

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY

LEADERS ENCOURAGING AIRMEN DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAM



UNITED STATES
AIR FORCE ACADEMY

DIRECTORATE OF ADMISSIONS
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 2400
USAF ACADEMY, CO 80840-5025

October 2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

USAF Academy Director of Admissions Memo.....	2
Background on LEAD Program.....	3
LEAD Timetable.....	3
Application Process.....	4
AF Form 1786, Application for Appointment to USAFA Under Quota for Airmen.....	4
Guidelines.....	5
USAFA Admissions Counselors.....	5
Admissions Liaison Officers	5
Frequently Asked Questions.....	6-7



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE

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

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDERS, COMMAND CHIEFS, AND FIRST SERGEANTS

FROM: HQ USAFA/RR

United States Air Force Academy Admissions
2304 Cadet Drive, Suite 2400
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 and diverse top performers with the highest moral character, strong academic ability, and those who are physically fit. Interested Airmen should complete the Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ) online at www.academyadmissions.com and submit the AF Form 1786. 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 once an Airman has completed their PCQ. For assistance, please call the Admissions office at 1-800-443-9266 or email USAFA_LEAD@usafa.edu.
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 provides this opportunity. 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Arthur W. Primas, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

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

LEADERS ENCOURAGING AIRMEN DEVELOPMENT (LEAD) PROGRAM

The LEAD Program is an ongoing effort to give our best and brightest Airmen the opportunity to attend the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The program, initiated by General 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 USAFA and who exhibit officer potential for this commissioning program.

Appointments are available for direct entry to the Air Force Academy for Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Airmen who meet entry criteria. These appointments are *highly* competitive. Airmen should be of high moral character. Guard and Reserve Airmen will be commissioned in the active duty Air Force upon graduation from the Academy. Airmen *must* meet the following legal requirements to attend the Air Force Academy (Title 10, United States Code):

- Be a U.S. citizen or be able to obtain citizenship before entry into the Air Force Academy
- Unmarried and have no dependents
- Must not have passed their 23rd birthday on 1 July of the entering year for direct entry into the Academy
- Must not have passed their 22nd birthday on 1 July of the entering year for entry to the Air Force Academy Preparatory School

Airmen also will need to meet Enlisted Commissioning Program application eligibility requirements including time-in-service, time-on-station, assignment, etc. in accordance with AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6. If appointed to the Preparatory School, regular members of the Air Force must have at least one year retainability when they enter. ***Any waiver requests must be submitted through the appropriate waiver authority listed in AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6.***

Individuals cannot apply directly to the United States Air Force Academy Preparatory School. Airmen complete the USAFA application and the selections board will determine if the Airman would benefit from a year at the USAFA Preparatory school before direct entry.

LEAD Timetable

Submit Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ) online	No earlier than 1 March of year prior to entry NLT 31 December
AF Form 1786 submitted	No earlier than 1 July of year prior to entry No later than 31 January of year of entry
Completed Candidate Packages	NLT 31 January
USAFA provides MAJCOMs a list of qualified candidates (for non-selected Airmen, availability code is removed at this time)	April
Airmen can accept/decline	Through 1 May (direct) 15 April (Prep)
USAFA In-processing Day for direct appointees	June
USAFA Preparatory School In-processing Day	July

Application Process

- FIRST: Complete Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ) (available 1 March of year before entry) *
(In no particular order):
- AF Form 1786 sent to USAFA Admissions counselor (should be submitted no earlier than 1 July of year prior to entry and no later than 31 January of year of entry)
- Complete extracurricular activities record, Form 147 *
- Letters of Evaluation (Unit Commander, First Sergeant or supervisor, and other military officer on Active Duty/Reserve/Guard) *
- Train for and complete Candidate Fitness Assessment (CFA), Form 158 *
- Complete writing sample, Form 0-878 *
- Complete AF Form 2030 *
- Complete interview with assigned ALO
- Up to two additional Letters of Recommendations (*optional*)
- Complete medical evaluation (DoDMERB)

* denotes online requirement

AF Form 1786

Applicants are highly encouraged to meet with their Wing Command Chief prior to unit commander signing AF Form 1786.

The AF Form 1786, Application for Appointment to the United States Air Force Academy for Enlisted Members of the Regular, Reserve, and National Guard Components of the Air Force, is an application for a nomination for appointment to USAFA. 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.

The AF Form 1786 is available online 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 www.academyadmissions.com. In accordance with AFMAN 36-2032, Paragraph A27.2.5., the AF Form 1786 must be completed by the member, endorsed by the member's unit commander, and 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 an electronic link to their 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 AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6. Airmen should verify 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 the information provided on the AF Form 1786 is correct and to provide USAFA 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. 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.

The unit commander has the responsibility to ensure only the top Airmen enter USAFA. 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. If a commander is unwilling to sign the AF Form

1786, that is their prerogative and the basis of the LEAD program. We assume 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.

Guidelines

Academics are extremely important and make up approximately 50% of an applicant’s application. The LEAD program takes into account the maturity and experience Airmen bring to USAFA, but students cannot survive at USAFA without the basic academic knowledge and skills required for success.

ACT/SAT: Applicants should also consider retaking the ACT and/or SAT to improve previous scores. Test scores are valid for a period of 5 years. USAFA Admissions will not waiver or accept scores that are more than 5 years old. Airmen are encouraged to contact their local education offices to inquire about the DANTES funded ACT or SAT test as soon as possible. There are several free test preparation websites available. Contact your education office for more information.

Academic Courses: 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. If taking college courses at the time of application, applicants 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 USAFA. See the Admissions website at www.academyadmissions.com for more information on suggested college preparatory curriculum.

Mid 50% Range		
	USAFA Direct	USAFA Preparatory School
SAT Evidence-based Reading	32-35	29-33
SAT Math	32-35	30-32
ACT English	26-29	23-26
ACT Reading	26-30	23-29
ACT Math	26-30	24-26
ACT Science Reasoning	26-31	23-27

USAFA Admissions Counselors

USAFA Admissions counselors are specifically trained to help candidates through the admission process. Once a “student file” is activated, it is maintained by one of the counselors assigned to the Selections Division in the Directorate of Admissions. We encourage Airmen to contact their counselor directly. Supervisors, commanders, or Education Services Center personnel should not be reaching out to counselors on applicants’ behalf. The applicant’s assigned counselor is listed on their online portal and is determined by location of base assigned (not home of record).

Admissions Liaison Officers (ALOs)

Applicants may reach out to their assigned local Mentor ALO to help answer any questions about USAFA or life as a commissioned officer. Mentor ALOs provide needed assistance, counseling, advising, and mentoring. The applicant’s Mentor ALO is assigned to the applicant in the candidate portal after the applicant has completed their Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ).

Upon reaching the candidate phase of the application, applicants will be notified of a separate Evaluator ALO. The applicant should reach out to this Evaluator ALO to schedule his/her virtual interview. You should expect this interview to generally last about one to two hours.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Are the age requirements waivable?

No. The age requirements for admission to military academies are set by U.S.C. Title 10 and are not waivable. Applicants must not have passed their 23rd birthday on July 1 of the year in which they will enter USAFA or must not have passed their 22nd birthday on July 1 of the year they will enter the Preparatory School.

2. 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. The LEAD program is extremely competitive. Airman status alone does not guarantee an offer to the Air Force Academy or Preparatory School.

3. 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 AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6.

4. 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 USAFA or Preparatory School. Prior Guard and Reserve Airmen who graduate from USAFA are commissioned in the active duty Air Force and assigned according to active duty Air Force units to meet active duty requirements.

5. What percentage of Airmen applicants get appointed to the Preparatory School?

Approximately 75-80% of Airmen accepted through the LEAD program are selected to attend the Preparatory School first. 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 and provide additional practice study skills in a less stressful environment which will aide in their success as a Fourth Class (freshman) Cadet. Please note Airmen cannot apply directly to the Preparatory School.

6. What is the percentage of Airmen that complete the Preparatory School and are appointed to Academy?

Very High! In the upper 90% of qualified Airmen (and about 75% of all Preparatory school students) make it into USAFA. Basically, we have invested a year of time and effort into a "Preppie" and make every effort to prepare them for an Air Force 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 Air Force Academy.

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

Active Duty, Guard, and Reserve Airmen remain on their current enlistment contract, maintain their Primary Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC), retain current enlisted rank with pay, and promote with pay commensurate with their grade IAW AFMAN 36-2032 and AFI 36-2502.

8. 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 to meet accession standards and, therefore, must undergo a DoDMERB exam.

9. What role does the MPS play in the process?

The MPS will ensure the Airman's eligibility to apply to USAFA and the unit commander has submitted any required ineligibility waivers IAW AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6. The MPS will place the individual in Assignment Availability Code (AAC) 05 and coordinates on the AF Form 1786 in the bottom of block 15. The

AAC will place a hold on any PCS orders until the Airman is either offered an appointment, declines an appointment, or is not selected for USAFA or the Preparatory School. (If Airmen are offered an appointment and accept their appointment, the MPS will process Permanent Change of Station (PCS) actions.)

NOTE: AFI 36-2110 – An AAC does not preclude a *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 OCONUS tour, unit move, or being surplus on base/installation).

10. What if I miss the 31 December deadline for the Pre-Candidate Questionnaire (PCQ)?

If you miss this deadline for unavoidable circumstances (such as a deployment), please contact your counselor immediately. 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 December deadline to determine for yourself (and your commander) that you will be competitive for admission to USAFA.

11. Who needs to complete airmen letters of evaluations?

Airmen are required to have three Letters of Evaluation: one from their Commander, one from their First sergeant or supervisor, and one from another military officer currently on Active/Reserve/Guard duty. Additionally, Airmen are allowed to include up to two optional letters of recommendation as long as the letter is not from a family member. These letters are completed online and may be addressed to USAFA Admissions.

12. 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 (with a lab) courses are especially well-received.

13. Is there a minimum Time-on-Station requirement before I can apply to USAFA?

Yes, there are eligibility requirements IAW AFMAN 36-2032, Table 10.6. that must be met or have waivers submitted. Additionally, regular members of the Air Force must have at least one year retainability when entering either USAFA or the Preparatory School.

14. 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. The DODMERB examination cannot be completed in all deployed locations, so Airmen should work with their assigned counselor on how to accomplish their medical examination.

15. If an Airman is selected to attend the Preparatory School, should they test for promotion or compete for SrA BTZ before arrival?

Yes. If selected to attend the Preparatory School, Airmen will remain on their current enlisted contract and remain eligible for promotion testing and SrA BTW.

16. Is USAFA for me?

USAFA is not the only Enlisted Commissioning Program (ECP). Refer to AFMAN 36-2032 to review all ECPs available and to determine which program is best suited for you. If the LEAD program is best suited for you, realize the Air Force 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. USAFA offers unique experiences you cannot find at other universities, but it also requires many sacrifices. While at the Air Force Academy, many freedoms, luxuries, and conveniences 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 USAFA, it is essential that individuals are *highly motivated* with an understanding your experience will not be typical of other military training programs. 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.