

TIPS FOR GUIDING PARENTS THRU THE USAFA EXPERIENCE

Perspectives of a grad ('88)/parent ('22)

8 April 2022



Goal



- One significant source of stress USAFA impacting parents is associated with not understanding what their children are going through
- Goal: Provide information for presidents to help their parents understand the USAFA Experience
 - Focusing on key milestones and support mechanisms

They Are Joining the Military



- Need to be responsible for themselves
 - Help them, don't do things for them
 - Need to be at USAFA for themselves, not to please others
- In 4 years they will be leading others
 - Training starts by being good followers & making their own decisions
- Things change in the military & you can't do anything about it – complaining to your cadet doesn't help
 - "Needs of the AF"
- Cadets need to learn to use their chain of command to address issues or get information





Every Cadet's Experience is Different



- Terrazzo Gap – Intercollegiate Cadets (IC) & Non-Athletic Regular Persons (NARP)
- Selecting a major / minor
- All cadets are used to being top performers – getting used to the idea of not being on top is difficult
- Squadrons also have unique cultures
 - “Baby” Squadron vs Graduation Squadron
- Things change over time: just because it's been done that way in the past doesn't mean that is how it is done now
- Legacy – cadets whose parent/grandparent are grads
 - Can opt to graduate from the same squadron

Basic Cadet Training (BCT) Tips



- In-processing Day (I-Day)
 - Pay attention to instructions from USAFA on how I-Day will work & take advantage of activities for parents
- BCT can be tough on parents & cadets who are used to constant communication
- Letters
 - Nothing fancy, nothing that feels like there is more than a letter in the envelope, no pictures
 - Keep sending even if you don't hear from them
- Make it easy for them to send letters
 - Pre addressed stamped envelopes & paper
- WebGuy – signs of life / see what they are up to (and comment on it in letters)





Milestones



- Many milestones celebrated during the USFA experience
 - Doolie Day Out
 - Acceptance Parade
 - Parents' Weekend
 - Recognition
 - Exemplar Dinner
 - Commitment Dinner
 - Class Ring Dinner & Dance
 - 100th Night Dining In
 - Graduation Week
- Symbolic
- Enhance class cohesion

Doolie Day Out



- One day during BCT when the basic cadets get away from USAFA & relax
- Spend the day with a volunteer family (normally their ultimate sponsor family)
 - Often a coach if IC
- Enjoy good food with other basic cadets
- Talk to their family/friends
- Not for parents/family
 - Unless they are the sponsor family in the local area
 - This is a day for the cadets to get to know their sponsor family

Acceptance Parade



- Takes place after BCT is complete & before classes begin
- “Accepted” into the Cadet Wing as fourth-class cadets
 - Doolies march in separately & join their squadrons during the parade (inverted-wedge formation)
- Pin-on ceremonies take place on the field after the parade
- Open to the public
 - Approximately 2 hours with your cadet

Parents' Weekend



- Labor Day weekend (usually Late Thu – Mon)
- Parade / Open Houses / Information Fair / Football Game / Other events
 - See detailed schedule which will be available on the USAFA website
- Family & friends are welcome to attend every year
- Coordinate activities with your cadet
 - 4 degrees may just want to eat and sleep - they need to be in uniform
 - Upperclassmen may want to get away from C. Springs as soon as the game is over
 - Cadet may want to share you with friends or sponsors
- Reserve rooms/houses early (prices do increase)



- Formal finale of the fourth-class year
- 4 degrees are “recognized” as upper class cadets & allowed to wear Prop & Wings
- Vital & traditional USAFA experience
 - Ceremonial acknowledgement the cadets successfully met military training requirements and is prepared to continue
- Not automatic – not all cadets are recognized during recognition
 - Some require additional time to meet requirements & work with upperclassmen to do so
 - Should know they are at risk before it happens
 - ATTITUDE & progress are key

Exemplar Dinner



- The Cadet Exemplar Program - a way for each Academy class to honor and identify with a past military giant
- Class selects an exemplar that epitomizes the personal characteristics the class seeks to emulate
 - Examples: General George S. Patton Jr., Lt. Gen. Jimmy Doolittle, Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell, Capt. Lance P. Sijan, Wilbur and Orville Wright, Neil Armstrong
 - Selection criteria
- The Class Exemplar not only becomes the cadets' honorary class leader, but the very namesake and identity of that particular class
- Dinner is for cadets only

Commitment Dinner



- Second class cadets indicate their commitment to USAFA
- Takes place at the start of the fall semester
- Once the cadets return to the Academy for their second class year, they incur the financial or active duty commitment for their education if they depart the Academy prior to graduation
- Cadets only

Class Ring Dinner and Dance



- Cadets receive their class rings (as they order earlier in the year) between finals & graduation their 2 deg year
- Usually can bring date
- Class crest
 - Always includes elements from the Class of 1959's crest: the class number, the class year, the Polaris star and the eagle
 - Designed by the class
- Class ring history

100th Night Dining In



- Celebration to mark approximately 100 days until USAFA Graduation
- Only for first-class cadets & dates (if allowed)
- Normally the Friday before Presidents weekend
- Most first-class cadets leave for the weekend
- The fourth-class cadets are then busy decorating the rooms of the first-class cadets



- Award ceremonies
- Parade
 - Opposite of Acceptance Parade – Firsties march away from the rest of the wing
- Commissioning
- Graduation
- Detailed schedule on USAFA website ~ Mar
 - Use previous year schedule for early planning
- Reserve rooms/houses early (prices are higher)

Supporting From a Distance (1 of 3)



- Can be difficult, especially because you don't know what they are going through
- They need your support
 - Listening
 - You probably can't solve their problems, but you can help put things into perspective
 - Don't complain about USAFA & leadership's decisions to your cadet – that doesn't help
- Communication on their schedule
 - They are juggling a lot of priorities, allowing them to communicate on their schedule avoids adding stress



Supporting From a Distance (2 of 3)



- Encourage participation in extracurriculars (but don't push)
- First time your cadet does not come home for break – can be hard on parents/family but a good sign of independence and strong relationships being built
- Share general information you see with them – they aren't all great at paying attention to everything in their e-mail or Teams
 - Don't share specifics about individuals
- If you send something remind them to check their PO box
 - Or send it to their sponsor

Supporting From a Distance (3 of 3)



- Support for mental concerns (depression...)
 - Teammates
 - Peers
 - Coach
 - Chain of Command
 - Counselors
- Visiting your cadet
 - Coordinate ahead
 - Do not be surprised or upset if they can't get out (especially as doolies) – can be precoordinated
 - Reminder: football games are mandatory
- Importance of the Honor Code

Sponsors



- Home away from home
- Mentoring relationship
- Encourage cadet to connect with sponsor
 - They should not use them just when they need something
 - Relationship is a two-way street – fit into the family
- Great source of support
- Place to relax, do laundry ...
- Sponsor placements don't always click

Sources of Information



- AOG Parent Membership Guide
- USAFA web site
- AOG (National & local chapters)
- AOG WebGuy
- State Club websites
- Facebook groups: Presidents, Parents, Class, State Club, squadron...
- Instagram: USAFA, Sup, Comm, Dean, squadron, extracurriculars...
- USAFA Parents All-Call events



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