

WEST POINT CHARACTER INITIATIVES



West Point
READY 
READY TO SERVE. READY TO LEAD.



"I believe the comparative advantage and unique contribution of West Point is the combination of intellectual, physical and military development combined with an integrated character development system that develops leaders of character who live honorably, lead honorably, and demonstrate excellence. Choosing and doing the harder right over the easier wrong requires good character that motivates leaders to do the right thing, at the right time, with the right attitude—especially when no one is looking."

— Dr. Jeffrey Peterson '87, Senior Character Integration Advisor



"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 hard right over the easier wrong require more than moral reasoning skills. In addition to being taught what is right, cadets also need to become more confident in their skills to take the morally correct action, and more willing to demonstrate the moral courage sometimes necessary for choosing the harder right.

To address this issue, West Point is implementing a Comprehensive Character Development System for cadets within the William E. Simon Center for the Professional Military Ethic (SCPME). 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 SCPME Director, the two work together to advise senior leaders on matters related to character development, conduct research on character education and assessment, and to help integrate character development across the four programs—military, academic, physical and character.

The desired outcome for West Point's increased emphasis on character is that West Point graduates will 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 character development expertise and supporting the character integration effort across the Academy.

The two primary areas that need funding support are the Character Development Lab and Character Individual Advanced Development (IADs).

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT LAB

The purpose of establishing a character lab at the United States Military Academy is to advance scientific insights that help cultivate a culture of character growth and, ultimately, produce leaders of character that live and lead honorably as they serve the nation.

Science can enhance the effectiveness of the Army's character development efforts. However, there is much work to be done in assessing the effectiveness of various character development activities and character growth at the individual level. The Academy, using the resources within the USMA Character Development Lab, will have the opportunity to develop assessment tools useful for both the West Point and Army mission requirements to develop good character. The USMA Character Development Lab's vision is to create a repertoire of science-based character development strategies and assessments that are tailored specifically to this context. The USMA Character Development Lab will contribute to the pressing challenge of assessing character

growth and developing and testing interventions, identifying best practices for character formation, and exporting Army-optimal character activities and measurement instruments.

Research areas include the following initiatives:

- Improving character development opportunities by testing and improving the design, delivery, effectiveness, and utility of character-based interventions.
- Exploring character "in the field" by studying behavior in realistic, scenario-based training environments. Example projects may include assessment centers, observational projects during high intensity training, and field experiments.
- Advancing new virtue and character measurement initiatives at the individual level. Example projects may include the measurement of virtues, virtue constellations, professional identity, or personality structures.
- Assessing the culture of character growth at the collective level. Possible projects include investigating the character-building power of role models and exemplars, as well as specific traditions, policies, norms, and existing developmental strategies.
- Collecting peer evaluations and developmental feedback relevant to character and team performance.
- Identifying the long-term effects that attending USMA has on character.

The USMA Character Development Lab will also focus on forging a consortium of experts in character and development, as well as sharing scientific insights with other service academies. The lab will function to create and disseminate the type of knowledge and best practices that help Army professionals and Army organizations flourish. These objectives will contribute to various Margin of Excellence opportunities related to character development.

Funding for this concept will allow West Point to purchase lab equipment and help West Point incentivize study participants. The number of people willing to participate in projects will directly influence the accuracy of the USMA Character Development Lab's conclusions, remaining in tune with the state of the art in the field by hosting and traveling to research meetings attended by top character experts. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, financial backing will allow the USMA Character Development Lab to hire high caliber researchers who will help collect and analyze the results and determine how to implement and disseminate the findings.

CHARACTER INDIVIDUAL ADVANCED DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of establishing a Character Individual Advanced Development (IAD) is to advance character insights, share best practices with external institutions, and ultimately, develop cadets who will lead character development activities for the Corps of Cadets and help cultivate a culture of character growth at the United States Military Academy.

The Academy would like to offer summer opportunities for interested and uniquely qualified cadets to participate in an advanced developmental program centered on character, competence, and commitment required to become commissioned leaders of character, inspired to uphold their professional identity and fulfil their professional responsibilities. The program would offer cadets a unique opportunity to observe and implement concepts relevant to their ongoing character development activities and education over several weeks during a summer internship. This program would align cadets with leading experts in character formation and development to broaden cadets' perspectives and provide them with practical advanced education related to their responsibilities at USMA and as future leaders for the military. Character IADs would also increase the Academy's body of knowledge regarding character and help the Character Integration and Advisory Group continue to develop our leaders for the type of character-related challenges they will face in the 21st Century.

Potential Character IADs may include:

- "Moral Leadership and Unlimited Liability" Discovering Officership at the D-Day landing beaches.
- "Professionalization through Innovation" Victory during the Saratoga Campaign, Excellence in the National Capital.
- "Victory in Europe" Winning Campaigns through Small Unit Leadership and Personal Sacrifice in Belgium.
- Gettysburg: Setting Conditions for Success and Learning from Inspirational Memoirs.
- "Moral Stamina" Washington's Perspectives on Leadership from Mount Vernon, applying sacrifice to turn the tide of the Revolutionary War.
- Character education opportunities with the Jubilee Center for Character & Virtues at the University of Birmingham, a pioneering interdisciplinary research center focusing on character, virtues, and values in the interest of human flourishing.



While using virtual reality headsets, cadets are exposed to various situations that require moral action. The technology tracks eye movement and monitors uncounscious physical reactions. Collected quantitative and qualitative data is used to assess the effectiveness of various character interventions.

- Development, research, and assessment initiatives for character and inclusion at the Wake Forest University Program for Leadership and Character.
- Research with the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania.
- Internship in the University of Pennsylvania's Character Lab, founded by Angela Duckworth (author of *Grit*), and researcher regarding resiliency characteristics based on the West Point experience.

These IADs will also focus on expanding the research and educating select cadets on character development, character assessment methods, positive psychology, resiliency, honor codes and systems, trust formation, and inclusive environments. The goal is to fund at least ten cadets each summer to share best practices and help build a strong bench of character experts among the Corps of Cadets and contribute to various Margin of Excellence opportunities related to character development.

In the summer of 2023, the SCPME proudly pioneered the first Character IAD experience for cadets to Washington, D.C. to engage in discussions about honor and character. This groundbreaking initiative reflects the Academy's commitment to holistic education, shaping not only the minds but also the character of our leaders. The success of this endeavor paves the way for more innovative programs to come, ensuring cadets have access to a variety of character experiences. These trips provide a unique platform for cadets to interact with experts, community members, members of the Long Gray Line, and practitioners who embody and promote ethical and honorable leadership. Through these conversations, the cadets gain valuable insights and develop a deeper understanding of the importance of honor and character in their future military careers. Some stops included Georgetown University, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Arlington National Cemetery, the National Archives, the Smithsonian Museums, and the National Museum of the U.S. Army.

"The Character IAD this past summer really helped me tie together the ethical standards of our profession with those which our nation was founded upon..." - CDT CPT Tanner Thornton, Brigade Honor Education Officer, '24



Photo: Lee Ross '73

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Total Center Endowment	\$8.6 million
Character Individual Advanced Development (IAD) and Character Assessment Endowment	\$4.7 million
Character Individual Advanced Development (IAD) Endowment	\$1.7 million
10 Cadets	\$50,000
1 Cadet	\$5,000

Initiatives

Character Development Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
Character in the Field Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
Character Measurement Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
Culture of Character Growth Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
Peer Evaluation Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
USMA Influence on Lifelong Character Assessment	\$750,000 endowment/\$30,000 annual
Bi-annual Character Forum	\$700,000 endowment/\$25,000 annual
Master Character Consortium & Lectures (reserved)	\$700,000 endowment/\$25,000 annual
Subject Matter Honorarium (reserved)	\$500,000 endowment/\$20,000 annual
Technology Endowment	\$500,000 endowment/\$20,000 annual
Start-Up Equipment and Endowment (funded)	\$242,000

MARGIN OF EXCELLENCE



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