to start, I began to pay the price for my regiment. Through a combination of the positions required for a football linebacker, constant lower body exercises, and some tiny spikes on the end of my femur, I shredded the soft tissue inside the joint. This injury effectively ended my season.

After a few months of physical therapy, our orthopedic surgeon concluded that I needed surgery on both hips to repair the tissue and shave down the spike that caused the tearing. In the months following the surgery, I was locked in a brace, immobilized in my bed or on the couch for weeks.

After about four weeks, I decided I was going to change some things about the next round of recovery. I realized there never is a time devoid of chances to improve. I decided to work both on the physical and mental side of recovery. I began by doing any mental challenge I could think of. I started fasting, taking ice baths, putting a laser focus on my schoolwork, and learning how to become a better learner. As I fortified myself mentally, I was able to take my condition more in stride. Eventually, I gained increased ability in my legs and looked for ways to improve physically. Previously my doctor had said that a fast recovery would be six months. Through hours and hours of at home workouts I was able to cut that down to just under five months and was up and about after that.

Despite all of my success in my recovery I was still limited by the nature of how these kinds of tissues heal. It was very clear to me I was not going to be up to the standards of fitness for West Point at the conclusion of my senior year. My one option was to wait a year and apply. Though it was less than ideal I knew it was also an incredible opportunity to improve myself as a person. I am treating my gap year like an opportunity to continue to improve as a person. This attitude I have about my gap year stems from what I did to overcome my setbacks from surgery. Although I would not call it enjoyable, my experience with my injury and the lessons I learned will be invaluable throughout the rest of my life.

**Essay 2 - Answer 2:**

When faced with a new challenge growing up, I felt I either excelled with the skills I had, or I just wasn't good at all, and accepted it. I was fine with this rather simple dichotomy. That was until I attempted cross country running, which opened my eyes to a new kind of effort and work ethic and closed them to my old way of accepting mediocrity. Through effort, I was able to improve in an area where I lacked talent and realized that hard work is more important than innate ability.

When people ask me why I joined cross country, I tell them they're asking the wrong question. It was something to do, some of my friends wanted to join the team, and it is good exercise for other sports. These are certainly legitimate reasons. But the real question is why would I join if I was not good at this sport? The practices are hard work and races are grueling to say the least. I wanted to join to test myself in something that is difficult and not naturally easy for me and see how I would do.

I didn't end up doing such hard work right away. At the start, with all the other new runners, I found myself at the back of the pack, not even being able to run a full racecourse without walking. It took me a full year to run a course start to finish. Midway through the season during a particularly muddy race day, the team captain, Cedric Smith, offered to take whoever got covered in the most mud out for dinner. I thought to myself "I'm going to get muddy and cold and wet, I might as well be cold, muddy, wet, and a winner." I finished that race with a strong personal best and enough mud that you could hardly read our school's name on my singlet.

Cedric Smith inspired me in that race and would continue to inspire and help me throughout the season and the rest of my time in high school. Cedric was a strong student, a dedicated athlete and dependable friend. I always strived to keep up my progress to be like him and went to him for advice whenever I had troubles. I continue to be inspired by Cedric, as he pursues further leadership positions as an Army ROTC cadet at New Mexico University. I hope that someday I can show Cedric how hard I've worked to be a leader, scholar and athlete like him.

**Essay 2 - Answer 3:**

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged people in many ways over the past year. We have witnessed many events postponed or canceled for health and safety reasons. In some cases, these activities could have continued if individuals saw these challenges as opportunities to conduct these events in new and exciting ways. My teammates and I at Wreaths Across America seized the moment and made an event last year that truly made a difference during a challenging time.

Wreaths Across America's mission to "Remember, Honor, & Teach" is one that I dedicated myself to when I became the local coordinator of the organization in Portland, Oregon. Without the ability to hold large in-person gatherings, organizing a wreath ceremony to honor the lives of our service members seemed unlikely in 2020. I reached out to my regional liaison for help, and she advised that if I was unable to hold the ceremony, I could simply cancel until next year. While I respected her viewpoint, I told her I wished to explore other avenues with Brenda Smith, one of the corporate heads of the organization. The liaison encouraged me to do so and told me she would support me in any way she could.



After consulting with Ms. Smith and several other community volunteers, we decided that holding a live virtual ceremony was the best option. We were able to create a virtual event that reached hundreds of people on YouTube and Facebook Live and accomplished the mission. Mr. Marcus Lutz and Congressman Paul Jones, two of our nation's most well-known heroes, even agreed to be filmed for the video. Most importantly we were able to honor two local heroes: Mr. Raymond Norkus, a WWII Marine Corps Veteran who recently passed away and a Gold Star Family whose father was killed in action in Afghanistan in 2019, leaving behind a one year old daughter and an expectant wife. With a small group of volunteers, we were able to place wreaths on the graves at our local cemetery raising \$4,500.

What I learned about myself during this process is to show determination and resilience in the face of adversity and to find new and innovative ways to accomplish the mission. Even with COVID, we were able to honor these families with the dignity they deserve and reminded our community that we should never forget their sacrifice.

### **Essay 2 - Answer 4:**

I grew up in a household that lived and breathed working hard. Both my parents have an incredible work ethic, and they strove to pass that down to me. However, that was difficult for me to develop. I went to a middle school where I was able to ace every class without putting in any work. I spent hours reading about history every day and had to be forced to go outside.

This all changed when I moved before my freshman year of high school from a small rural town to a significantly larger one. At first, I felt very lonely at my new high school and did not have any friends. The classes were much harder, and soccer was far more competitive. I stuck out like a sore thumb with my underweight, slow, and tall frame. One night being fed up with how I looked I went into my basement and worked out. Over the next few years working out went from something I dreaded to a central part of my life. In my junior year, I was waking up at 5 am to work out in the football weight room, being the only soccer player there. I spent dozens of hours researching nutrition, form, and other information to help me workout. Working out is now one of the favorite things in my life. My entire day revolves around when I can get in the gym with my friends and kill a workout. I've seen tremendous changes in my physique that helped improve my confidence. However, the biggest benefits of working out have not been the change I have seen physically but rather mentally. The work ethic I had built with working out applied to other areas of life. In school, I was able to complete and balance schoolwork with sports and extracurriculars. I made varsity my junior year after impressing the coaches with my discipline and improvement. Working out also gave me the drive to better myself academically. I took the most difficult classes I could and maintained a very high GPA.

My character has undoubtedly been shaped by the benefits of working out. I learned that I am a highly motivated individual with a work ethic to match it. I learned that I love the feeling of being challenged and overcoming obstacles. I learned that failure is just an opportunity for improvement. I learned that I will live without regret because I give everything my best effort.

### **West Point Essay 3 - Diversity**

This essay is best answered by reaffirming the candidate's respect for gender, color, ethnicity, and/or religion different from his/her own. Army officers are comfortable working in teams and they value the

inherent strengths that come from teams made up of people with different backgrounds and perspectives. They are respectful of others. They understand that high performing teams are characterized by common goals, shared responsibility for success and appropriate leadership-follower relationships.

**Essay Prompt:**

**West Point and the Army are committed to the idea that respect for others and an understanding of diversity are important leadership traits. Why will you be successful in working with leaders, peers, and subordinates of a gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or religion different from your own?**

**Essay 3 - Answer 1:**

Officers in the military need to be able to be successful in working with people unlike themselves. The United States Military is representative of the country itself. This means it is filled with people of all different backgrounds and life experiences. Military officers are able to use diversity to their advantage by getting different views and opinions on issues and leveraging the expertise of all members of the team to accomplish the mission.

A person is not defined by what they do not control. The judgment of someone should be completely based on his or her character. No one chooses inherent characteristics—skin color, religion, sex, or economic circumstances. All of these things are inherent to a person, and do not arise in an individual by choice. What someone can control is his or her character. Each decides what kind of person he or she is going to strive to be.

I spent two weeks in Guatemala prior to my freshman year of high school as part of a church program. We helped out a local school by spending time with the children as well as assisting with some odd jobs. After only a little time, I realized how similar these people were to people in my hometown. They liked to draw, play sports and spend time with friends. All the surface-level differences between us had no effect the entire time. The sooner you spend time with people you think are different from you the sooner you will realize you are not actually very different.

The ability to understand people's differences is a core responsibility of a good leader. I also understand I will deploy to different regions with differing cultures. My experiences have prepared me to understand and respect those different people and cultures as I work with my team to accomplish the missions of the U.S. Army.

**Essay 3 - Answer 2:**

I have always appreciated diversity in school, business, and in life. My parents, having lived in other countries, raised me to appreciate the unique gifts others bring—no matter what their background. My grandmother was a champion for women's rights, serving in various leadership positions in regional and global organizations even before she was an officer in the U.S. Navy. I believe diversity plays a role in successful organizations and helps an organization thrive in this increasingly diverse world. It is important for the U.S. Army to be able to carry out its missions and that must start with respect for others. Indeed, one of the Army Values is respect. In the Soldier's Code, we pledge to "treat others

with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same.” The Army is one team and we get missions accomplished together as one.

Growing up in a small rural town, I didn’t have much exposure to people of different cultures and nationalities until my family hosted foreign exchange students. My parents wanted us to experience another culture on a day-to-day basis. Hosting foreign exchange students from Hungary, Germany, Brazil and Japan taught me many lessons about relating to, communicating with and accepting people that looked, spoke and believed different things to me. The first foreign exchange student we hosted, Kana from Japan, changed my worldview surrounding diversity. I learned that we share more similarities than differences. Learning to accept and embrace our vast differences is what makes the U.S. a beacon of freedom and innovation.

I am confident that given the lessons of tolerance I have been taught by my parents, the legacy of fighting for equal rights left by my grandmother and the valuable experiences I gained from hosting four foreign exchange students, I will be an effective leader for people of all colors, races and creeds. The diversity of people and ideas contribute to the strength of our Army and I would be honored to contribute to and protect that diversity as an Army officer.

### **Essay 3 - Answer 3:**

I have been extremely fortunate in opportunities throughout my life to experience different cultures and people from all walks of life. My mom’s side of the family is from Taiwan, and most summers I live in Taiwan with my extended family for a few weeks. At first, the language barriers and differences in religion and cultural beliefs made it difficult to communicate and relate. However, living among people of such a different culture taught me to have more patience and understanding. At home, the area of Houston I live in is quite diverse. At school I have been given the opportunity to engage with diverse peers and recognize the benefits of different perspectives. These life circumstances taught me to honor and respect those who are different.

In order to work well with others I listen to people with an open mind, knowing they may have certain insights that I lack. My experience in school and church orchestra has shown me that as a group we are stronger together, we are greater than the sum of our parts. As a member of my church orchestra team leading kids of all ages, I have learned to change my teaching approach based on what works for kids with different levels of attention and learning needs.

Another area where I have gained valuable leadership experience with diversity is as captain of our tennis team. Our team of 25 is coeducational and has quite a few new faces this year, due to a large number of seniors graduating last year. Bringing the team together has never been more important. Our culture emphasizes teamwork even though half of the matches are played by individuals. Practices require everyone working together to help the whole team improve with productive drills. The culture we have developed is extremely supportive. During matches against other schools, we look out for teammates and cheer them on to victory. We also have a policy that everyone stays and cheers until the last match is finished. The loyalty and support we show each other daily is pivotal to our success as a team. Our team’s culture is the reason we are successful!

Both examples, orchestra and tennis, show that diversity can either hinder a group or enhance it. The determining factor is almost always the type of culture that leadership instills. I look forward to using my

experiences with diversity to continue to promote cultures of inclusion, patience, humility, and understanding in my future leadership opportunities.

**Essay 3 - Answer 4:**

I come from a diverse high school. Through my election as 11<sup>th</sup> grade representative in my high school I was successfully able to convince my peers that I would be an effective representative for them. I very much enjoyed talking with my peers who were different from me and, in the end, found that we are stronger because of our differences.

In eleventh grade I was elected grade representative. As my classmates' representative, my job was to help plan events, host meetings, and address concerns. I had to address several issues with the larger student government. The most memorable thing this last year was how to respond to the police shootings of an African American in Minneapolis. After conferring with my peers of all different races and getting their input, we decided to make a statement confirming the respect for all people and asking our local government to work towards police reform in order to prevent such incidents in our community.

Overall, I believe that everyone should be treated with respect regardless of their differences. Every day when I wake up I strive to be a better person. The way to make things better in the world is to be a leader of character who respects others. I am looking forward to being an officer in the United States Army where I can lead the sons and daughters of the great diverse country we call home.

## Successful Congressional Nomination Essays

We've included several examples of answers to prompts you will encounter from Members of Congress as you fill out your Congressional nomination packet. Most are very similar to the essays you need to complete for the Service Academies. The same advice applies.

### Example Prompt:

#### Why do you want to become an officer in the U.S. Military

#### Answer:

There are three main reasons I want to be an officer in the U.S. military. One is my grandfather's service in the Navy during World War II. Two is the challenging environment that the service academies create, helping me to grow into the most capable leader possible. Lastly, I want to give back to the United States for all it has provided for me, by defending the U.S. Constitution and taking care of my Sailors or Soldiers.

First, when I was younger, my father would tell me great stories of my grandfather's military experiences. Although I did not get to meet him, what caught my interest most is my grandfather's service onboard the USS Missouri in World War II. As I got older, I asked more questions and learned more about the history of my family and World War II; my grandfather left college and was commissioned as an officer in the Fighting 12th from the Los Angeles Midshipmen School. That is the moment I first realized my calling; leading sailors is what I am meant to do. From that day forth, I committed myself and my future to serving my country, just like my grandfather. My commitment lives on to this day. My time as an Eagle Scout and attendance at Webb Military Academy have only further cultivated my desire to attend a service academy and be like my grandfather. The opportunity to lead 80 boy scouts as a troop leader helped me to not only solidify my leadership skills but prove to myself that I thrive while helping and leading others, just like my grandfather.

Second, I want to be an officer in the military because of the competitive environment that will help mold me into the best leader possible. I desire to push myself and compete amongst the best. My servant leadership style is what I rely on to lift my brothers and sisters in arms and lead them to excel. As I have learned in Boy Scouts and from my high school, a service academy will first instill followership. Once I have learned how to follow, my responsibilities will grow to mirror those of an officer. The Navy Academy and West Point offer me the chance to practice my leadership skills every single day for four years. The core values of the Navy are extremely meaningful to me. The service academies develop honor and courage and mold model men and women, as well as Sailors and Soldiers. Living in an environment where every day is challenging but builds character and strength will arm me to be the best U.S. military officer possible. This is the environment in which I wish to excel. The character of the men and women who thrive in this environment are the people with which I want to serve.

The third reason I desire to be an officer in the military is to give back to the United States for all that it has provided me, to secure the freedom and rights of future generations, and defend the place that is my home. I want to lead the defense of the United States of America and the Constitution that is the foundation for our strength as it provides so many with the opportunity to thrive and create a better life

for their family. The defense of the United States Constitution is the defense of opportunity for our citizens, not found in many other countries around the world. In the Constitution, the 3rd through the 27th amendments are human endeavors and the 1st and the 2nd amendments support those endeavors.

I have lived in the Middle East from five to 15 years old and know first-hand what life is like without a 1st Amendment. The result is no freedom of speech, religion, press and assembly. I witness the lack of voting rights for women without a 19th Amendment. Our enumerated rights cannot be taken away thanks to the 9th Amendment, in stark contrast to the Middle East. Without these opportunities provided by the Constitution, people would lose hope. This country is built on the hopes and dreams of all Americans, and it is the hopes and dreams of our citizens that move this great country forward. By leading my Sailors or Soldiers to the best of my abilities, I hope to have the greatest impact on our nation's ability to protect and defend our freedoms.

It is for these reasons I wish to serve my country as an officer in the U.S. military and ensure that future generations of Americans can make their dreams a reality. Attending the Naval Academy or West Point will best prepare me for these challenges. I hope to help move our exceptional nation forward into a bright future.

### **Essay Prompt:**

**You were asked to list your activities by order of importance to you. Please tell us why you consider your top activity to be most important. What have you learned from participating in that group, club, team, or activity? What have you added to the group? How will having participated affect you in the future?**

### **Answer:**

The activity I would consider my most important is baseball. This activity has always been a very important part of my life ever since I started tee ball when I was six years old. This upcoming year I will be playing varsity baseball as a senior at Staples High School. Playing baseball has brought me through the whole spectrum of feelings and emotions. There have been times of joy and celebration, when my team won important games, as well as moments of loss and failure.

The difficult moments I have experienced playing baseball have taught me several lessons about the importance of never giving up. There is a phrase written on our baseball locker room wall: "Bend Don't Break." Baseball has taught me the inevitability of failure. Even the best hitters in the Major Leagues only hit one out of three times they come to bat. They all strike out or hit into a double play that may cost their team a victory. However, the true beauty of playing baseball is becoming better because of failure. This has taught me that even though we will all bend, we must not break.

One of my additional duties to the team has been working with some of the younger players. Last spring, I witnessed some of the underclassmen struggling with their mindsets. Many of them put pressure on themselves, feeling as though they needed to be perfect every time they stepped up to the plate. As an upperclassman, I felt a responsibility to talk to the younger players and show them that perfection in baseball was unattainable and to work on what they can control.

Baseball has made me humble and aware that there are always areas to improve and that achieving excellence takes persistence. These lessons extend far beyond the baseball diamond and will make me a stronger leader in the years to come. If I am appointed to the United States Military Academy these lessons will be extremely valuable and beneficial. At West Point I will be pushed, I will be tested, but I will refuse to break.

**Essay Prompt:**

**Write a one-page essay of any life experience that you feel influenced you to apply for a Service Academy Nomination**

**Answer:**

Growing up, I always felt like I had an obligation to give back to the country that had already given so much to me. Given my huge expectations at home to go to college, I feared that I'd miss out on my opportunity to serve. That was until I learned about the United States Military Academy. The more I read, the more I felt like this program was perfectly tailored to me. It has always been clear to me that I want to lead America's soldiers as an officer in the U.S. Army.

This past spring, I had the privilege of attending West Point's Summer Leaders Experience, where in addition to following USMA Cadets through their day and attending workshops with West Point professors, I learned about the different branches of the Army, in particular my preferred branches of Air Defense Artillery and Signal Corps. I also noticed that even though the cadet formations had 50 or more cadets, they all knew each other and seemed to have a strong bond. I'm not sure I've ever seen anything like that and I wanted to join them in order to be a part of something larger than myself.

Given the opportunity to enroll in the United States Military Academy, I would be able to fulfill my obligation to serve, achieve a high level of education and gain valuable skills to follow me all my life. My greatest inspirations for wanting to serve are my father and his mother. My grandmother, though I never had the opportunity to meet her personally, influenced me a great deal. Both she and my father enrolled in Navy ROTC, commissioned, and served for many years. I believe that their service to our country taught them integrity, leadership and how to overcome obstacles in the face of adversity. My father has passed these values to me as well, and I am confident that admittance into West Point would allow me to build on these values set by my father.

Overall, I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to apply to the United States Military Academy and train to become an officer in the United States Army.

**Essay Prompt:**

**Explain why you want to attend and service as an officer in the military.**

**Answer:**

Serving alongside the brave men and women fighting for our country has long been a desire of mine. Being a United States Army officer is a substantial undertaking worth careful consideration. I explored the duties and responsibilities involved in being a West Point cadet and pursuing an Army career.

I also wanted to explore what my duties and responsibilities would be as a lieutenant in the Army so I contacted Major Dugan Smith and visited Fort Jones Army Reserve Center. I spoke to several full-time employees who emphasized that an Army career is an unparalleled opportunity to give back to our country. I met First Lieutenant Matt Jones, who told of his West Point experience and Army career. He highlighted networking opportunities and countless jobs and experiences the Army offers. He explained how people could pursue their interests and find Army careers within that passion.

Leadership and adaptability are traits key to success in the Army. As a two-time captain of the basketball team and assistant basketball coach for elementary students, I've gained leadership experience. Adaptability has been prominent in my life. Having always lived abroad and traveled extensively, I was raised in a way that allows me to be sensitive to other cultures and adjust in different environments easily. West Point allow me to further develop these important skills

Through my research and activities, I feel I understand what it takes to be an West Point cadet and an Army officer and I am prepared for the challenge. I would be honored to be an officer in the United States Army and have the chance to give back to our country in such a meaningful way.

### **Essay Prompt:**

**Why do you want to attend a military academy instead of a traditional university? Have you applied to any traditional universities?**

### **Answer:**

There are three aspects of value in my life: mental, physical, spiritual. A traditional collegiate institution would test only one of these areas, whereas the Service Academies would challenge all three of these simultaneously. I want to attend an Academy to expand my mind, to reach my full physical potential, and to discipline myself with a military lifestyle. I am very interested in serving others and leading my fellow citizens as an officer in Armed Services.

The pride I would have after finishing basic training and a hard course load my first year as a plebe would rival any accomplishment in my life so far. That pride would only be compounded after graduation. The idea of graduation brings me to my feet searching for anything within reach that I can do to bring me closer to that outcome. In the end, I could look back on my accomplishments, the work of my platoon, and the opportunities given by my country with pride.

The Service Academies also offer great courses and tools in the areas of study in which I am most excited and interested. While applying for multiple summer seminars at the beginning of this year, I noticed how many of the daily activities aligned closely with my interests and passions. From mechanical engineering to microcomputer design, my intrigue in these workshops, alongside the excitement for the physical aspect of the summer seminar, solidified my desire to attend the service academies.

I am planning on applying to traditional universities, such as Alabama A&M and RIT, because I recognize that admission to the Academies is very competitive and not having a backup plan is indicative of poor planning. I am applying to Alabama A&M and RIT for their extensive and prestigious STEM programs. This does not mean I am not open to alternative routes to the Academies, like the



prep schools, and if I had to choose between going to a prep school or going to a traditional school, I would choose the prep school in an instant.

**Essay Prompt:**

**When did you decide you wanted to attend a Service Academy? What generated your interest? Do you have family members or friends who are/were in the military?**

**Answer:**

When I was in the first grade, I got to see the Blue Angels flight demonstration. The control, especially at that speed, that the pilots had was immaculate to a younger me and getting to watch the formations and maneuvers is something that I will never forget for as long as I live.

Now, I did not decide that I wanted to attend the Service Academies in first grade, but I definitely knew they were there if and when I wanted to commit to going. Around the time that I was looking at colleges I might want to attend in my junior year, my father mentioned that I should apply for the summer seminars that the Academies offered.

Up to that point, I had always envisioned myself going to a traditional university and studying mathematics, but the things that I read while researching the summer seminars piqued my interest. From the moment I saw the academic workshops and the itinerary that was packed with physical activities, I knew that the Service Academies was where I needed to be.

Another reason I am passionate about attending the Service Academies is the family legacy I want to continue. My father was a Class of '92 USAFA Graduate and a C-130 pilot, and my grandfather served in the Navy during the Vietnam War as an airplane mechanic on the USS Grant. I like to joke that I have been in the military my whole life because I was born at the Homestead Air Force base in Miami. I realize that it is not that simple, but I would not be where I am today without my father and grandfather. I have been surrounded with service my whole life and continuing the legacy laid before me is a great responsibility that I am to undertake.

Lastly, I recognize that everything exists in a balance, and the benefits I have enjoyed from my country, community, and family, come at a cost. Many people do not think about it, but there is a lot of time and energy put into protecting American freedoms, such as the freedom of speech, press, and religion. The opportunities my community has given me, through high school and sports, do not appear out of the ether. The support my family has shown me, by raising me, providing me an education, and giving me a roof over my head, requires constant sacrifice. I have been the benefactor for a lot of my life, and I want to give back. The Service Academies offer an opportunity to be a part of something greater than myself and equip myself with the tools to be able to meaningfully give back.

**Essay Prompt:**

**Briefly describe an experience that demonstrates your leadership capabilities.**

**Answer:**

During the spring semester of my junior year, I volunteered in the Smithwinter Prop Crew for my school's competitive color guard season. This entailed coordination of loading and unloading the truck at the school of the competition, organizing and distributing props to groups of people, and instructing proper timing and placement of the props before, during, and after the performance. The performance included the facades of doors, windowsills, a bathtub, and even a bed, so it was pivotal to the color guard to have the props timed correctly and in the right place on stage. The Smithwinter Prop Crew Master, a senior named Mary, managed the different people who would volunteer and was the coordinator of the combined efforts of the crew.

On Saturday, the day of the competition, Mary abruptly announced in the Prop Crew group chat that he would be absent. It was normal for any one member to be missing during a competition because it is more on a volunteer basis, but for the Crew Master to be absent meant a lot of the logistics were to be picked up by someone else. Thankfully, I had been attentive and diligent at previous competitions to the extent to where I felt confident in filling in as Crew Master. I reassured everyone before the competition that I knew, for the most part, what I was doing and not to worry.

Immediately, I went to work taking role, receiving a timeframe from the Colorguard director, dividing up the 20 or so props into manageable groups, and assigning each person to a group. After that, I instructed each group where and when to place the props, the order that the props were to be loaded and unloaded, and the path to and from the stage they would take. Many questions were flying my way and even though I did not know all the answers, I gave them the best advice and worked through individual problems with them.

Before I knew it, we were on stage rolling out props, setting up tarps, and watching the performance. Of course, some of the crew were uncertain when we got on stage, but I made sure everything was in order and that the performance went off without a hitch. I forget how well the color guard placed for that competition, probably because I was so entrenched in the logistics of the props, but the performance of the Prop Crew went smoothly, and we had a close-to-perfect run. What I learned is that I can effectively lead others in many situations which includes both long term planning, as well as in this case, in an impromptu manner. Overall, I enjoy being a part of a team and leading and serving others when I am needed.

### **Essay Prompt:**

**How have you prepared yourself for the academic, physical, and moral challenges presented by a military service academy? Please feel free to elaborate on any of the activities listed on your resume.**

### **Answer:**

Throughout my high school career, I have excelled in my areas of interest and pushed myself out of my comfort zone. My course history is lined with difficult and challenging classes that have more than prepared me for balancing academics with the physical and spiritual requirements of the Service Academies. Along with scholastic achievements, I have kept and explored my physicality from my previous experiences with team sports.

I have taken advantage of almost every opportunity to explore and further my interests in new fields. To elaborate, I took engineering and computer science courses in order to experiment with fields of study that are varied and possibly of interest. I continually push for success in academic competitions and standardized tests. Also, courses like College Calculus 3 and AP Physics C demonstrate that I am willing and capable of balancing a higher-level education with extracurriculars and other aspects of my life. Regardless of what field of study I enter, I will enter it knowing full well that I can and will succeed at the highest caliber of it.

Entering high school, there was only one class above mine, as it was a brand-new school that had opened the year before I started high school. I evaluated the quality and competitiveness of the school's programs and made a difficult decision between band and sports. There was a higher chance to go to a state competition, create a legacy for future years to follow, and allowed more opportunity for developing leadership skills. In the end, I miss stealing bases and scoring goals, but playing a large part in the school's biggest and most successful program has allowed me to learn how to lead in greater capacities.

Although I am not a part of my high school's athletics program, I have more than kept myself physically fit for my future at the Service Academies. Basic strength and conditioning are a constant and habitual practice of mine that I have grown to appreciate during the pandemic. Running, sit-ups, push-ups, and pull-ups are my main focus in order to prepare for the Candidate Fitness Assessment, but, whenever I get the chance, I like to turn my workouts into social activities and create chances to learn from and with my peers physically. Besides working out I have also continued to play team sports, such as volleyball and football, recreationally with my friends. Being a setter on the volleyball court and enabling my friends to have fun and win is what gets me excited and amped to get back out there and play more.

I find moral courage in knowing that I am imprinting my character on impressionable people around me. My younger siblings, James and Susan, are directly impacted by my actions and integrity, and if I do not hold myself to a high standard and keep myself honest, then I am being a bad role model for them. For example, when I was offered to vape by one of my classmates and was processing how to diffuse the situation, I thought of my siblings and how they would see me if I were to be suspended for that misconduct. Me following my own moral compass directly translates to the next generation and is my way of paying it forward. I believe that officers in the military must set the example in all areas--especially morally. I try to serve as a role model to my siblings and through this practice strive to build a foundation to rely on when I have to make difficult ethical decisions for the men and women I hope to lead as an officer in the military.

### **Essay Prompt:**

**What is unique about your personality, character, or talent that makes you stand out from the hundreds of students competing for a nomination? When answering this question, please keep in mind that the members of the selection board will not have the opportunity to interact with you and that your completed packet is their only opportunity to distinguish you from other candidates.**

### **Answer:**

My uniqueness is based on my perspective and where I was raised. Although I know that my experiences give me a somewhat narrow perspective, I work to create an open dialogue and embrace the viewpoints of others.

Through my time as President of the Youth Advisory Board with the Youth Safety and Civility Alliance, I have learned how to have tough conversations with others who do not share my beliefs. Sharing and conversing about values and perspectives with others has become almost second nature for me. I helped create the Political Conversations Club at my high school, organized and ran an annual discussion panel covering civil rights and recently Black Lives Matter, and campaigned for civil conversations surround the 2020 election in and out of the classroom. Overall, I am someone who promotes the exchange and cultivation of different perspectives.

Additionally, I am a highly collaborative learner. My ability to take individual learning assignments and attach a meaningful social aspect to it is something I use daily in the classroom. For example, in AP Physics 1 we were given a Kinematics problem to work on until the end of the class, and I had noticed that me and my friend Dave were struggling on similar parts of the problem. I looked around my table and realized that none of us were going anywhere with the problem. My instincts took over and I pooled the table together to solve the problem, even though it was an individual assignment. Some people had the same problem of not knowing how to convert acceleration to displacement, and others did not know how to solve for time with the given equations. After we all shared our ideas, we realized that we had all the parts and after consolidating our abilities we were able to solve the problem. Time after time I have come across gaps and wells of confusion in the classroom and shown that I am able to mend and bridge those lapses through the exchanging of perspectives.

Lastly, I have been surrounded with diversity throughout my childhood. On a more literal note, San Diego, California recently had a large influx in East Asian and South Asian families because of a Ford manufacturing plant that was established here. This meant that from the time I moved here in 6th grade, I have grown accustomed to other religions, ethnicity, and cultures affecting my daily life. I embrace the diverse backgrounds and unique perspectives that surround me because they expose me to things I never would have tried or seen.

In conclusion, I strive to better myself every day and learn from others. I want to be a good teammate and serve others. I am the collage of ideas, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences that I have come across throughout my life. I know that the military is a team of teams with people of diverse backgrounds. I look forward to being a good teammate and a leader of others.

### **Essay Prompt:**

**What disappointments/obstacles have you encountered in life? How did you handle these situations?**

### **Answer:**

Growing up in a household with four siblings has its share of challenges. While many things are multiplied, exponentially, like dishes and laundry and love and laughter, some things are finite. Such as time. Your parents only have two hands each and 24 hours in a day, and often that meant they relied on me and my older brother to babysit, mow the yard, help with all that laundry, and change some diapers.

I loved playing sports and never met a competitive sport that I did not want to play, and I excelled at math and academics. I was even invited to participate in competitive travel sports teams and an accelerated math program that would have required me to change schools. But because my parents were busy and practical, I could not participate. I traded in stealing bases in baseball and being team captain in soccer for refereeing to make some money on the weekends. I helped coach my younger brother and sister and other teams to learn to love sports like I do. And I grew some new muscles in the process. Heart and service muscles.

I found out that I can lead and serve at the same time. I found joy in trying new things, beyond my comfort zone, and I took pleasure in the time I had with my family because I came to realize (with the passing of loved ones) that time is finite. It is amazing to have little people looking up to you and it is neat to see their faces light up whenever they learn a new skill or fly on an airplane for the first time.

So, I suppose one disappointment or obstacle in my life has been the recognition that I cannot do it all and that there's not enough time to commit to all the exciting opportunities that are out there. And my response has been to fill my days with as much as I can in joyful service, and then to sleep well at night knowing that I have given it my all. I know that there will be difficult times as a military officer. But if I do the best that I can in service to others, that is all I can ask of myself.

### **Essay Prompt:**

#### **Why do you want to attend a United States Service Academy?**

#### **Answer:**

For some, the value of an education past high school is found in the stable jobs and careers that degrees provide for most college graduates, and for others, the value stems from the areas of study explored and the information gained during the pursuit of a degree. For me, I base value in the discipline and life skills learned through the medium of education and anticipate the utilization of those skills after college.

I know that the obligation to become an officer and to lead America's sons and daughters is not one to be taken lightly. I made sure I did extensive research on the duties and responsibilities of officers by visiting the Services' excellent websites and officer specialty information. I also talked to several officers to include a former West Point history instructor and a retired Army ROTC professor of military science. They emphasized to me the importance of leading by example and competency and the awesome responsibility that comes with leading others in combat situations.

The Service Academies also offer great courses and tools in the areas of study in which I am most excited and interested. While applying for multiple summer seminars at the beginning of this year, I noticed just how many of the daily activities aligned closely with my interests and passions. From mechanical engineering to political science and microcomputer design, my intrigue in these workshops, alongside the excitement for the physical aspect of the summer seminar, solidified my desire to attend the service academies.

Many colleges only challenge students through one avenue, whether its academically or physically. I want to challenge myself. I desire to attend the Academies and develop my academic, physical, and

leadership attributes to the greatest degree possible so I can lead effectively as an officer. Overall, I want to go to a place that will push me to be the best that I can be. I am excited about the future and leading America's sons and daughters as a military officer.

**Essay Prompt:**

**Explain how your experiences have prepared you with the character, leadership, academic, and physical strengths to serve as an officer in the United States Armed Forces.**

**Answer:**

My background: soccer and baseball, band and mathematics, is a foundation that I have given myself for the future, and that foundation I designed so that I would be able to be the best officer candidate I can be and eventually enable me to excel as an officer in the armed forces.

I started playing team sports from a very young age. Throughout my childhood my family kept me busy with soccer, baseball, and even flag football. I developed a fierce internal competitiveness that, to this day, drives me to reach for success. In addition, these sports developed my love for athletic activities and provided me basic knowledge on how to grow both my physical and personal growth.

Band has been a consistent outlet for my leadership attributes and dedication. Since middle school, I have been heavily invested in the success of the band program. I did not possess immediate talent at my instrument, the tuba, but with hard work, I could become a valued member of the band. Given that even with this work I was not the most skilled in the band or even in the tuba section, I found other ways to elevate the program, which included joining the Band Council in middle school and loading/logistics crew in high school. Currently, through my effort outside of practices and rehearsals, I am the tuba section leader, and I am grappling with leading and teaching my section through a pandemic.

I chose my experiences in athletics and band to answer this question. I also strive to do the best I can in academics and other endeavors. What I understand is that all this preparation will be essential to being the best officer candidate I can be at a Service Academy and will lay the foundation for future success as a military officer.

**Essay Prompt:**

**Describe the importance of military service to you or your family.**

**Answer:**

The importance of military service to me stems from the opportunity it provides. The opportunity to give back to my freedoms, family, and community that I have had the privilege of benefiting from for the better part of my life.

I believe that all things exist in a balance. Many people forget that there is a lot of energy expended in order to maintain the freedoms of American society, such as the freedoms of speech, press, and religion. In my mind there exists an imbalance, a debt that has yet to be paid, and military service is the vehicle through which I can pay it forward to the next generation.

My family has provided me with a great childhood, and they have set me up to excel in life. If I were to go and waste my opportunities by focusing simply on myself, then I would be doing a disservice to the effort put into my childhood and upbringing by my parents. I believe that I should be of service to others.

Lastly, the stability and consistency of the communities in which I have lived has inspired me to serve a greater purpose than myself. The world may still spin if everyone repaid what was done for them and covered their debts, but it would not be the place I want it to be. The communities I have partaken in were made special by individuals going above what was required of them. I want to add to their legacy by making a difference and becoming an officer in the U.S. military.

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Reading responses from candidates interested in other Service Academies can indeed still be helpful to your own application, as you can learn why other students prioritize those Academies higher. We hope you learned valuable information about writing your essays.

If you're interested in learning more about how competitive you are, complete with a Congressional District analysis, you can [schedule a personalized strategy session](#) where we help you plan out your entire Service Academy application and how to make yourself more competitive.

Best of luck in your quest for a Service Academy appointment!

-Lieutenant Colonel Kirkland and Captain Dach