



## **Education and Military Service**

The U.S. military is a professional, all-volunteer force consisting of officers and enlisted members. Officers are members of the military who hold a special position of authority and a commission is the document used to appoint a person to that high office.

Officers form the core of the military's professional leadership ranks and the selection standards are therefore quite demanding. With very few exceptions, a 4-year college degree is a prerequisite for commissioned military officers. In addition to the degree, candidates are generally evaluated for their moral character, physical fitness, cognitive ability, and leadership skills.

There are two primary commissioning programs: the service academies, and the Reserve Officer Training Corps.

To attend a service academy, an individual must first receive a nomination (usually from their Congressman or U.S. Senator) and then an appointment from an academy. An appointment is the equivalent of a full scholarship. The United States Military Academy (USMA), the United States Naval Academy (USNA), the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), and the United States Coast Guard Academy (USCGA) offer room, board, medical and dental care, salary, and tuition throughout a 4-year undergraduate program of instruction leading to a baccalaureate degree. The service academies offer a full portfolio of standard undergraduate degrees.

Another route to becoming a commissioned officer in the U.S. military is through the various Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs. Three branches of the military offer their own programs—Army, Navy, and Air Force—and Marines are commissioned through the Navy (NROTC). In addition to the opportunity of serving in the military, there are distinct advantages to ROTC. One can attend a civilian university of choice while also receiving training for leadership in the military; a large part or all of college tuition is paid for; and whether or not one stays in the military beyond the required service time (four years active), the commissioned officer will be placed into a position of leadership right out of college, and such training will prove beneficial throughout life.

In general, service academy graduates are afforded the most choices in terms of academic degrees, access to military training opportunities and immersion programs while at the academies (such as parachuting, marksmanship, special warfare training, engineering internships at national labs, etc.) and career choices post-graduation. ROTC scholarships tend to offer less in the way of immersion programs and post-

graduate career choices.

Graduates from service academies and ROTC scholarship programs generally owe a minimum of 5 years of military service upon graduation, though some specialty jobs (e.g. aviation careers) have higher commitments.

In addition to the two primary commissioning programs, Officers Candidate School/Officer Training School (OCS/OTS) allows the military services to offer commissions to individuals who already possess at least a baccalaureate degree. OCS/OTS exists as a commissioning source for college graduates who did not receive military training or indoctrination as part of their undergraduate education. OCS/OTS usually involves 3-4 months of intensive military training and indoctrination.

On average, about 20% of the officer corps comes from service academies, while about 35% and 25% come from ROTC and OCS/OTS, respectively.

To be competitive for a service academy appointment or an ROTC scholarship, applicants need to demonstrate strong performance in academics, sports, and extracurricular activities. In academics, applicants must complete a rigorous program of studies in all core disciplines with excellent grades, while also demonstrating superb scores on college aptitude tests. Applicants must also possess advanced physical fitness skills, and earn varsity letters in several sports. Finally, applicants must demonstrate the potential for leadership and should excel in extracurricular activities. Examples include earning the Eagle Scout or Civil Air Patrol Billy Mitchell award, occupying an elected student government position, and showing leadership in community service organizations like the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, etc. Applicants must also pass medical exams administered by the Department of Defense Medical Evaluations Board.