

# UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

## LEADERS ENCOURAGING AIRMEN DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAM



### ***DIRECTORATE OF ADMISSIONS USAF ACADEMY, CO***

***8 August 2018***

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## DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS  
UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY  
USAF ACADEMY, COLORADO

8 AUG 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDERS, COMMAND CHIEFS, AND FIRST SERGEANTS

FROM: HQ USAFA/RR  
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 2300  
USAF Academy CO 80840-5025

SUBJECT: Leaders Encouraging Airmen Development (LEAD) Program

1. The United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) and its Preparatory School offer magnificent opportunities for our sharpest enlisted personnel to obtain their college degree and enter the active duty commissioned ranks. Prior-enlisted cadets possess both military knowledge and proven reliability which makes them the archetype cadet and commissioned officer.
2. We look to you to find and nominate "leading edge" Airmen. Specifically, we are looking for qualified top performers with the highest moral character, strong academic ability, and those who are physically fit. Interested Airmen should complete and submit the AF Form 1786 and complete the Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ) on-line at [academyadmissions.com](http://academyadmissions.com) or <https://admissions.usafa.edu/gateway/gateway.aspx>. We have Admissions counselors at the Air Force Academy and Admissions Liaison Officers (ALO) in every local area who will help Airmen navigate the application process. For assistance, please call the Admissions office at *1-800-443-9266*.
3. The prior-enlisted cadets attending USAFA are truly among the best the Air Force has to offer, and it is because of your vision and dedication to the LEAD program that they are here. We are grateful for your commitment to the Air Force and support of the LEAD program. I look forward to seeing your talented Airmen here at the United States Air Force Academy.

ARTHUR W. PRIMAS, JR., Col, USAF  
Director of Admissions

## LEADERS ENCOURAGING AIRMEN DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAM

The LEAD Program is an on-going effort to give our best and brightest Airmen the opportunity to attend the USAFA in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The program, initiated by Gen Fogleman in 1995, delegates authority to Unit Commanders to nominate qualified Airmen to compete for an appointment to the Academy or attend the Preparatory School with the intention of an Academy appointment to follow. Commanders have the opportunity to identify outstanding and deserving Airmen, who are qualified to attend the USAFA and who exhibit officer potential for this commissioning program.

Appointments are available for direct entry to the Air Force Academy for active duty Airmen who meet entry criteria. These appointments are highly competitive. An Airman must be a U.S. citizen or be able to obtain citizenship before entry into the Academy, be unmarried and have no dependents, of high moral character, academically qualified, and must not have passed their twenty-third birthday by 1 July of the entering year (this is a stipulation of Title 10, United States Code) for direct entry into the Academy. Appointments are also available for direct entry to the Air Force Academy for Guard and Reserve Airmen, who must meet the same criteria as the active duty Airmen. Guard and Reserve Airmen will be commissioned in the active duty Air Force upon graduation from the Academy. For entry to the Air Force Academy Preparatory School, Airmen must not have passed their twenty-second birthday by 1 Jul of the entering year. Between 40 to 60 Regular and Reserve Airmen attend the Air Force Academy Preparatory School on an annual basis. Airmen must meet Enlisted Commissioning Program application eligibility requirements relating to LEAD or applying to USAFA IAW AFI 36-2013, Table 1.1. Additionally, IAW AFI 36-2021, Para 2.5 Regular and Reserve members of the Air Force and Air National Guard must have completed Basic Military Training; Para 2.6 Regular members of the Air Force must have at least 1 year retainability when they enter the Preparatory School.

Application: Complete the Pre-Candidate Questionnaire/Application online and submit the AF Form 1786, Application for Appointment to the United States Air Force Academy Under Quota Allotted to Enlisted Members of the Regular and Reserve Components of the Air Force. The AF Form 1786 requires the Airman's personal information, commander's endorsement, and Military Personnel Section (MPS) Assignments coordination. The MPS reviews applicant eligibility IAW AFI 36-2013 and places the Airman in Assignment Availability Code (AAC) 05 and coordinates on the AF Form 1786. The completed form must reach the Air Force Academy Admissions Office NLT 31 Jan of the desired entry year. Once the application has been processed, the Airman will be notified by the Admissions office concerning additional requirements such as the Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA) which consists of seven components and a separate test from the standard Air Force PT test, an extensive medical evaluation separate from the enlisted medical examination, completion of an interview with an Admissions Liaison Officer (ALO), completion of a writing sample, and attainment of qualifying scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT). Applicants should also be involved in athletics, base and community activities, attend college courses, and excel in their primary duties.

### LEAD Timetable

- |                                                                                                                                             |                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| - AF Form 1786 submitted                                                                                                                    | 1 Mar (year prior to entry) – 31 Jan |
| - Submit Pre-Candidate Questionnaire/Application on-line at <a href="http://www.academyadmissions.com">http://www.academyadmissions.com</a> | NLT 31 Dec (Airman's responsibility) |
| - Completed Candidate Packages                                                                                                              | NLT 31 Jan                           |
| - USAFA provides MAJCOMs list of qualified candidates (for non-selected Airmen, availability code is removed at this time)                  | Apr                                  |
| - Airmen can accept/decline                                                                                                                 | Through 1 May                        |

## Guidelines

Guidelines for Direct Appointment to the US Air Force Academy: SAT Reading Test: 31 and SAT Math Test: 29. ACT English 24, Reading 24, Math 25, and Science Reasoning 25. Top 20% of high school class or about a 3.50 GPA if school does not rank. Candidates should have taken a college preparatory curriculum in high school which included mathematics through pre-calculus and should have also taken a high school chemistry course. College work at the community college level or higher which makes up for missed high school curriculum can compensate for some weakness in the high school record and will be considered. See the admissions website at <http://www.academyadmissions.com> for more information on suggested college preparatory curriculum.

**Mid 50% Range of ACT:** Science Reasoning 26 - 31, Math 26 - 30, English 26 - 29, Reading 26 - 30  
**Approximate Correlating SAT Range:** Math Test 32 - 35, Reading Test 32 - 35

Guidelines for United States Academy Preparatory School Appointment: There are no guidelines for SAT/ACT scores. Refer to the mid-50% range of airmen for historical scores of preparatory appointees. Top 40% of high school class or about a 2.70 GPA if school does not rank. Candidates should have taken a college preparatory curriculum in high school which included mathematics through Algebra II. Pre-calculus and a high school chemistry course are strongly encouraged. College work at the community college level or higher can compensate for some weakness in the high school record and will be considered.

**Mid 50% Range of ACT:** Science Reasoning 23 - 27, Math 24 - 26, English 23 - 26, Reading 23 - 29  
**Approximate Correlating SAT Range:** Math Test 30 - 32, Reading Test 29 - 33

NOTE: Candidates should consider taking math and science (with a lab) courses. The time since high school graduation and whether an Airman is currently taking or has taken college level courses will also be evaluated in determining suitability for direct entry to the Academy or entry to the Preparatory School.

Any questions about the LEAD Program should be directed to USAFA Admissions at: [USAFA\\_LEAD@usafa.edu](mailto:USAFA_LEAD@usafa.edu).

### **AF Form 1786, Application for Appointment to the USAF Academy Under Quota Allotted to Enlisted Members of the Regular and Reserve Components of the Air Force**

The AF Form 1786 is an application for a nomination for appointment to the Academy or to the Preparatory School. Active Duty and Reserve Airmen are considered for each entering class based on their enlisted status. The AF Form 1786 is the formal paperwork required for an Airman to obtain a commander's nomination, however Airmen are highly encouraged to seek nominations through the other competitive categories such as Congressional, Vice Presidential, and also Presidential (if applicable) nominations.

IAW AFI 36-2019, Para A2.2.5 & A2.2.6, The AF Form 1786 must (1) be completed by the member, (2) endorsed by the unit commander, and (3) processed by the Military Personnel Section (MPS). The MPS will place the Airman in Assignment Availability Code (AAC) 05. The unit commander must complete a separate electronic endorsement letter (upon entering *Candidate* status, Airman will provide electronic link to unit commander) to provide a comprehensive statement of the applicant's character, ability, and motivation to become an Air Force officer, which will be submitted online. Additionally, unit commanders should verify eligibility and should ensure any waivers for ineligibility are submitted IAW AFI 36-2013, table 1. Airmen should verify that their AF Form 1786 was submitted to Admissions from their MPS. Ultimately, it is the Airman's responsibility to ensure the AF Form 1786 is submitted.

The purpose of the commander's endorsement is to verify that the information provided on the AF Form 1786 is correct and to provide the Academy with details of a positive or negative endorsement of the individual pursuing this commissioning program. The Airman's personnel folder should be screened to see if any Unfavorable Information File (UIF) documentation, letters of reprimand, etc., exist. The commander should also ensure the Airman has one year retainability starting on 1 Jul of the year they will enter. The unit commander is our "safety net" to ensure only our top Airmen enter the Academy. Commanders should subjectively analyze if an Airman "has the potential" to become an Air Force officer. Minor infractions such as a speeding ticket or missed appointments may not, in and of themselves, warrant disapproval, but a "pattern" of misconduct might. Bottom Line: we are looking for Airmen who have the potential to become officers of character and embody the Air Force Core Values.

The AF Form 1786 is available on-line at: <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/>. Go to "Search Products" and type in "AF1786" to bring up the form to be downloaded and completed. This form can also be found on our website, <http://www.academyadmissions.com/admissions/advice-to-applicants/enlisted-airmen>.

## Application Process

- Airmen should maintain a copy of the LEAD Handbook and also provide a copy to their Unit Commander
- AF Form 1786 scanned or mailed to USAFA Admissions Counselor
- Complete your pre-candidate questionnaire/application \*Online
- Contact your Admissions Liaison Officer (ALO) – contact information on application portal
- Letters of Evaluation (Unit Commander, First Sergeant or supervisor, and other military officer on active/reserve/guard) \*Online
- Up to two additional Letters of Recommendations (optional)
- Contact your Academy Admissions Counselor (via e-mail or call [1-800-443-9266](tel:1-800-443-9266))
- Train for and take your Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA), Form 158 \*Online
- Complete extracurricular activities record, Form 147 \*Online
- Complete your writing sample, Form 0-878 \*Online
- Original AF Form 2030 and new AF Form 2030 \*Online
- Complete your medical evaluation (DoDMERB)
- Complete other requirements outlined in the Instructions to Candidates booklet

## USAF Academy Admissions Counselors

The Air Force Academy has ten admissions counselors geographically assigned to five regions of the United States/world who are specifically trained to help candidates through the admission process. Once a “student file” is activated, it is maintained by one of the ten counselors assigned to the Selections Division in the Directorate of Admissions. We encourage Airmen to contact their counselor. However, to effectively use our counselor resources, only Airmen should call their counselor, not supervisors, commanders, or even Education Services Center personnel. Which counselor to contact is listed on your online portal and **determined by location of base assigned** (not home of record). Airmen, supervisors, and commanders may also contact their local Education Services Center for information and assistance.

### **The Admissions toll free number is [1-800-443-9266](tel:1-800-443-9266)**

Region 1: CT, ME, DE, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, VA, DC, WV, and APO AE.  
DSN 333-3801/COMM 719-333-3801

Region 2: AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC, TN, Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands and APO AA.  
DSN 333-3802/COMM 719-333-3802

Region 3: IA, ID, IL, IN, MI, MN, MT, ND, NE, OH, SD, WA, WI, and Canada.  
DSN 333-3803/COMM 719-333-3803

Region 4: AR, AZ, KS, LA, MO, NM, OK, TX, and Central and South America.  
DSN 333-3804/COMM 719-333-3804

Region 5: AK, CA, CO, HI, NV, OR, UT, WY, Asia, Australia, Guam, South Pacific and APO AP.  
DSN 333-3805/COMM 719-333-3805

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. I have conflicting information on the current age requirements for the Academy. What are they?**

Applicants must be under 23 years of age on 1 Jul of the year that they will enter the Academy or under 22 years of age on 1 Jul of the year they enter the Preparatory School.

### **2. Is there any LEAD information available on the Internet?**

Yes. The Academy's Admissions website - <http://www.academyadmissions.com> or <https://www.academyadmissions.com/admissions/advice-to-applicants/enlisted-airmen/> has up-to-date LEAD information.

### **3. How many slots are available for Airmen?**

The number of appointments to the Air Force Academy available for Airmen varies each year based on by-law restrictions and authorized end strength of the Cadet Wing. However, there are appointments available each year to meet Air Force needs. Please note that you must be qualified for direct entry or the Preparatory School to receive an appointment. Airman status alone does not guarantee an offer to the Academy or Prep School.

### **4. Do Airmen need a congressional nomination?**

The AF Form 1786 serves as an official nomination. However, Airmen are highly encouraged to seek nominations through the other categories such as Congressional, Vice Presidential and Presidential (if applicable) nominations in order to make their application as competitive as possible. Airmen must still submit an AF Form 1786 for their commander's endorsement and to ensure eligibility requirements are met IAW AFI 36-2013 and AFI 36-2021.

### **5. Are Guard and Reserve Airmen returned to their units after graduation from the Air Force Academy?**

No. Guard and Reserve Airmen are released from their units upon entering the Academy or Preparatory School. Prior Guard and Reserve Airmen who graduate from the Academy are commissioned in the active duty Air Force and assigned according to active duty Air Force units to meet active duty requirements.

### **6. How critical are test scores and high school GPAs?**

Very critical! Fifty percent of an applicant's qualification is based on their academic accomplishments. The LEAD program takes into account the maturity and experience that an Airman brings to the Academy and Preparatory School, but a student cannot survive at the Academy without the basic academic knowledge and skills required for success. Airmen are encouraged to contact their local education offices to sign up for the DANTES version of the ACT or SAT test as soon as possible. There are several free test preparation websites available. Contact your education office or do an internet search.

### **7. How much does a person's personnel file (EPRs, training records, etc.) affect their appointment?**

We expect the individual's unit commander to utilize this as a screening tool before signing the AF Form 1786. Negative quality indicators in an Airman's personnel file can have an effect on their opportunity for an appointment. However, the personnel file is not viewed by the selections team.

### **8. What is the percentage of personnel who complete the Preparatory School that make it into the Academy?**

Very High! In the upper 90%. Basically, we have invested a year of time and effort into a "Preppie" and make every effort to prepare them for an Academy appointment. Unless there is some disciplinary, physical or academic deficiency involved, most who complete the requirements to graduate, obtain the Preparatory School Commander's recommendation, and have a legal nomination will have an opportunity to obtain an appointment to the Academy.

### **9. What if a commander is unwilling to sign the AF Form 1786 on an Airman?**

That is their prerogative and the basis of the LEAD program. We assume that the commander knows which personnel are strong performers and have the potential to become officers of character. Commanders take into consideration that not signing the AF Form 1786 will take away an Airman's opportunity for appointment.

### **10. How do most Airmen feel about an extra year at the Preparatory School as opposed to entering the cadet wing directly?**

The Preparatory School is a great transition from life as an Airman to life as a student. Airmen will face similar challenges academically and militarily at the Preparatory School while maintaining their current enlisted pay. It allows Airmen to practice study skills in a less stressful environment which will aide in their success as a Fourth Class (freshman) Cadet.

**11. What does an Airman make in base pay at the Preparatory School?**

Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Airmen maintain their prior-enlisted pay while at the Preparatory School.

**12. Why do Airmen have to take a Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board (DoDMERB) medical examination?**

DoD regulations require all applicants applying to a commissioning program meet accession standards and, therefore, must undergo a DoDMERB exam.

**13. What role does the MPS play in the process?**

The MPS will ensure the airmen's eligibility to apply to USAFA and the unit commander has submitted any required ineligibility waivers IAW AFI 36-2013, Table 1.1. The MPS will place the individual in Assignment Availability Code (AAC) 05 and coordinates on AF Form 1786 in the bottom of block 15. The availability code will place a hold on any PCS orders until the Airman is either offered an appointment, declines an appointment, or is not selected for the Academy or Prep School.

**NOTE:** AFI 36-2110 – An AAC does not preclude a *mandatory* PCS

Mandatory PCS – a permanent change of duty station of an Airman due to base closure, completion of or elimination from training, completion of a CONUS maximum stabilized tour, an OS tour, unit move, or being surplus on base/installation

**14. What happens if I miss the 31 Dec deadline for the Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ)?**

The PCQ allows us to determine if you meet the legal requirements to be considered for an appointment. It is completed by ALL applicants prior to receiving an official candidate application kit. Please make every effort to complete the PCQ prior to the 31 Dec deadline to determine for yourself (and your commander) that you will be competitive for admission to USAFA or the USAFA Preparatory School. If you miss this deadline for unavoidable circumstances (such as a deployment), please contact your counselor immediately. Your assigned counselor can assist you.

**15. Should I complete a new AF IMT 2030 (Drug and Alcohol Abuse Certificate)?**

A copy of your 2030 can be obtained from the AF portal – PRDA (Personnel Records Display). E-Mail or fax a copy of your original 2030 to your assigned counselor. Additionally, you will need to complete a new AF IMT 2030 as part of your online candidate application portal.

**16. Do Airmen need to complete the teacher evaluations?**

Airmen need to get Letters of Evaluation from their Commander, First sergeant or supervisor, **and** one other military officer currently on Active/Reserve/Guard duty. Additionally, Airmen are allowed to have up to 2 additional letters of recommendation as long as the letter is not from a family member.

**17. How do Airmen make themselves more competitive among other Airmen?**

Admissions would like to know what operational Air Force experience you have obtained, leadership qualities you possess, and deployments you have served. Airmen have more experience and we want to ensure you can lead your peers as well as follow them. Ensure you mention the above to your ALO and use those experiences in your essay and resume. Additionally, taking college courses can make up for time out of school and improve your overall academic record. College math and science courses are especially well-received.

**18. Is there a minimum Time-on-Station requirement before I can apply to the Academy?**

Yes, there are eligibility requirements IAW AFI 36-2013 table 1.1 that must be met or have waivers submitted. Additionally, Regular members of the Air Force must have at least 1 year retainability when entering either USAFA or the Prep School.

**19. Can I apply from a deployed location?**

Yes, Airmen can apply through LEAD while on deployment. However, the AF Form 1786 must be completed by the Airman's home station commander and all published deadlines must still be met.

**20. Is the Academy for me?**

The Academy is not the only Enlisted Commissioning Program (ECP). Refer to AFI 36-2013 to review all ECPs available and to determine which program is best suited for you. We ask that ALL Airmen considering the U.S. Air Force Academy weigh the pros and cons of what it takes to commission as a 2d Lt in the United States Air Force via the Academy. If the LEAD program is best suited for you, realize the Academy is a leadership laboratory that gives all cadets the opportunity to lead and follow. The majority of the upperclassmen are going to be younger than incoming Airmen. The Academy also offers unique experiences that you cannot find at other universities, but it also requires many sacrifices. While at the Academy, many freedoms, luxuries, and

conveniences that you were accustomed to during your enlisted service will need to be given up for a period of time or for the duration of your time at the Academy. Due to the demands of the Academy, it is essential that individuals are highly motivated to complete the program with an understanding that your experience will not be typical of other military training programs. Some prior-enlisted cadets/cadet-candidates decide to disenroll from USAFA due to the lack of day-to-day liberties (*freely coming and going, driving privileges, etc.*) that they experienced as enlisted Airmen, and some are not ready to transition back to training mode. USAFA is not an opportunity to “test the waters” and should not be treated as such. The decision to apply for an appointment should not be taken lightly and various resources should be sought out to come to a decision that benefits your overall personal growth, and ultimately the United States Air Force.