

# Priority #1— Developing Officers of Character



Part 2 of 3

Photo by Dave Ahlschwede

“Make no mistake, the mission here is not athletics, not airmanship, not academics — but building officers of character,” Academy Superintendent, Lt. Gen. John Regni, said.

This clear guidance is why the Academy’s No. 1 strategic goal is: “Focus on leadership and character development.”

“It’s impossible to overestimate the importance of character and leadership in our business — the profession of arms,” said Commandant of Cadets, Brig. Gen. Susan Desjardins. “Our core values, the cadet honor code, learning values-based leadership, and treating people with respect and dignity — these are the foundations of officer development here. Regardless of individual academic majors, athletic or airmanship achievements, or Air Force Specialty Code, after they leave here, every graduate must get these right.”

On the hill, one can see this goal in action with the honor code prominently displayed on the Terrazzo. Air Officers Commanding and Academy Military Trainers exemplify internalizing the Air Force core values, and faculty members continuously stress the importance of integrity in class through enforcing plagiarism policies and by setting personal examples. In addition, the Center for Character Development conducts regular character seminars and classes for the cadets. However, these are only part of the equation in accomplishing this goal.

Every Academy organization is involved, either directly or indirectly, in developing the future leaders of the Air Force and the nation. “When cadets see me and how I do my job

and carry myself, professionalism is the key,” said Staff Sgt. Justin Lane, installation patrolman, 10th Security Forces Squadron. “When we do dorm patrols and conduct our business in a professional manner, exemplifying the core values, they are respectful in return. We are setting the example now for the enlisted force so when the cadets graduate, they will hopefully carry that respect over onto active duty.”

“Even if personnel don’t see cadets during the day, the cadets see them or the fruits of their labor,” said Vice Superintendent, Col. Paul Ackerman.

From the airfield to the athletic fields, the integration across all Academy organizations is designed to mutually reinforce consistent lessons and messages about character.

“We are working with the faculty and Academy staff to give them some tools and make sure we all have the same vocabulary,” said Col. John Norton, Center for Character Development director. “For example, every summer there is a new faculty orientation and this year we had a full day where we told the new members about what the mission and vision statements really mean. And, what they really mean is that we all have a role in this. So we gave them some practical examples of how we integrate character and leadership lessons in a PE class or a chemistry class; and it resonated really well.”

Dean of the Faculty Brig. Gen. Dana Born summarized the importance of the faculty demonstrating their character every day.

“The most important way we build character in the classroom is by the example we set,” she said. “Every person on the faculty is conscious of the fact that we’re being watched by the cadets in everything we say and do. We accept the premise that character is ‘caught’ as much as it’s ‘taught’.”

In order to better integrate the mission elements, the Center for Character Development will transition into the Center for Character and Leadership Development as new manning positions are filled. The change will allow the center’s staff to continue the programs they currently conduct, while adding the ability to further develop and assess the effectiveness of Academy training and education.

“The Center for Character Development gets maybe only half a percent of a cadet’s time,” the colonel said. “Because of this, we must effectively integrate our efforts with all mission elements, because commissioning officers of character is the basis of what all MEs do, day-in and day-out.”

In addition to the transition of the center, other MEs are adjusting to better accomplish this goal.

“After the Academy Outcomes were approved, we took a hard look at every program and rewrote syllabi and adjusted operation orders to highlight which outcomes were being focused on during each activity or event,” General Desjardins said.

In the end, all changes are intended to accomplish one thing—to develop officers of character.

“Character goes far beyond merely adhering to the tenants of the cadet Honor Code,” the general said. “It’s about always doing your best, making tough moral choices despite pressures and temptations to the contrary, and showing dignity and respect to the people around you.”

“The four-year Academy experience is really designed to move beyond simply following a set of pre-established rules. Instead, it is about developing an internal motivation to embrace the Core Values of integrity, service and excellence. This occurs when all Academy mission elements are working in concert to systematically reinforce the Academy Outcomes.”

*By Capt. Uriah Orland - Academy Public Affairs*