



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT  
**UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY**  
WEST POINT, NEW YORK 10996-5000

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To the Men and Women of the Long Gray Line,

Some of you may have seen a letter written by retired Lieutenant Colonel Robert Heffington in our graduate forums taking issue with our policies and procedures at West Point. Let me be clear. I am incredibly proud of our cadets, our staff and faculty, and our program. This great institution continues to evolve to meet the needs of today's Army, and, in doing so, we steadfastly uphold the highest academic, military, physical and disciplinary standards. While we do not compromise standards, we are a developmental institution with the timeless mission to provide Leaders of Character to our Army and Nation and an enduring commitment to excellence.

This commitment to excellence must permeate everything we do. I will not compromise my decision to advocate winning in accordance with our values of duty, honor and country. It is what America expects of our Army and of its leaders. The crucible of ground combat is unforgiving, and we owe it to our cadets to give them every opportunity to learn how to succeed. We are committed to developing our future leaders to be successful on today's complex battlefield, and always, how to do so in accordance with our values.

In the last four years, we modified our military and physical programs to increase intensity and rigor. All of our cadets, including our women, now take boxing as a mandatory physical education class, and they must successfully pass the course. We created the Cadet Leader Development Program that brings our first class back to Camp Buckner in an 18 day Camp Darby Ranger-type program where cadets experience leadership development in squad leader, platoon sergeant, and platoon leader graded positions. They must successfully complete this as a graduation requirement. Thirteen cadets from the Class of 2017 did not graduate in May because they did not complete the training to standard. Instead, these cadets missed graduating with their class, completed the training, and graduated instead in June.

These changes have increased the realism, toughness and challenge of our developmental programs, resulting in the most capable and confident young leaders of character that we have ever produced. As I mentioned in my previous letter to you, I would invite you to accompany me for one day in the streets of Mosul or Kandahar, and judge for yourself the quality of honorable leadership our graduates have provided over the last 16 years of war.

The bottom line is this, in the last 50 years, only 26 classes have signed up to come to West Point while the Nation was at war. Sixteen of those 26 have been in the last 16 years. The accomplishments and sacrifices of our graduates in selfless service to our nation over the last 16 years of war, speak to the quality of standards, discipline and values they experienced here at West Point.

- Our graduates, 15,900 since 2001, have served honorably in some of the most challenging and demanding positions and environments in the defense of our nation.
- Many of those graduates are now preparing for battalion command across all of our thirteen branches.
- Our graduates have been awarded for valor and service with 2 Distinguished Service Crosses, 38 Silver Stars, 21 Distinguished Flying Crosses, 252 Bronze Stars for Valor, 403 Army Commendations for Valor and 516 Purple Hearts.
- Our graduates have distinguished themselves in some of the most harrowing situations imaginable, as our recent Nininger Award Recipient, Captain Nicholas Dockery, who over the course of four hours, fought, maintained contact and defeated a well-armed enemy force using all available direct and indirect fire and the courage to expose himself, under fire, while leading Soldiers in the crucible.
- As recently as last year, we placed cadets, as newly commissioned officers, in all of our divisions across the Army with many now leading in the 1st AD, 3d ID and 82d in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 173d, 2d ACR and 4th ID in Eastern Europe and the 2d and 25th in the Republic of Korea and across Southeast Asia.

When we speak directly to battalion commanders, we continually receive positive feedback. Here are some examples of what we hear from the field:

“They (USMA Graduates) come strong. They believe in the Army values and components of them. They can easily articulate them to their Soldiers – the Army Values, and project that as well.”

“They come physically fit. They come resilient, mentally as well. They have strength.”

“Whatever you are doing there – I am an ROTC guy – I have never been to West Point but the product you are producing is making a difference in the force – that’s for sure.”

Our academic, military and physical pillars remain strong and are rooted in our character development program. In all areas, we seek to align values and behaviors with those that the Army and the nation deserve and demand from West Point graduates. Our Cadet Honor Committee, with the dedicated support of our Simon Center for Professional Military Ethic and the broader faculty, continue to improve honor education and adjudication of cases to preserve the values of Duty, Honor, and Country.

We are committed to remaining the world's preeminent leader development institution through timely evolution, consistent evaluation and assessments of our programs. This view is confirmed time and time again by outside institutions and organizations:

- The 2018 edition of U.S. News & World Report's Best Colleges placed the U.S. Military Academy as the top public national liberal arts college. West Point also ranks No. 4 on the Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs list, and takes the top spot in the Best in the Specialties category for civil engineering.
- Forbes ranks us the #2 Public College and #9 Liberal Arts College in the Nation.
- The 2018 Princeton Review ranked us #1-5 in six different categories measuring classroom and faculty experience.
- The Class of 2017 had 27 cadets earn 29 post-graduate scholarships including one Rhodes, one Marshall and two Fulbright scholars.
- During our 2015 Middle States and ABET reaccreditations, our institution and its programs passed with full accreditation. Getting fully accredited reflects a dedication to processes of continual improvement.

On the athletic field, our cadets continue to excel with multiple individual achievements, scholar-athlete recognitions and numerous team victories, and our coaches continue to receive accolades across many of our sports as well. Additionally, our competitive clubs won 12 national championships last year and for the first time in the history of collegiate sports, both our men's and women's boxing teams were national champions from the same university. In the military domain, we took the top spot in the 2017 Sandhurst Military Skills Competition out of 61 teams, which included 12 international teams.

With respect to some of the allegations brought up in LTC (Ret) Heffington's letter, I feel it is important to factually respond in order to illustrate the consequences of cadets who fail to meet standards in this last year alone:

- Last year we separated 26 cadets for academic reasons, including 7 firsties and 3 cows.
- Last year we separated 10 cadets for Honor and 18 cadets for other misconduct reasons.
- Last year we separated 2 cadets for not meeting physical requirements.
- Last year we graduated 962 cadets, with 653 cadets branching combat arms, including 68 women, and 309 cadets branching our other critical branches to include 15 in cyber.
- Last year our cumulative grade point average was 3.02 and our athletic teams achieved a .590 winning percentage against their opponents, including 14 wins over Navy.

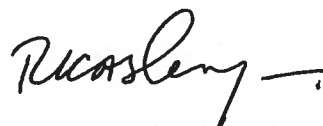
We have shifted our approach from an 'attritional' model to a 'developmental' model without compromising our standards. It is our responsibility to coach, teach and mentor our cadets. The character development program provides personal and professional growth for every cadet. But do not be confused. If cadets fail to achieve our high standards, they do not continue. I have noticed that this shift in developmental leadership does not sit well with many 'old grads' who yearn for the days of 'zero tolerance' or 'black and white' or the 'Old Corps'. Our pursuit today is the same as it has been for 215 years...excellence, because in the pursuit of excellence, success always follows.

Our current Corps of Cadets is comprised of the finest young men and women we have ever gathered here at the Academy as evidenced by their performance in the classroom, in their athletic endeavors, and in their field training. They are the most diverse group in the history of West Point, and we are stronger for it. In addition, the Corps is surrounded by a cadre of the finest staff and faculty, including officers, non-commissioned officers and civilians.

I have great concern being called a liar after more than 42 years of honorable service to our Nation and many years serving here at West Point. I have an incredible team here led by both our Commandant and Dean. To call them liars as well is a great injustice to their professionalism and their numerous years of dedicated and honorable service. Speaking truth to power is important, to be sure, but personal attacks do not promote improvement. Is our Academy perfect? No. Do bad cadets sneak through the system? I would hope not, but I can attest, having served with graduates for over 40 years, that sometimes I have stopped and wondered. Do we need to assess our programs and policies? Absolutely, and we do, both internally and externally. We take all criticism seriously, but we take constructive criticism offered directly through the numerous forums available to staff, faculty, and cadets most seriously because it reflects genuine ownership of our profession and our military academy.

So in that spirit, I invite all of you to visit our Alma Mater and observe firsthand the outstanding young men and women who make up the Corps of Cadets. I believe you will be impressed by the academic, military and physical rigor you remember from your time here and amazed by the positive changes made over the years. But more than curricula or schedules, facilities or sporting events – you will be most proud and inspired by our cadets.

Let me close as I began. There is no greater measure of the quality, standards, discipline and values here at West Point than the accomplishments and sacrifices of our graduates in selfless service to our Nation over the last 16 years of war.



Robert L. Caslen, Jr.  
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Superintendent