

# WEST POINT CHARACTER INITIATIVES



West Point  
**READY**   
READY TO **SERVE**. READY TO **LEAD**.



COL James Yastrzemycki '97, SCPME Director

The Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic integrates, innovates, and inspires to provide world-class character development opportunities that produce our Nation's next generation of leaders of character. In pursuit of our vision to be the Character and Officership Center of Excellence for West Point and beyond, the SCPME operates along four deliberate, comprehensive, and mutually reinforcing lines of effort:

- 1) Officership
- 2) Character Development
- 3) Honor Stewardship
- 4) Applied Character & Officership Research



## DEVELOPING LEADERS OF CHARACTER

The mission of the United States Military Academy focuses on developing commissioned leaders of character – commissioned officers who demonstrate the character and judgement to do the right thing, for the right reasons, consistently throughout their lives. “A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do.” These words from the Cadet Honor Code immediately establish the moral-ethical expectations of every cadet and West Point graduate. Choosing and doing the harder right over the easier wrong requires more than moral reasoning skills. In addition to being taught what is right, cadets also need to become confident in their skills to take the morally correct action and be willing to demonstrate the moral courage sometimes necessary for choosing the right.

### WILLIAM E. SIMON CENTER

#### FOR THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY ETHIC

As it nears its 25th anniversary, The William E. Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic (SCPME) at West Point is focused specifically on the Military Academy's mission of Officership and character development. As part of that effort and to reinforce the ongoing need for character development, Dr. Jeffrey Peterson was officially appointed the Senior Character Integration Advisor to the Superintendent. In coordination with COL James R. Yastrzemycki '97, the Director of the SCPME, the two work together to advise senior leaders on matters related to Officership, character development, conduct research and assessment related to Officership and character, Cadet character education, and to help integrate character development across the three pillars of the West Point Leader Development Program – academic, military, and physical.

The desired outcome for West Point's increased emphasis on Officership and character is West Point graduates provide the

moral leadership necessary to build cohesive teams and ethically accomplish the mission. The SCPME is an essential resource for the Academy in this endeavor by providing Officership and character development expertise and supporting the character integration effort across the Academy.

The primary areas that require funding support are the Officership Community of Practice (Center for Junior Officers), annual Officership conference, Inspiration to Serve, and Character Academic Individual Advanced Development (AIADs).

## AREAS IN NEED OF SUPPORT

### Officership Community of Practice (Center for Junior Officers):

This digital platform connects cadets and junior officers to the Army Profession and Ethic, providing access to leadership content, case studies, and professional development resources. As a central hub for scholarly articles, podcasts, and practical tools, it equips emerging leaders to confront real-world challenges with professionalism, ethical awareness, and confidence.

- Audience: Cadets through Company Grade Officers (USMA, ROTC, OCS)
- Impact: Over 1M+ social media impressions, 148k page views and 81k active users in the last 180 days
- Goal: Equip junior leaders to lead honorably and serve ethically across the Army. Continued support allows for platform growth, more robust content, and greater reach to developing officers across all commissioning sources.

**Officership Conference:** The annual Officership Conference is a capstone event that equips First Class Cadets with a deeper understanding of how the principles of Officership are applied across the Army Profession. Through engagement with subject matter experts who share real-world experiences, cadets explore the practical challenges and opportunities of leading in

*“Character development is the most vital component of our mission and leader development system. At West Point, we believe that every cadet graduates with a degree in character development and leadership.”*

*— LTG Steven Gilland '90,*

*61st Superintendent of the United States Military Academy*



## MISSION

SCPME integrates, innovates, and inspires to produce world-class character development for our Nation's next generation of leaders of character.

## VISION

Be the Character Center of Excellence for West Point and beyond and the preferred USMA department in

complex and uncertain environments. Recent conferences have examined Mission Command across a range of contexts, from combat operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mogadishu to humanitarian assistance, and defense support to civil authorities. Reaching over 1,000 cadets each year, the conference plays a critical role in shaping the ethical, strategic, and professional development of our future officers.

- Focus Areas: Mission Command in combat, humanitarian, and defense support to civil authorities
- Audience: Entire First Class (1,000+ cadets annually)
- Impact: Brings theory to life and strengthens professional identity before commissioning. Funding enables the inclusion of distinguished guest speakers, expanded case studies, and immersive learning experiences that cultivate critical thinking and ethical decision-making.

**Inspiration to Serve:** The annual Inspiration to Serve experience helps third-class cadets (Yearlings) reflect on the responsibility of becoming commissioned leaders of character. The event honors fallen graduates at the West Point Cemetery to strengthen cadets' connection to the Long Gray Line. More than 1,000 cadets, Tactical Officers, coaches, and SCPME staff participate in the event alongside volunteer speakers who knew the honored graduates personally. The stories shared help cadets internalize the meaning of Officership in a deeply personal way as they prepare to affirm their commitment to the Army Profession.

- Audience: 1,000+ cadets, TAC officers/NCOs, coaches, and volunteers
- Purpose: Deepen connection to the Long Gray Line and underscore the responsibilities of Officership. Additional funding supports speaker coordination, event logistics, and the continued integration of meaningful reflection

*"The Character AIAD really helped me tie together the ethical standards of our profession with those which our nation was founded upon..."*

— 2LT Tanner Thornton '24

*Former CDT CPT & Brigade Honor Education Officer*

exercises that shape cadets' understanding of duty and sacrifice.

### **Character Academic Individual Advanced Development**

**(AIADs):** Our Character AIADs immerse cadets in formative experiences that reinforce warfighting principles, deepen their understanding of key Army frameworks such as the Army Ethic, ADP 6-22, and FM 3-0 and intentionally strengthen their character. By traveling to historically significant locations like Washington, D.C., Vietnam and the Philippines, and France and Belgium, cadets engage with the realities of large-scale combat operations and the enduring principles of warfare, including mission command, disciplined initiative, and the ethical use of force. Visits to sites such as Omaha Beach, Bastogne, Hoa Lo Prison, NATO Headquarters, and Arlington National Cemetery provide tactical and strategic context, illustrating how ethical leadership shapes decision-making in complex, high-stakes environments. These experiences bridge the gap between doctrine and practice, preparing cadets to lead cohesive teams, navigate ambiguity, and maintain moral clarity in modern challenges.

The local Character AIAD emphasizes voluntary hardship as a deliberate pathway to character formation. Cadets take on challenging disciplines such as silence, solitude, simplicity, service, reflection, and self-denial, practices that foster humility, resilience, and self-awareness. Each experience deepens their professional identity as warfighters who lead with character and uphold the Army's values in every operational environment.







Photo: Lee Ross '73

# FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

**Total Center Endowment ..... \$8.6 million**

Officership Community of Practice (Center for Junior Officers) .....	\$3.7 million endowment / \$150,000 annual
Character Academic Individual Advanced Development (AIAD) Endowment ..	\$2.5 million
10 Cadets .....	\$50,000
1 Cadet.....	\$5,000
Officership Conference ( <i>reserved</i> ) .....	\$1.5 million / \$60,000 annual
Simon Center Enrichment Program .....	\$500,000
Inspiration to Serve Cemetery Tour .....	\$250,000 endowment / \$10,000 annual
Start-Up Equipment and Endowment ( <i>funded</i> ) .....	\$242,000

MARGIN OF  
EXCELLENCE



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as of April 23, 2025