

The Air Force Academy Admissions Diversity Focus

In Response to the Cadet Wing Diversity Plan

By Col. Chevalier "Chevy" Cleaves, class of 1985

In an increasingly competitive and dynamic global environment, the ultimate success of the United States Air Force depends largely upon diversity of thought, background, talent, demographics and even organization. In April 2008, Lt. Gen. John Regni, the Air Force Academy Superintendent, signed the first-ever Cadet Wing Diversity Plan, an action plan that identifies the Academy's recruiting objectives and diversity recruiting initiatives.

Over the past year, the Academy Admissions staff has worked tirelessly to execute the Superintendent's diversity vision. Although other areas of advancement exist, such as force/cadet development, retention and accountability, the primary diversity responsibility of Academy Admissions is cadet accessions.

USAFA Strategic Goal #4:

Enhance faculty, staff and cadet diversity. Ensure we have the faculty, staff and cadet diversity to broaden the cadet learning environment and prepare USAFA graduates to lead in a global expeditionary Air Force. We will use our total force expertise to expose our cadets to new ideas, beliefs and experiences while emphasizing language and culture to enhance their worldview.

Admissions Strategic Goal #3:

Expand the diversity of the USAFA cadet wing to better educate and train future officers expected to serve and lead in a diverse and expeditionary force.

Since the Cadet Wing Diversity Plan was introduced, the Admissions Directorate's principal focus has been to build, expand, establish and launch significant efforts and initiatives linked to the cadet portion of the strategic goals highlighted above. On our behalf, we'd like to share with the graduate community the broad expanse of what we mean when we talk about diversity, as well as the foundational policy document that guided our initial steps...the Cadet Wing Diversity Plan.

Cadet Wing Diversity Plan Summary

The diversity plan highlights the importance of exposing cadets to a broad range of ideas and experiences. The goal is for cadets to live amongst many others with dissimilar backgrounds, which will then “compel them to examine their personal assumptions and philosophies in contrast to those of others.” Having a richly diverse environment will help enable cadets to see the best qualities, strengths and perspectives each individual, regardless of his or her background, brings to the organization.

The plan further explains the importance of diversity in terms of our expeditionary military force because we operate in a global environment with many other nations and a wide variety of threats. Academy graduates need to be prepared to lead a widely diverse military force with people of every culture and view.

Oftentimes, diversity is confused to comprise of only race, ethnicity and gender. However, the Cadet Wing Diversity Plan broadly outlines diversity as a composite of individual characteristics that includes personal life experiences, geographic background, socioeconomic background, cultural knowledge, educational background, work background, language abilities, physical abilities, philosophical/spiritual perspectives, age, race, ethnicity and gender.

Since implementation, this new mission area has benefitted directly from the Academy Superintendent’s financial support, as well as from the additional appropriations authorized to support diversity operations. This support has enabled the Admissions Directorate to realize significant gains, and based on these gains, we’d like to provide a progress report of our performances. Here are some of the programs, initiatives and efforts we’ve led/introduced/emphasized in order to execute the diversity mission. You might recognize some of the names of fellow graduates who have been key organizers and participants.

Identifying Candidates

Admissions Marketing and Media received funding to advertise in prominent minority, urban and rural media outlets. We continue to revamp material annually to ensure it appeals to the current generation of middle and high school students of various backgrounds. **(Tammie Adams '03)**

We are also increasing emphasis via the Diversity Affairs Coordinators (86 specialized Admissions Liaison Officers, or ALOs, with specific diversity responsibilities - located in 67 geographic areas nationwide) who identify, mentor and evaluate specific local, diverse candidates through the Academy application process. **(Dr. Phil Prosseda '80, retired Lt. Col.)**

Target Populations

We've identified the diverse target populations as first generation college students, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students from academically disadvantaged backgrounds, enlisted Airmen, USAFA Prep School students, female candidates, Falcon Foundation students, and racial/ethnic minorities. **(Lt. Col. Jeff Lum '88 and A.J. Scott '85, retired Lt. Col.)**

We are engaging with the Falcon Foundation to expand scholarship opportunities for diverse applicants **(Dr. Randy Cubero '61, retired Brig. Gen.)**. We also support the Falcon Foundation implementation of the Junior Falcon Scholar Program, which is focused on the educational preparation and development of diverse middle school students in order to widen the admissions pipeline/funnel. **(Dr. Chris Howard '90, President of Hampden-Sydney College)**

We've expanded the Admissions Diversity Recruiting Division by adding a civilian deputy division chief to maintain corporate knowledge and stabilize the constant diversity recruiting lieutenants' turnover. We increased cooperative efforts with the Air Force Recruiting Service, Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps and other Air Force outreach programs. We also expanded recruiting efforts into

middle schools, with the goal of establishing/increasing student interest and goals of becoming academically qualified for admission.

Outreach

Admissions Tours – We host students and parents/guests every year August through May. The tours include a 45-minute briefing by Admissions, followed by students spending the day with a cadet, while the parents are taken on a two-hour guided tour of the cadet area.

Appointee Orientation – We host this orientation three separate times in April in order to provide the appointees with the opportunity to become acquainted with the Academy mission, operation, facilities and faculty. We internally identify students with economic needs and utilize gift funds to help offset the cost of attending. In the future, we will also host an Appointee Orientation Diversity Mixer, designed to provide a forum so diverse candidates and parents may address individual concerns.

Building partnerships with National and Regional Youth Organizations, USAFA Minority Alumni Organizations, and Disadvantaged Youth Community Outreach Organizations

Congressional Caucuses – We continue to build and solidify relationships with Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) nominating sources, focusing on African-American and Hispanic constituents. In addition to regular coordination with caucus leaders' staffs, we have held two specialized workshops with CHC staffers and one with CBC staffers in order to strengthen ties and offer assistance with spreading the word about Academy opportunities. **(Moses Stewart '78, retired Lt. Col.)**

Congressional Staffer Orientations – We annually conduct a two- to three-day annual Congressional Staffer Orientation at the Academy. We offer first opportunity to staffers from congressional districts with historically low nomination rates and those serving on freshman congressional staffs (expanding to two events in 2009).

Congressional Workshops – We annually conduct three Congressional Workshops in highly diverse urban areas and areas with historically low nomination rates to encourage attendance from district and state congressional offices (expanding to four events in 2009).

Disadvantaged Youth Community Outreach – We are exploring the possibility of partnering with national and local organizations that provide academic-related programs for disadvantaged middle school children.

Diversifying the ALO Force – We’re making efforts to diversify the ALO force to ensure underrepresented areas have adequate coverage.

Diversity Advisory Panel – We created a new board of directors-level body and clearinghouse for ideas, best practices and standardization. More efficient communication and more effective execution also provides forum for admissions strategic/operational diversity planning (first conference held August 2008). (Lt. Col. Fred Sandoval '82, Cynthia Mack '82, Col. Mike Morgan '83, Alonzo Babers '83, Lt. Col. Joe Calderon '84, DJ Vanas '93, Rodney Bullard '96 and Delavane Diaz '04)

Diversity Affairs Coordinator (DAC) Conference – This conference brings the DACs together to discuss their role in helping implement the Cadet Wing Diversity Plan (first conference planned for Fiscal Year 2009).

Educator Orientations – We host two educator conferences every year that include 40 to 50 attendees. We provide comprehensive information on USAFA’s structure and admissions process, and we identify and invite educators from high performing areas and from congressional districts with historically low representation in the cadet wing.

Expanded Diversity Visitation Program – This program brings 100 highly qualified, diverse applicants to the Academy for a two- to three-day visit. We match the applicant with a diverse cadet in order to effectively address areas of interest. Eighty percent of the visiting students have accepted appointments.

We are developing another version of the Diversity Visitation Program that focuses on high school juniors and below. In order to compete with aggressive civilian universities, we feel it is advantageous to reach this target group.

Grass Roots – During their Thanksgiving vacation, cadets return to their hometowns and share information about the Academy to various groups. This volunteer-based program enables cadets to give presentations to high schools, provide materials to newspapers, and arrange for interviews with television and radio stations. Special emphasis on diverse and low nomination areas is being taken to generate stronger interaction.

International Cadet Program – We work annually with the Secretary of the Air Force International Affairs to fill the 60 authorized international cadet positions.

Leaders Encouraging Airmen Development (LEAD) Conference – This conference is for command chiefs, career advisors and base education officers so they can in turn educate their Airmen. It provides comprehensive information to this key group of influencers about the Academy's education structure and admissions process (first world-wide conference held September 2008). (**Tina Erzen '88, retired Maj.**)

Recruiting Visits – The Admissions Diversity Recruiting Division conducts approximately 40 seven- to ten-day trips targeting minorities and disadvantaged population centers with recent graduates who represent the diverse Air Force community. The division also focuses on areas with low congressional nomination rates. Diversity recruiters visit community colleges, high schools, middle schools, community organizations and attend college fairs. In addition, they will pre-indentify top candidates and offer in-home visits to candidates and parents. (**2nd Lieutenants Jamie Davis, Christian Evans, Whitney Evanson, Valencia Gore, April Harker, Ruben Ihuit, Benjamin Pass, Paul Reyes, Anthony Rocco and Ruben Ruiz-Perez - all from '08**)

SAT/ACT Preparation Mentoring Team – Based on a very successful West Point alumni program and sponsored by the Diversity Advisory Panel, this pilot program provides standardized testing preparation and mentoring to selected individuals, with otherwise strong records, in order to help them demonstrate and more accurately assess their potential. **(Alonzo Babers '83)**

Summer Seminar - Three, highly competitive, one-week programs held at USAFA, offered to students between their junior and senior years. At the end of the week, the student has a clear understanding of the commitment necessary to attend the Academy and to become an Air Force officer. **(Lt. Col. Steve Orié '90 and Maj. Brendan Halloran '97)**

Historically, 40 percent of the entering four-degree class attended Summer Seminar. A similar U.S. Naval Academy program resulted in marked increases in participation by diverse students in their summer program as well as in their brigade.

Strategic Initiatives

USAFA Congressional Nominations Operations Plan – The plan is designed to provide assistance to Members of Congress who desire to improve their nomination programs. It provides comprehensive program knowledge, best practices and subject matter experts to facilitate constituent engagement and overall program development. More than 20 offices were impacted in the first three months.

Service Academy Congressional Engagement Plan/Calendar – The Academy Congressional Liaison Office is coordinating a comprehensive Congressional Engagement Plan/Calendar that includes all service academy training/education opportunities created for Members of Congress.

Service Academy Diversity Conference – This conference is coordinated by Academy Admissions to share best practices, while synchronizing efforts in key geographic locations.

Strategic Cities Diversity Initiative – Academy Admissions has tentatively identified seven key cities (Chicago, New York, Baltimore, Miami, Atlanta, Dallas and Los Angeles) where we will create focused partnerships between all service academies (USAFA is lead), the school districts, community-based

organizations, congressional offices and other strategic partners. We expect to use this effort to demystify college access and increase the pipeline of qualified diverse candidates.

This is a fairly broad overview of our current activity to accomplish the admissions/accessions portion of diversity. It is aggressively comprehensive, and we've already seen results. Cultural intelligence and the respect for human dignity, across the full definition of diversity, are linked to maximizing operational relevance, and they resonate within our service's core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Thanks to the Superintendent, the resource allocation is being adjusted to match the commitment, so we expect to continue to improve in our execution and results. The ultimate reason for success in accomplishing our mission is and will remain partnership. If you would like to participate/partner with us, or if you would like to support our efforts when we are in your geographic area, please contact Lt. Col. Jeffrey Lum at jeffrey.lum@usafa.edu or 719-333-2644.