How to Grow Character: Lessons from West Point and the Army

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U.S. Military Academy

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Army Values

- **LOYALTY**: Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit, and other Soldiers.
- **DUTY**: Fulfill your obligations.
- **RESPECT**: Treat people as they should be treated.
- **SELFLESS SERVICE**: Put the welfare of the Nation, the Army, and subordinates before your own.
- **HONOR**: Live up to all the Army Values.
- **INTEGRITY**: Do what’s right—legally and morally.
- **PERSONAL COURAGE**: Face fear, danger, or adversity (physical or moral).
**USMA Mission:** To educate, train, and inspire the Corps of Cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of Duty, Honor, Country and prepared for a career of professional excellence and service to the Nation as an officer in the United States Army.

**USMA Vision:** To be the world’s preeminent leadership development institution.
West Point Leader Development System

• WPLDS

• A system designed to develop and sharpen positive character through the 47 month education and training experience of West Point cadets

• High standards

• Allows cadets to learn from failure

• A community-wide initiative
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Cadet Focus</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1802-1990</td>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Class System</td>
<td>Plebes</td>
<td>Compliance</td>
<td>Attrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991-2012</td>
<td>Cadet Leader Development System (CLDS)  “4-Class System”</td>
<td>All Cadets</td>
<td>Officership</td>
<td>Attrition &amp; Development</td>
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<td>- Mem of Prof</td>
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<td>- Ldr of Char</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Serv of Ntn</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Warrior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2017</td>
<td>WPLDS 1</td>
<td>All Cadets (&amp; specific S&amp;F roles)</td>
<td>Ldr of Char</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- WPLDS Hnbk</td>
<td></td>
<td>- 8xOutcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- BCL</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Dem expertise</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- CDS</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-UTC</td>
<td>WPLDS 2</td>
<td>All Cadets (all S&amp;F have the same role)</td>
<td>Ldr of Char</td>
<td>Development to Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- “Developing Leaders of Character”</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Live honorably</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Lead honorably</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Dem expertise</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Develop = Educate, Train, and Inspire

from USMA’s mission statement

A leader is someone who influences others to accomplish a mission or fulfills a purpose.

Army Leadership (ADP 6-22, p.1)
The Five Facets of Character

- Moral
- Social
- Civic
- Performance
- Leadership

Live Honorably

Demonstrate Excellence

Lead Honorably
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person’s Focus</th>
<th>Stage 2: Imperial</th>
<th>Stage 3: Interpersonal</th>
<th>Stage 4: Self-authored</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-focused</td>
<td>Other’s approval-focused (team)</td>
<td>Duty-Hnr-Cntry, 7-Army Values, 5-Facets of Character</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WPLDS Expectation</th>
<th>New cadets</th>
<th>Upperclass</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Set and enforce high standards
- Put in shared team activities
- Provide Stage 3 role models
- Give choice of thought and authority
- Contexts where identities conflict
- Facilitated deliberate reflection
Theory 2: USMA’s Leader Growth Model

- Challenging Experiences
  - Assessment
  - Challenge
  - Support

- New Knowledge and Capacities
  - \(+\text{Time}\)

- Reflection

= Better, more self-aware Leaders
The WPLDS Model

Individual Leader Development
- Academic Program
- Military Program
- Physical Program
- Character Program

Leadership Development
- Practice Following
- Practice Leading

Culture of Character Growth
(Honor System, Feedback, Mentors, Ceremonies, etc.)

Leader of Character
- Live honorably
- Lead honorably
- Demonstrate excellence

47 mo.
# WPLDS’ Core Leader(Ship) Development Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman (Plebe)</th>
<th>Soph. (Yearling)</th>
<th>Junior (Cow)</th>
<th>Senior (Firstie)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadet Company Tactical Officer &amp; Tactical NCOs are primary integrators of each cadet’s experience.</td>
<td>Faculty and Staff are role models for all cadets.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Academic Curriculum (Bachelor of Science)*

30 x Core Courses (STEM & Humanities) and 10 x Electives

Choose 1 of 38 Academic Majors, 1 of 5 Engineering Tracks, and 1 of 7 Language Req.

### Military Program

- **Cdt Basic Tng skills***
  - Intro. to Warfighting*
  - 2 x APFT*

- **Cdt Field Tng skills***
  - Fund. Army Ops*
  - 2 x APFT*

- **Cdt Ldr Dev Tng skills***
  - Platoon Operations*
  - 2 x APFT*

### Physical Program

- **Intro. to Field Tng skills***
  - IOCT*

- **Fund. Army Ops***
  - IOCT*

- **Platoon Operations***
  - IOCT*

### Misc

- **Boxing***
- **Personal Fitness***
- **Combatives***
- **Survival Swimming***
- **Unit Fitness***

### Leadership Development

#### Practice Following

- **CBT Mem. of Sqd**
- **CFT Mem. of Sqd**
- **Sum. Ldrship Det.**
- **CLDT Patrol Leader**

#### Practice Leading

- **1st Acad. Sem. MOS**
- **3rd Acad. Sem. Team Ldr**
- **5th Acad. Sem. SL, PSG, or NCO**
- **7th Acad. Sem. PL, CO, Officer, or Tm CPT**

- **2nd Acad. Sem. MOS**
- **4th Acad. Sem. Team Ldr**
- **6th Acad. Sem. SL, PSG, or NCO**
- **8th Acad. Sem. PL, CO, Officer, or Tm CPT**

### Cadet Troop Leader Training (CTLT)^^

### Mentors

- **Plebe Sponsors**
- **Department Academic Counselors (DACs)**
- **PL300 Mentors**

### Ceremonies

- **Oath; Acceptance**
- **CFT Graduation**
- **Affirmation**
- **Ring; Commissioning**

## Legend

- **Bold & Underlined** = occurs during summers
- **Italicized** = cadet led
- **= performance assessed, **= performance assessed in a force-distributed way
- **^** = must complete at least once during cadet career

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### Cadet Company Tactical Officer & Tactical NCOs are primary integrators of each cadet’s experience.

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**Cadet Character Committees**

**Aspirational Creeds: Cadet Creed, Worth’s Battalion Orders, Schofield’s Def. of Discipline, etc.**

**Life in the Corps: cadet companies, chain of command, regulations & standards, stewardship**

**Honor System and Code**

**Cadet Observation Reports (CORs)**

**Periodic Develop. Reviews (PDRs)** (4 x semester providing a 360-degree eval)

**Cadet Development Reports** (1 x semester)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>WPLDS Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Army Ethic</strong></td>
<td>Live Honorably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead Honorably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honorable Servant</strong></td>
<td>Steward of the Army Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steward of the Army Profession</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrate Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Army Professional Certification</strong></td>
<td>Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character</strong></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>West Point Values</strong></td>
<td>Honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Honor</strong></td>
<td>Country</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Duty</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Five Facets of Character</strong></td>
<td>Moral, Civic, Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moral, Civic, Social</strong></td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Performance</td>
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Note: ADRP 1 provides official Army doctrine on professional certification and the Army Ethic.
All USMA employees’ foundational responsibility is to develop leaders of character.
A Touch of Theory
What is Character?

• Character reflects a person’s positive relationship with the world around them

• The attributes that make up character must vary across time and place, in order to meet situational demands

• Individuals have unique constellations of character attributes – success in life may be linked to different aspects of character
How does Character Develop?

• “Mutually beneficial person ↔ context relations”
  • Alignment of youth strengths and strengths of the setting

• Youth have agency to develop their own character
  • Intentional self-regulation skills, executive functioning important

• Successful character development programs leverage relationships, empower youth agency, take a holistic and developmental approach
  • PRIMED model
### Moral Virtues & Character Strengths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wisdom &amp; Knowledge</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Justice</th>
<th>Humanity</th>
<th>Temperance</th>
<th>Transcendence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Bravery</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Capacity to Love</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Appreciation of Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Fairness</td>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Social Intelligence</td>
<td>Prudence</td>
<td>Hope/Optimism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love of Learning</td>
<td>Vitality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Regulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Spirituality</td>
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</table>
Classification of Character Strengths

• Based on years of research

• Linked to
  – Positive adjustment
  – Improved performance
  – Increased resilience

• Signature Strengths
PROJECT ARETE

A Study of Character and Leadership Development among Cadets at the United States Military Academy

Funded by the Templeton Religion Trust
Collaboration with West Point

• **Project Arete** builds on a decade of existing research
  • Grit (Duckworth, Matthews, Kelly, et al.)
  • Hardiness (Bartone, Matthews, Kelly, et al.)
  • Values-in-Action (Matthews, Kelly, et al.)

• Study is first of its kind: longitudinal, multi-rater, multi-method, linking different data sources

• This new study addresses the multi-part “what” question to describe how character develops for more targeted feedback and intervention
Initial Findings

4 Key Components of Character

- Relational
- Commitment
- Honor
- Machiavellian
4 Key Components of Character

- Relational
  - Leadership, Intellectual Openness, Relational Humility, Social Intelligence, Empathy, Teamwork

- Commitment
  - Hardiness-Commitment, Optimism, Hardiness-Control, Purpose, Grit

- Honor
  - Honesty, Integrity, Bravery

- Machiavellian
  - Control, Status, Distrust, Manipulation, Intellectual Arrogance
Developing Leaders of Character

Project Arete investigates:

• What is the relationship between character and leadership?

• How are character and mastery related in cadets’ professional development at USMA?

• How can these findings be applied to other youth-serving organizations, out-of-school time activities, service academies, the larger Army?
How Might These Ideas Translate to K-12?

• Group discussion
Parents, educators, and practitioners often ask: What is the “right amount” of character?

Better Questions: What are this young person’s strengths? What are the resources available in our family, community, school, installation, to help optimize their strengths?