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

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U.S. Military Academy

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Tufts University
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
## Historical Context

<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)</td>
<td>All Cadets</td>
<td>Officership</td>
<td>Attrition &amp; Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>“4-Class System”</td>
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<td>- Mem of Prof</td>
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<td>- Ldr of Char</td>
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<td>- Serv of Ntn</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Warrior</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-2017</td>
<td>WPLDS 1</td>
<td>All Cadets</td>
<td>Ldr of Char</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- WPLDS Hnbk</td>
<td></td>
<td>- 8xOutcomes</td>
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<td>- BCL</td>
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<td>- CDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>2018-UTC</td>
<td>WPLDS 2</td>
<td>All Cadets</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>
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<td></td>
<td>- Lead honorably</td>
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<td>- Dem expertise</td>
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</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
+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>WPLDS’ Core Leader(ship) Development Experiences</th>
<th>Academic Curriculum (Bachelor of Science)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadet Company Tactical Officer &amp; Tactical NCOs are primary integrators of each cadet's experience</td>
<td>Choose 1 of 38 Academic Majors, 1 of 5 Engineering Tracks, and 1 of 7 Language Req.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and Staff are role models for all cadets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Academic Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Program</th>
<th>Cdt Basic Tng skills*</th>
<th>Cdt Field Tng skills*</th>
<th>Cdt Ldr Dev Tng skills*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro. to Warfighting*</td>
<td>Fund. Army Ops*</td>
<td>Platoon Operations*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 x APFT*</td>
<td>2 x APFT*</td>
<td>2 x APFT*</td>
<td>2 x APFT*</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Program</th>
<th>IOCT*</th>
<th>IOCT*</th>
<th>IOCT*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boxing*</td>
<td>Personal Fitness*</td>
<td>Combatives*</td>
<td>Unit Fitness*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Movement*</td>
<td>Survival Swimming*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competitive Sports (intercollegiate, competitive club, or company athletics)*</td>
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</table>

## Misc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Program</th>
<th>Cadet Character Development Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leader Challenge</td>
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</table>

## Leadership Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Development</th>
<th>Character Program</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cadet Character Development Program</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Life in the Corps: cadet companies, chain of command, regulations &amp; standards, stewardship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honor System and Code*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspirational Creeds: Cadet Creed, Worth's Battalion Orders, Schofield's Def. of Discipline, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cadet Character Committees</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Cadet Observation Reports (CORs)*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Periodic Develop. Reviews (PDRs)* (4 x semester providing a 360-degree eval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cadet Development Reports** (1 x semester)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Mentors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Plebe Sponsors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Department Academic Counselors (DACs)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PL300 Mentors</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Ceremonies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ceremonies</th>
<th>Oath; Acceptance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CFT Graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ring; Commissioning</td>
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## Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legend</th>
<th>Bold &amp; Underlined = occurs during summers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italicized = cadet led</td>
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<tr>
<td>*= performance assessed, **= performance assessed in a force-distributed way</td>
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<tr>
<td>^= must complete at least once during cadet career</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Army Ethic</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honorable Servant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Army Professional Certification</td>
<td>Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Point Values</td>
<td>Honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five Facets of Character</td>
<td>Moral, Civic, Social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

- **Wisdom & Knowledge**
  - Creativity
  - Curiosity
  - Judgment
  - Love of Learning
  - Perspective

- **Courage**
  - Bravery
  - Persistence
  - Integrity
  - Vitality

- **Justice**
  - Teamwork
  - Fairness
  - Leadership

- **Humanity**
  - Capacity to Love
  - Kindness
  - Social Intelligence

- **Temperance**
  - Forgiveness
  - Modesty
  - Prudence
  - Self-Regulation

- **Transcendence**
  - Appreciation of Beauty
  - Gratitude
  - Hope/Optimism
  - Humor
  - Spirituality
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?