Chapter 8
Developing Leaders of Character at the Federal Service Academies

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ABSTRACT

The chapter provides an overview of the practice of leadership development at the United States Military Academy, the United States Air Force Academy, and the United States Naval Academy. The service-specific mission and core values provide a foundation for a theoretical review of leader, leadership, and human development theories currently implemented at selected service academies. The practical application of these models is then illustrated in an overview of leader and leadership education and training throughout the 47-month academy experience. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts concerning the influence of the military model in traditional colleges, universities, and preparatory schools.

INTRODUCTION

"The Foundation of leadership is character." -Major General Alexander Patch

While military prep schools provide a wholistic approach to educate and prepare young men and women for the many opportunities and challenges they will encounter upon graduation, the service academies have but one mission: To develop *leaders of character* to serve as commissioned officers in the armed forces of the United States (USMA, 2019; USAFA. n.d.- c; USNA, n.d. –d). The maturation and development of these extraordinary individuals is founded in a comprehensive and complex process of education, training, and leader development that is continuous, challenging, unyielding, and often foreign to a large percentage of their traditional counterparts (USAFA, 2019, n.d.-d; USMA, 2019, 2019a, 2020; USNA, 2019, n.d.-a, n.d.-d). Academic standards are extremely high, and the academies are regarded as "Ivy League" like institutions (Cycyota, Ferrante, Green, Heppard, & Karolick, 2011;Dufresne & Offstein, 2012). Generally, these institutions accept, on average, no more than 15% of all applicants

annually (NCES, n.d.). Moreover, to maintain pace with the technological demands of a global society, and the many challenges cadets and midshipmen will face as members of the profession of arms, the federal service academies emphasize the pursuit of academic disciplines specific to science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM).

While many of these cadets/midshipmen will enjoy a prolonged career in the armed forces, others who serve will terminate their active duty military commitment within five to six years of commissioning and graduation. Yet, the competence, character, and leader/leadership qualities cultivated throughout the 47-month academy experience are recognized in all facets of society, providing a critical resource to the nation (Kellogg, 1996).

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the practice of *leader development* at the United States Military Academy, the United States Air Force Academy, and the United States Naval Academy, and to offer content that may serve to advance leadership and character education and training within military, as well as traditional, preparatory schools, colleges, and universities. To "set the stage," a brief summary concerning the establishment and significance of military higher education in America is provided. This short but noteworthy primer introduces the foundational components/programs which have influenced leader development within military (higher) education for more than two centuries (Thelin, 2004; Pappas, 1993). Following the abbreviated historical review, the mission, core values, and intended outcomes or attributes which shape these young men and women as leaders of character are presented. The service specific mission and core values provide a foundation for a theoretical review of leader, leadership, and human development theories currently implemented at selected service academies. The practical application of these models is then illustrated in an overview of leader and leadership education and training conducted throughout the 47-month academy experience. The emphasis on an organizational culture imbued in honor and respect is profiled throughout the chapter. The chapter concludes with some final thoughts concerning the application of the military model in higher education.

THE FOUNDING AND MATURATION OF MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION IN AMERICA

In September of 1776, at the request of General George Washington, the Continental Congress formed a committee to investigate the readiness of the Army (Banning & Azoy, 1963). The committee's findings validated Washington's assessment concerning the lack of discipline and readiness and specifically noted that "some of the troops were badly officered" (Pappas, 1993, p. 5). In October of 1776, the investigative committee concluded, among other things, that "The Board of War be directed to prepare a Military Academy and provide the same with proper officers" (Pappas, 1993, p. 5). During the next two decades, Washington's quest for a formal military institute to educate and professionalize the Army officer corps was stifled with political debate (Pappas, 1993; Wagoner, 2004). Simultaneously, Thomas Jefferson's initiative to advance traditional higher education through the establishment of a national university steeped in math, science, engineering, and other such subjects also encountered substantial political resistance (Wagoner, 2004).

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